**10 Key Background for Reading the NT**

Recent History

* Persians: Cyrus the Great
* Greeks: Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes
* Hellenization (2 Maccabees 4.7, 10-15; 1 Maccabees 1.41-53)
* Maccabean Revolution: Mattathias, Judah the Maccabee, Jonathan Apphus, Simon Thassi, John Hyrcanus, Aristobulus I, Alexander Jannaeus, Salome Alexandra, Hyrcanus II, Aristobulus II
* Romans: Pompey the Great annexed Judea in 63bc
* Herodian Dynasty: Herod the Great and his descendants

Geographical and Political Setting

* Roman Empire: Augustus (27bc-ad14), Tiberius (14-37), Caligula (37-41), Claudius (41-54), Nero (54-68)
* Provinces: every region outside of Italy
* Galilee: Herod the Great (37-4bc), Herod Antipas (4bc-ad39), Herod Agrippa I (37-44)
* Judea: Herod the Great (37-4bc), Herod Archelaus (4bc-ad6), Coponius (6-9), Marcus Ambivulus (9-12), Annius Rufus (12-15), Valerius Gratus (15-26), Pontius Pilate (26-36), Marcellus (36-37), Marullus (37-41), Herod Agrippa I (41-44)
* Samaria: under Judean jurisdiction; Samaritans and Jews conflicted with each other

Jewish Groups

* Sadducees
  + controlled the temple
  + partners with Roman governors
  + wealthy aristocrats
  + chief priests were the leaders
  + only accepted the Torah as scripture
  + didn’t believe in resurrection or angels
* Pharisees
  + focused on obedience to Torah
  + accepted the law (Torah), prophets (Nevi’im), and writings (Kethuvim)
  + oral tradition & fence laws
  + not in power at the time of Jesus, except those in the Sanhedrin
* Sanhedrin
  + Romans established 5 councils over 5 districts
  + most important council was in Jerusalem
  + had temple police at their disposal to arrest people
  + could meet out punishments except capital punishment, which was reserved for the Roman governor
* Scribes
  + every group had scribes
  + even Paul used scribes to write his letters (Tertius in Rom 16.22)
  + writing was a skill
  + copy scripture to preserve it
  + called lawyers or experts in the law
* Revolutionaries
  + wanted to overthrow Roman occupation
  + Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.23   
    “But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord”
* John’s Renewal Movement
  + called people to repent
  + baptized them in the Jordan River
  + possible connection with the Essenes

Important Issues

* Temple
* Taxes
* Torah
* Unrest

Review

* When the Greeks conquered the world, they made cities adopt their customs, culture, language, and religion.
* When Antiochus Epiphanes forcibly Hellenized Judah, it resulted in the Maccabean Revolution under Mattathias and his sons.
* After they won their independence, the Hasmonean Dynasty ruled up until 63bc when Pompey annexed Judea into the Roman Empire.
* Herod the Great and his descendants ruled over the region for many years, though in Judea the Romans directly ruled through governors.
* During Jesus' ministry Herod Antipas ruled in Galilee and Pontius Pilate governed Judea and Samaria.
* Sadducees partnered with the Roman government and controlled the temple.
* The Pharisees focused on obedience to Torah, according to the traditions of the elders.
* The Sanhedrin was a council in Jerusalem made of Sadducees and Pharisees that controlled a police force and ruled on legal issues.
* Scribes copied scripture and had expert knowledge of the Law of Moses.
* Jesus lived in a time of fragile peace when Roman provocations threatened to light the match of Jewish revolution at any moment.