

Between the Testaments

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[0 : 00] All right. Uh, let me start, uh, with a little bit from Psalm 115.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. Why should the nation say, where is their God?

Our God is in the heavens. He does all that he pleases. O Israel, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord.

He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. Amen. Uh, so we have reached the end of this, uh, of this quick sweep through the Old Testament this summer in, uh, Sunday school.

Uh, and in fact, we've actually, uh, got, we've gone past the Old Testament this Sunday. Um, now we enter the time in between the two Testaments, which is like 400 years that a lot of us don't know very much about because it's not in the Bible.

[1 : 20] Um, and this is, uh, this time period this morning, it's a, it's a tumultuous time in, in Israel.

Uh, it's a tumultuous time when it might seem like God is distant and silent.

Um, the nations and even the Jews themselves might reasonably say, where is God? Uh, there's no prophetic utterance.

There's no, uh, in all the tumult, there's no, there's no prophet comforting them with God's words or telling them, uh, this tumultuous time will come to an end very soon.

Um, like, like there was previously when, when the Jews were exiled in Babylon. Um, and yet even here, uh, as we'll see, uh, God is, God is working.

Uh, as we look back on this time period, we can say God, God is at work here. Uh, he does all that he pleases. Uh, so, uh, the Old Testament is an unfinished world.

[2 : 21] Um, last, last week we were talking about, uh, God promising that, uh, the, the latter glory of the temple in Jerusalem will be even greater than the glory of, of the old temple, Solomon's temple, uh, that was destroyed.

But if we, if we read the whole Old Testament, we never see the fulfillment of that promise. Uh, and there are other promises like that, that are unfulfilled at the end of the Old Testament. And, and so, uh, we look to the New Testament to, to see the next chapter of the Old Testament.

God's story with Israel. Uh, but then we're confronted with, with strange things that are going to be unfamiliar to us, even if we know our Old Testament really, really well. Um, like, uh, towards the beginning of Luke's gospel, in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, Caesar Augustus, you know, why are we talking about Rome?

Right? I thought, you know, last time I read, if I'd go back a few pages in my Bible, Persia is, is the big empire in charge with, uh, ruling over, over Jerusalem.

Now it's Rome. What happened? Um, or when Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with them. Herod the king, you know, how was their king in Jerusalem again?

[3 : 38] One might wonder. Uh, I thought that the, the monarchy was brought to an end by Babylon when they went in and took the Jews into exile and destroyed the temple.

Uh, I thought there wasn't any more king. Now, now, now we're seeing about a King Herod in Jerusalem. Uh, what happened? Um, or we read quite a bit about, uh, about religious groups, religious sects that didn't exist before.

Uh, and, and the Pharisees and Sadducees came and detest Jesus. They asked him to show them a sign from heaven. Uh, if you've grown up in the church, Pharisees and Sadducees sound very familiar to you, but have you ever thought, like, who actually are these people and where did they come from?

Because we don't read about them in the Old Testament. Uh, you know, the Gospels talk about them as if we should know who they are, but if we know the whole story so far really well, we still might not know who they are.

Um, in fact, we won't know who they are. They're not in the Old Testament. They come into existence in this time in between the two Testaments. That's, uh, the sort of silent years, uh, where, where we don't, where we don't have anything in the Bible about it.

[4 : 47] Uh, the, the story of the Old Testament ends in about 400 BCE, and Jesus isn't born until about 4 BCE. Uh, that's like 400 years, where if you know your Bible really well, you still have no idea what happened in that time.

Um, but knowing what's going on in those approximately 400 years is, uh, really helpful for, for understanding how God is, is working with his people.

And, and it's also helpful for us to understand, uh, what's going on in the New Testament. Um, real quick. Uh, anyone else need a handout?

Uh, yeah, there's a lot of stuff we'll be reading from this this morning, because the stuff that we'll be reading about is not in the Bible.

Um, so, uh, there are really broadly, so I, forgive me, there's probably more information this morning than we can probably absorb.

[5 : 59] Uh, I, I did my best, but, uh, it's a tumultuous time period. There's a lot going on, and it's 400 years. Um, but really broadly, there are sort of three chapters.

Uh, there's, um, Greek rule when, when the Greeks rule over Jerusalem, and there's a lot of stuff going on there and some drama going on.

Then there is a period of Jewish self-rule when, when Jerusalem is independent, uh, once again, for the first time in centuries, ever since Babylon. Uh, and then that comes to an end with the sort of third chapter of, uh, Roman rule, uh, which, finally, that will be familiar to us if we've, if we've know our New Testaments.

Uh, but this time in between the Testaments begins, uh, but first, any questions about where we're going? Um, okay, great. So, this, this story begins with, uh, Alexander the Great.

Uh, as a, as a side note, I think it's, uh, I find it really, uh, it tickles me, I guess, that, uh, there are these figures that I know from history from outside of the Bible who actually play a major role in the history of God's people.

[7 : 11] So, um, take that for what it's worth. I, I, I enjoy it. Uh, but Alexander the Great, um, he's a Greek king and he conquers the entire known world and part of the unknown world to him.

Uh, and that includes Jerusalem. So, we read in this, uh, in this book, First Maccabees, you can find it in Catholic Bibles, you won't find it in Protestant or Jewish Bibles.

Um, after Alexander, son of Philip, the Macedonian, had defeated King Darius of the Persians in the Medes, he succeeded him as king. He had previously become king of Greece.

He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. He advanced to the ends of the earth and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted and his heart was lifted up.

He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him. Uh, and that's how the story of, of Greek rule over, over Jerusalem begins.

[8 : 21] Uh, but Alexander, if you, as you may recall from like a high school world history class, he didn't live very long. He conquered the entire known world, including Persia, uh, who had ruled over Jerusalem.

Uh, and in doing so, he spread the Greek language and culture all around the world, which, uh, is actually really significant for the church, as, as I'll mention towards the end.

Um, but Alexander didn't reign long. Uh, he was a great conqueror, but he wasn't a great ruler. Uh, and when he died, his kingdom was split in between his generals.

Um, this split is actually discussed in Daniel chapter eight, um, which I was debating whether we should read and talk about this morning, but it's super obscure. Uh, it's all this talk about a ram with two horns.

Um, and I thought there's so much, there's so much history to get through. Um, we might not have time, but, uh, it's actually prophesied in Daniel chapter eight. Um, that this, this Greek kingdom under, under Alexander would be split.

[9 : 27] Uh, and after a period of conflict between two of these kingdoms, uh, which again is discussed in Daniel, this time chapter 11, uh, the, the empire called the Seleucid empire, one of, one of the, one of these kingdoms that came out of Alexander, uh, came to rule over Jerusalem.

Um, and then in 175 BCE, this one notorious king, uh, Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, uh, became the Seleucid king.

Uh, and this is a really notorious figure, which is why I mentioned him by name. Um, we can read about him a little bit in, in first Maccabees a little later on.

Um, then the king Antiochus IV wrote to his whole kingdom, including Jerusalem, this included, included, uh, Judah, that all should be one people and that all should give up their particular particular customs.

All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly accepted his religion. They sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath.

[10:42] And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. He directed them to follow customs strange to the land. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances.

Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant or anyone who adhered to the law was condemned to death by the decree of the king. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised and their families and those who circumcised them. And they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. Uh, this is probably the worst persecution that God's people had ever endured up until this point.

Uh, and it's made all the more chilling because, uh, God isn't speaking at this time. There's no, there's no prophet amongst them telling them it'll be okay.

Only 70 years and you're back and you're back to your homeland. Like, like God said to through Jeremiah, uh, during the Babylonian exile. Um, and in about 167, I only give years in case, uh, to give some context, but obviously you don't need to know him or anything.

[12:00] But, uh, and about 167, he prohibited Jewish religious practices and some Jews complied. Uh, cause after all, wouldn't you be tempted to? Uh, I mean, this is a chilling picture.

They hung the infants from the, from their mothers' necks. Uh, that, that's, that's chilling. And yet, some persisted despite, despite all of this.

Um, despite the prohibition, some were faithful, sort of like Daniel. Uh, was faithful, even though, uh, there was a decree in his time in Babylon that, uh, if he, if, if anyone prayed to the God of Israel, they would be, they would be thrown into a lion's den.

Daniel persisted nevertheless. And we see the same kind of thing going on here among, among some. Um, but, uh, I'll take a brief pause there before we move on.

Uh, are there any questions? Also, I think there are handouts in the back. Oh, I'm sorry. But, any, any questions or thoughts at this point?

[13:18] All right. So, now let's, let's read on in response to this, in response to this, uh, persecution.

The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modain to make them offer sacrifice. That is, pagan sacrifice, right?

Not, not to the God of Israel. Many from Israel came to them. And Mattathias, a priest, and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officer spoke to Mattathias as follows.

You are a leader, honored and great in this town, and supported by sons and brothers. Now, be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done.

But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice, even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him and have chosen to obey his commandments, every one of them, abandoning the religion of their ancestors, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors.

[14:26] Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left. When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modain, according to the king's command.

When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger. He ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time, he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice and he tore down the altar.

Thus, he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri, son of Salu, who's mentioned that this Phinehas is in Numbers chapter 30.

It's a biblical thing. Very dramatic. That's what I mean. There's a lot of high drama going on in this time. But thus began what's known as the Maccabean Revolt in about 167 BCE.

After this priest Mattathias died, his son Judas led the revolt and he led it with such zeal that he earned the nickname Maccabee, which possibly, probably means the hammer.

[15:49] What a nickname, right? Judah the hammer. But that goes to show the kind of zeal that he had, that he clearly got from his father, as we read in this story.

They eventually gained full independence from this massive empire, full independence for the Jewish people under the descendants of this Mattathias.

And these people, these rulers who were descended from this priest were called the Hasmonean dynasty.

It's named after one of their ancestors. Thinking back to this, if you read this story, there were people, as you may recall from some time that you may have heard some sermons on the Gospels, there was an expectation that Messiah Messiah would come and kill all the Romans.

Or as Greg was preaching a few weeks ago in his sermon on hospitality, there was revolutionary discontent among some of the Jewish people in the Roman Empire during the time of Jesus.

[17:21] And if this story of this Maccabean revolt is still in your collective memory, then that sort of makes sense, doesn't it?

That you think back to these very zealous people, you think back to Judah the hammer, you know, breaking off the shackles of their oppressive rule, and you think, yes, we're going to do the same thing against Rome.

So you see, it's sort of, knowing this period in between the Testaments can help to, some things in the New Testament make a little more sense.

One might think, why would these Jews ever think they could defeat the Romans? Well, they had already defeated a big empire, you know, back in the second century BC.

They thought, we're just going to do the same thing again. And they won full independence from the Seleucids. But before we move on and talk about that period of Jewish self-rule, any questions or thoughts?

[18:31] Yeah, Jess? Was there any thinking that, like, these priests who let their revolt were in the silence? Not so much. So a lot of messianic fervor sort of emerged a little bit later on.

Messiah wasn't on everyone's mind at this point yet in the second century BC. But a little bit later on, there gets to be a lot of intense messianic fervor.

Like, we're waiting for Messiah. He's going to come kill all the Romans. Yeah. But I've never heard this idea that these folks were Messiah. Yeah.

It's a good thought. All right. So now this period of priestly rule.

One of the striking things about this time, after this Maccabean revolt succeeded, and the Jews were independent from any empire for the first time since 586 when Babylon came in.

[19:39] I mean, this is centuries, right? 586 to 167-ish. Many centuries they've been under foreign rule. Now, for the first time ever in many centuries, they're ruling themselves.

This must have been a very exciting moment for them. But one of the striking things about this period is that for the first time in Jewish history, they are led not by kings or by these sort of judges, if you think way back to the book of Judges.

But they're ruled by priests. This Mattathias who began the revolt was a priest. Then in 152 BC, so not long into this period, his son Jonathan became the high priest.

And every ruler in this dynasty after Jonathan was a high priest. The high priest was ruling the city, was ruling Judah. And then this ruling high priest even started calling himself king with the reign of this one guy, Aristobulus I, around the year 100.

So they're ruled by priest kings. Now, as Christians, our Messiah radar might be going crazy because we, as Christians, are ruled by a priest king, Jesus.

[21:06] He is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, as the book of Hebrews continually insists. And he is our king. He is son of David.

And at this time, the rule of these priest kings who are not from the house of David, unlike Jesus, they're not descended from David, they were polarizing.

And we see some religious sects, some Jewish sects emerge that are going to be familiar to us in the New Testament. One of them is the Sadducees.

We read in the New Testament that these Sadducees are the party of the high priest. They're the sort of inner circle of priests in Jerusalem.

And, of course, as the party of priests, they're naturally going to be supportive of a priest running the whole show. So because of that, because a priest was running the whole show and the Sadducees were this Jewish party of priests, the Sadducees became wealthy and powerful and influential.

[22 : 27] And they favored the political status quo, which continues to be the case in the New Testament. The Sadducees are wealthy political power players who favored the political status quo even of Roman rule over them.

But then not everyone was pleased by the rule of these priest kings. In particular, these priest kings who were not descended from David. There's this other party, the Pharisees, who they thought back to God's covenant with David back in 2 Samuel 7.

And they thought, wasn't only a son of David supposed to be calling himself king in Jerusalem? God said that David would never lack for a son on the throne.

But now there are these people, they're calling themselves kings, but they're not from David.

They're descended from Levi. And then, along with that, the later kings in this dynasty, the later priest kings, became more and more Hellenized, more and more Greek.

And less and less Hebrew. And they began to resemble the very kings against which they originally revolted. Frankly, it actually reminds me of the period of the monarchy in the Bible, where you have originally this great king David.

[24 : 04] But then as time goes on, they become more and more like all the other nations around them. They turn away from God's instruction and start worshiping and living like all the other nations around them.

And the same sort of thing happens in this time period. The very family that revolted against these Greek rulers began to resemble the Greek rulers.

And of course, the Pharisees were already upset that there were kings who were not descended from David. And they got especially upset that these were resembling Greek kings. In one instance, just to give an example of how these kings sort of went off the rails.

This king, Alexander Gennas, he crucified 800 of his own people in an attempt to quell opposition to his rule. Crucifixion, mind you.

That's not a... You're not going to read about crucifixion as capital punishment in the law of Moses. Crucifixion was not a Jewish practice up until this point.

[25 : 10] So aside from the horror of killing so many of your own people, he's even doing it in this horrific way that is not even the sort of standard capital punishment according to the law of Moses.

Crucifixion was not a Jewish practice up until this point.

I can't help but think the motivation of the Pharisees in Jesus' time made sense. These Pharisees were looking back on their own history and they thought, whenever we obey the law of Moses, things go well for us.

And whenever we don't obey the law of Moses, things go badly for us. You know, we turned away from the law of Moses back when there was a son of David on the throne.

And then we got exiled in Babylon. Then we were faithful to the law of Moses when, during the Maccabean revolt, we were zealous for the law.

[26 : 39] And then we gained our independence again. Then we're turning away from the law of Moses under these priest kings in the Hasmonean dynasty. And then ultimately they come under Roman rule.

And then comes along this charismatic preacher, Jesus, who says things like, well, I am Lord of the Sabbath and your Sabbath observance is a little too stringent.

Here, we're picking grain on the Sabbath. And, you know, even David didn't quite obey the law all the time. My goodness, you know, if you're looking at your own history and you think whenever we're faithful to the law, things go well.

And whenever we're unfaithful to the law, things go badly. I can understand why the Pharisees might, might get really upset about this. Where, where they went wrong, ultimately, is they didn't, they didn't quite understand the law about which they were so zealous.

And they didn't realize that the law is not about all these external observances, but it's about, as Jesus said, about the, about the heart. What, what defiles a person is not what comes in from the

outside, but what comes out of the heart.

[27 : 58] And, and our lovelessness and our selfishness that comes out of the heart. That's what really defiles us, Jesus said. And, and that's where they, that's where the Pharisees went wrong. It wasn't their zeal for the law, but they misunderstood the very law about which they were so zealous.

But all that to say, you know, if we look at this time period in between the two testaments, the Pharisees, the motivation of the, the motivation of the Pharisees begins to make a little more sense. They're not just these boogeymen. One, one text, uh, written by, probably by, by Pharisees, uh, in, in the first century BC.

So not very long before Jesus came around, uh, identifies these Hasmonean priest kings as great sinners bearing God's judgment. Um, they write, you, O Lord, chose David king over Israel. And you swore to him concerning his offspring forever, that his palace would never fail before you. And because of our sins, sinners, those to whom you did not promise, wink, wink, nudge, nudge, the Hasmonean kings, they rose up against us.

[29 : 10] They attacked us and thrust us out. They took possession by force, and they did not glorify your honorable name. They set up in arrogance a palace concerning, uh, corresponding to their loftiness.

They laid waste the throne of David in arrogance, leading to change. But you, O God, will overthrow them and will remove their offspring from the earth when there rises up against them a person that is foreign to our race.

It's to that person who's foreign to their race that we now turned. Um, but before we turn there, uh, any thoughts or questions? I, I realize I said a whole lot just came out of my mouth, so.

So, the Pharisees actually look reasonably good here in this statement, but they're actually not wrong.

Yeah, I think in this time, yeah, in this time period, you know, I think of them as kind of the good guys. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, yeah. They ultimately miss the mark, but I think there's a lot of good there, even though they ultimately miss the mark.

[30 : 17] Except the good guys are always the bad guys of the parables. You know? Yeah. Yeah, it's weird to think of the Pharisees as good guys.

Yeah. Yeah. Compared to the rulers during this time period, certainly, I think, the good guys, if we can, if we can moralize on history like that.

Yeah. Yeah. Any other questions before we move on? Cool.

I have heard that in terms of kind of moral theology, Jesus tended to answer the way the Pharisees would answer.

Mm-hmm. They tended to be very similar theologically, and then there's just a little shift that, you know, like, they're really similar, except Jesus is Christ.

[31 : 38] The gospel's coming. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, if you were to compare, if you compare Jesus with the other Jewish groups around at the time, he doesn't fit neatly into any of them, which is sort of what we would expect.

Uh, Jesus can affirm something in just about anyone and say, but, you know, you're sort of, there's things that you're getting wrong. Um, sort of like how whenever the gospel intersects with any culture, there are going to be some things that the gospel affirms, said, yes, this is right.

And some, where it's like, well, not so much. Um, but if you compare Jesus to the other Jewish groups at his, in his day, he comes closest, probably, to the Pharisees, um, in terms of belief.

Yeah. Um, yeah. My other problem is it's almost like God goes, okay, they're taking the law seriously. Now we can dig a little deeper.

Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. Uh, you know? Maybe, you know? Uh, that, yeah.

[32 : 47] Jesus does say to the Pharisees, you know, uh, you tithe so, so scrupulously. You take some of the law so very seriously. But then, what about all this other stuff?

Like, the more important parts that you actually, that you actually aren't so concerned about in your practice. Uh, let's, let's dig deeper. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But the trouble is, if that's your mentality, if that's our mentality, uh, doing this, I'm doing this, I'm doing this, I'm doing this.

By doing all this, I'm putting God in my debt. Um, you tend not, you tend not to hear what you want to do. You know, you set yourself up for, uh, for being resistant to any expression.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, and also, if you, if you have this thought that, like, no son of Abraham will ever see hell.

Right. Uh, there, there's, who, who was it, who was it who said, there, there was some rabbi around this time who said that no son of Abraham would ever see Gehenna, which is the word that we translate hell in the New Testament.

[34 : 01] Uh, well, then you're not going to be very open to correction. Um, yeah. What, was it the reference that young ruler who said, on son of Abraham? Right.

Yeah. Yeah. Um. All right. You ready? Did I, did I see a hand over here?

No? No. Great. Okay. Um. All right. Now the Romans. The latter years of this, of this Hasmonean dynasty, this, this dynasty that we've been talking about, this, uh, dynasty of priest kings, uh, they, they were politically tumultuous.

Um, there was a, a succession dispute, uh, between these two kings, uh, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. Um, and then look at the years there, 67 to 63.

We're coming very close to the birth of Christ now. Um, and, uh, in that dispute, uh, Aristobulus I, uh, but, and then Hyrcanus sort of left Jerusalem disgraced.

[35 : 18] But then he foolishly, frankly, uh, got the help of the Roman general Pompey. Uh, he must have not known the Romans very well because you don't ask Rome for help, uh, in military matters and then expect to be free and independent at the end.

Uh, Rome is not, that's not how they operate. Um, so, so the Roman general Pompey, uh, sided with, with Hyrcanus and, uh, and, and he captured Jerusalem in 63 BC because, I mean, who can stand against Rome?

Um, so he got his wish of becoming the high priest governing, governing Jerusalem, but at the cost of submitting to Roman rule. Um, and there, there's this story, uh, in, in all of my textbooks, it talks about this story, but I actually couldn't find a primary source talking about it.

I would have loved to quote it here. Um, but Pompey sort of marching into the temple in Jerusalem, marching into the Holy of Holies and then being shocked to find nothing there. Um, because of course, uh, the Jewish people didn't worship idols.

Um, you know, normally in a temple you expect to see a big idol there, but Pompey marches into the Holy of Holies, finds nothing. Um, so that's how, that's how Jerusalem comes under Roman rule.

[36 : 41] Um. And then the, the notoriously brutal Herod the Great, um, who was, who was the, the ruler over Jerusalem at Jesus' birth, who, according to Matthew 2, uh, slaughtered infant boys in Bethlehem, all, all of the, all of the infant boys, uh, in order to try to kill Jesus, this king of the Jews.

Uh, he continued in this tradition of being a kind of a client king, um, who was ruling over Jerusalem, but really was submitting to Rome. Um, and then also you have Herod Antipas, who's a different person, confusingly enough, uh, who executed John the Baptist.

He's also in this tradition of, of rulers over the Jewish people who were actually just, uh, uh, submitting to Rome.

Um, they, they, they, they were underneath the Roman authorities. Uh, and though the apostles thought that Jesus might come destroy the Romans and, and free God's people again in a political sense, sort of like Judah the hammer did, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, not that long before, um, they, they were mistaken.

Um, as Jesus said to, to Pilate, uh, in his interrogation at the end of the Gospel of John, my kingdom is not of this world. Uh, Jesus didn't come to bring this particular kind of political liberation.

[38 : 10] Uh, Rome continued to rule over Jerusalem, ultimately destroying it, uh, in, in the year 70, um, during, during a Jewish revolt.

Uh, they thought that they would revolt just like the Maccabean revolt all over again, but they were crushed because you can't beat Rome. Um, and the city was destroyed, the temple was destroyed, and that's, that's sort of the, the end of the story of Jerusalem for some time.

And yet there is, even now, uh, at that time, uh, a king on the throne over Jerusalem, so to speak. Um, when, when God raised Jesus from the dead, he gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee might bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that, that he's king.

Um, so ultimately, in a sense, he did, uh, break off Roman rule over, over God's people, in a sense. Um, because there's no, there's no Roman ruler ruling over Jesus.

[39 : 25] So, now, whew, we just, I mean, that's 400 years. Um, uh, and that's a lot of information.

Forgive me if it was too much. I was trying to strike a balance. Forgive me if it was too much. But, uh, having looked at, so briefly, at centuries of history, now let's, let's take a step back and say, what, what can we learn from this time period, uh, about God, about God's purposes for his people, and about the life of faith?

Um, which, we have to be a little, uh, theologically imaginative, I think, because we have no scripture from this time, giving a sort of God's eye view of the time.

Um, but, here, here are some thoughts that I have, at least, uh, for, for what little it's worth. First, cross-cultural people. God's people have been crossing cultures for a very, very long time.

Uh, when Alexander the Great swept through the whole known world, uh, the whole world that was known to him at the time, uh, including through Judea, and spread the Greek language and culture, uh, the, the, the message of the scriptures was crossing culture.

[40 : 47] Um, the Old Testament was translated into Greek during this time. In fact, the, the, this Greek translation of the Old Testament is what early Christians were using. Um, the gospel, as we can even see in this time period, we can see the gospel's for all, all tribes and peoples and languages.

And that doesn't just start when the gospel's first proclaimed in the first century. Um, the, God's people have been crossing cultures for a very, very long time.

Um, and we can, we can see that. We can see that gloriously today because the, Christianity is not a Western religion. Uh, I mean, it didn't originate in the West.

And most Christians today aren't living in the West. Uh, it's, it's this global thing. Uh, more global than really any other world religion. And, and it starts a long time ago.

Uh, next, division. Um, political and religious division among God's people is not new. Um, it's not even new in, in the church.

[41 : 55] We can think about, uh, if you know church history, there's a lot of, uh, tumult at, at different times. Um, being, being Protestant, uh, we can only be too aware of, uh, of division among God's people.

Um, but that's not new. Um, this Hasmonean period, this period of Jewish self-rule, uh, was messy and it brought along new divisions, uh, between different, different factions of, of God's people.

Um, but Jesus entered that time in a united people from these disparate factions. Uh, among his apostles, uh, you had Matthew, the, the tax collector, uh, employed by the Roman Empire.

Uh, and you had, uh, what was his name? Simon the Zealot? Uh, great, yeah. You had Simon the Zealot, who being a, a, a zealot meant that he wanted to violently, uh, uh, defeat the Romans.

They were both his followers. Uh, I, I can, I can only imagine the sort of conversations they would have been having following Jesus along the way. Uh, but, I mean, Simon thinking that this Matthew, uh, if they, if they didn't have Jesus, he would want to put him to death probably.

[43 : 12] Uh, but Jesus brought them together. Uh, this, this is what Jesus has, his, God, God, uh, uh, tells us by the hand of Paul in Ephesians that, that his plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in Jesus.

Things in heaven and things on earth. Uh, division is not new to God's people and God's plan of uniting things that are divided is not new either. And, and, and I think perhaps above all in this time we see God's providence during confusing, inscrutable trials.

Um, God's people suffered a great deal during these 400 years. Uh, especially towards, um, that first part where, where they were under Greek rule.

Uh, there's this Antiochus, the fourth figure we talked about who killed people for obeying Torah, the law of Moses.

We got this chilling image of infants who were circumcised hanging from their mother's necks. And unlike earlier suffering in, in the history of the Old Testament, unlike the time in Babylon, there's no prophet saying, you know, 70 years and this is all over.

[44 : 34] You're going to come back into your land. You're going to be free. God's going to be with you. You're going to rebuild the temple. 70 years. You can count them. There's, there's no prophet saying that at the time. It seems that God is silent. Um, it, it, like in Psalm 15, it's the nations might indeed be saying, where is their God?

Uh, the Jews themselves might, might be saying, where is our God? Um, and yet even in that time, it seems that God was arranging history for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of many.

I mentioned the, the spread of the Greek language because of the, the conquest of, of Alexander the Great. Well, because of that, Paul could go anywhere in the Roman Empire and speak Greek and be understood.

That's incredible, right? Uh, Paul's missionary efforts would not have been possible without Alexander the Great. Um, he, he could go anywhere and speak Greek and be understood. He could write his letters in Greek and everyone would understand it because everyone learned Greek. Uh, it was the language of commerce and, and that's all because of this conquest of Alexander.

[45 : 51] Um, even though that conquest also brought along with it this horrible suffering under, under Antiochus IV. The Romans, uh, they built roads.

They're, they're famous for building their roads and they made travel a great deal safer. Uh, I forget which emperor it was who said to, uh, the Roman army, the Roman military, get rid of all the piracy on the Mediterranean Sea, all of it.

Make travel safe. Of course, their, their motivation was, well, if travel is safe, then trade is easier. And with trade comes money, you know, comes prosperity. It's great. But it also made it such that Christian evangelists like, like Paul and his compatriots could go around and not have to worry about highwaymen, uh, not, not have to worry about getting robbed and killed on the roads. Uh, that aided the proclamation of the gospel. Um, but the people at the time couldn't have realized this, you know, the, the, the Jews suffering under Antiochus IV never would have realized, you know, God has a plan.

For this suffering right now. And at the end of it is the, is this glorious salvation of innumerable people because the proclamation of the gospel, uniting us with God, the son, you know, bringing us into, into communion with the Trinity.

[47 : 10] Um, they, they never would have imagined that, right? But that it seems that that's what God was doing. Um, I think this time period, these silent years, so to speak, um, can, can show us that, that God is on the throne.

God is in control. He's sovereign. No matter what is happening in the world, whatever is happening to you, uh, God is still with you. Um, God is still for you.

God will still be your God. Um, there is a direction to history, uh, with God at the helm.

Even when, even when that is inscrutable to us and we have, we can't see it. Uh, there's a direction to the history, even of our lives, our individual lives with God at the helm.

Um, and if we belong to Jesus, that, that the end of that direction is glorious resurrection in him.

Um, I think perhaps above all, we can, we can see that from, uh, from this, uh, the intertestamental, this, this time in between the, the testaments.

[48 : 22] Um, and so we can, we can pray with Psalm 115. Why should the nation say, where is their God? Our God is in the heavens.

He does all that he pleases. Um, let us pray. Father, thank you for your sovereignty and that you are always for your people and that even when the world or our lives don't make sense, we can trust, we can look at your past history of faithfulness, um, and trust that you will continue to be faithful.

Um, Lord, we pray, give us faith, um, to trust in your faithfulness. Um, and as we go upstairs, give us faith to, um, respond in love to your, um, to your preached word.

We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. Uh, by the way, that's the end of the sort of, uh, Old Testament sweep survey of, of Sunday school.

Um, the next couple of weeks, uh, before I head back to Boston, uh, where I, where I'm studying, uh, we're going to sort of shift gears a little bit and talk about the Trinity for, for a few weeks.

[49 : 59] Um, and, uh, uh, this is sort of the beautiful heart of the Christian faith. So I'm, I'm really looking forward to it. But, uh, if you come next Sunday, that's what we'll be doing, but, uh, we're a little over time.

So, uh, let's head upstairs. Uh, if I said anything that's confusing or you want to learn more about this period, you can come grab me.