

THE TIME BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

I. *THE GLORY THAT WAS GREECE*

Why was the New Testament Written in Greek (not Latin)?

A. The state of the world at the end of the OT

1. Dan 2 - Nebuchanezzar's Dream of 4 Kingdoms
Gold - Babylonian
Silver - Persian
Bronze - Greek
Iron - Roman
2. Dan 5 – writing on the wall – Persians conquer Babylon – 539 BC
3. Dan 6 – vision of the ram (Persia) and the goat (Greece)
 - i. Daniel prophesies Greece will conquer Persia
 - ii. Large horn refers to first king of Greece – 200 years in the future
4. Esther 1:1-3 Xerxes (reigned 485-465 BC) gives a banquet in the 3rd year of his reign (482 BC). Deposes Queen Vashti.
5. Esther 2:15-18 Esther becomes queen in the 7th year of his reign (478 BC)
 - i. It always seemed to me the Xerxes of Chapter 1 is much more confident and assertive than the Xerxes of the rest of the book. History also records an active early period and quiet later period.
 - ii. What happened between the 3rd and the 7th years of Xerxes reign? Perhaps the most important events in history (outside of the Bible)

B. The Persian War (480-479 BC)

1. Xerxes wanted to invade Greece to avenge the defeat of a small Persian force by Athens 10 years before at the Battle of Marathon (490 BC)
 - i. How far is it from Marathon to Athens? Pheidippides.
2. Greek historian Herodotus tells of a meeting of Xerxes and his generals to plan the war (perhaps same gathering as Esther 1?) Full might of the Persian Empire assembled – force of 2,000,000 men (and at least one woman). Built a bridge over the strait separating Europe from Asia Minor (the Hellespont). Advance to the Pass at Themopylae.
3. Greece consists of independent city states. Olympic Games distract the Greeks. Themopylae is defended by only 4,000 Greeks under Leonidas of Sparta. Persian army – even Xerxes's best troops the Immortals – cannot break through the Greek lines. Greek “traitors” lead Persians by mountain path to surround the Greeks. Most of the Greek force withdraws except 300 Spartans under Leonidas - who fight to the death. 20,000 Persians casualties. Same emotions for the Greeks as the Alamo.
4. Xerxes advances to Athens. Greek not fully prepared or united. Most want to defend the isthmus of Corinth. Athenians make a fateful decision: abandon their city and evacuate women and children to island of Salamis. Rely entirely on naval power. Xerxes occupies and burns the city of Athens in revenge for Marathon.

5. Athenians persuade or manipulate the rest of the Greeks to fight the Persian navy at Salamis (and not retreat to Corinth). Battle of Salamis. Xerxes watches from shore as the Persian fleet suffers crushing defeat. Xerxes fears Greeks will sail to the Hellespont, destroy the bridges and cut off his army. He withdraws most of his army and leaves 300,000 to complete the conquest. Persian army is defeated a few months later by Spartans and others at the Battles of Platea and Mycale. Greece has repelled the invasion of the mighty Persian Empire! Xerxes finds solace in the arms of Esther.
6. Collier – why did you tell (bore) us with all this? To see God’s hand in history as He fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel. The importance of the victory of the Greeks over the Persians for subsequent Western history cannot be overestimated. Quote from Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com):

“The battle of Salamis has been described by many historians (among them [Victor Davis Hanson](#), [Donald Kagan](#) and [John Keegan](#)) as the **single most significant battle in human history** (emphasis added). The Greek victory protected the nascent and singular traditions of democracy and individual rights, as well as guarding Greek philosophy and culture. This meant the eventual flowering of Western culture, which would likely have been snuffed out completely, had the Persians overrun Greece. Due to the enormous and wide-ranging influence of Western culture on all of human civilization, as well as the huge success of Western culture in its own right, it is literally possible that the world today would be utterly and basically different had the Greeks lost at Salamis.”

C. Flourishing of Classical Greek Civilization (479 BC to 338 BC)

1. After the war, Athens is rebuilt with the buildings we today identify with ancient Athens. Tremendous burst of confidence and creativity. They consider Greek culture superior to all others (“barbarian” derives from the Greek word for “non-Greek”).
2. Greek religion (the gods on Mount Olympus) was not the driving force of their culture. It was more of a civic duty not a source of morality and truth as we think of religion. Greek gods were notoriously subject to the same moral failings as humans. Christianity (not Zeus and his crowd) would later become the religion of Western Civilization. The power of Greek culture was not its religion, but its other ideas – which can be summarized as the Pursuit of Beauty and Truth.
3. Concern with Beauty. Homer and the *Iliad*. Helen – the most beautiful woman in the world (Hellas, Hellenic, Hellenization). How many ships were sent to rescue Helen? Developed Western notions of: Literature. Drama. Architecture. Art. Sculpture (human body; male and female - homosexuality). Athletic competition. Contrast monumental art of earlier Fertile Crescent civilizations.
4. Concern with Truth. Developed Western concepts of: Rationalism. Science. Physics. Mathematics. Geometry. Medicine. History.

Philosophy. Metaphysics. Ethics. Political notions of freedom and individual rights.

- i. Americans think our founders invented democracy – problem? democracy is a Greek word – Athens was the first democracy.
5. Great Philosophers: Socrates = Plato (Academy) = Aristotle (Lyceum) Acts 17:16-21 – nearly 400 years later, Paul argues with Greek philosophers in Athens – v.21 (NIV): “All of the Athenians and the foreigners who live there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas”.
6. Ancient Greeks basically invent Western Civilization. Hellenic ideas, later combined with Christianity, define Western Civilization and make it distinct from other cultures.
7. How Did God Feel About Greek Culture? From a human point of view, in the words of Edgar Allen Poe, it was “the Glory that was Greece.” Not God. Rom 1:18-32. The Greeks did not honor God and He gave them over to homosexuality. Parallels with our society today. Our society exalts human wisdom and Science over God and His Word. Homosexuality is now tolerated (only a few times in history). We cannot let the world and its thinking influence us.

D. Macedonian Conquests and Hellenization

1. Greeks never united, but remained independent city states. Rivalry of Athens and Sparta (the Peloponnesian War). During the mid 300s BC, kingdom of Macedonia to the north of Greece becomes powerful under the military genius Philip II of Macedon. After a series of conquests in the Balkan Peninsula (modern Albania, Rumania, Bulgaria), he invades and conquers Greece (338 BC). 18 year old son is one of his generals.
2. Macedonian respect for Greek civilization. Aristotle is the tutor to Philip’s son. From his father, the son inherited military genius and from Aristotle, he acquired a great appreciation for Greek culture. What was his name? ALEXANDER THE GREAT
3. Decided to conquer the world. Did so. Invaded and destroyed the Persian Empire. In a breathtakingly short period of time, conquered the entire Fertile Crescent region, i.e. modern Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan (NW India). Died at the age of 33 in 323 BC.
4. Initiated the spread of Greek culture to his conquests. Greek learning and philosophy. Greek art and architecture. Greek drama and literature. Greek language. Process known as Hellenization. The entire eastern Mediterranean became Greek in culture and language and generally remained so for 1,000 years - spanning the centuries before and after the time of Jesus until the coming of Islam in the 7th Century AD.

THAT’S WHY THE NT WAS WRITTEN IN GREEK. That’s why the word “Greek” is synonymous with “Gentile” in the NT. Starting at Antioch, all of the cities visited by Paul on his missionary journeys (except Jerusalem and Rome) were Greek in language and culture. Most of the NT was written as letters to Greek speaking readers

Next time: The Impact of Hellenization on the Jews and the Rise of Rome.

II. *THE GRANDEUR THAT WAS ROME*

Why did God send His Son in the 1st Century?

A. Impact of Hellenization on the Jews

1. As prophesied in Dan 8:22, at the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire was divided into 4 kingdoms by his generals. The kingdom in Asia Minor (Seleucid) had its capital at Antioch; the Egyptian kingdom (Ptolemaic) at Alexandria. As prophesized in Dan 11, Palestine was disputed between the kings of the north (Seleucid) and the kings of the South (Ptolemaic). **Daniel's prophecies are still coming true 250 years later.**
2. OT was translated into Greek by Jews living in Alexandria around 250 BC (the Septuagint abbreviated LXX). Dead Sea Scrolls (around 100 BC) include OT books in both Hebrew and Greek. The OT "Bible" of most NT Christians was the Septuagint. Most NT quotations of the OT are from the Septuagint (i.e. not directly from the Hebrew). Greek names are not uncommon among the Jews of the 1st Century AD (such as Philip and the other deacons in Acts 6).
3. As prophesized by Dan 11:31-32, Antiochus IV Epihanes (one of the kings of the north who reigned 175 - 164 BC), attempted by force to eliminate Judaism and Hellenize the Jews. He set up an altar to Zeus in the temple (the abomination that causes desolation) and forced Jews to eat pork. "Corrupt those who violate the covenant" – foreshadows the Saducees – who remain open to the influence of the dominant Greek culture. "Those who know their God will firmly resist him" – prophesy of the revolt of the Macabees and the sect of the Pharisees who reject Greek culture in devotion to the law. **At this point, the prophecies of Daniel are 375 years old.**
4. Hasmonean Dynasty (162 BC to 63 BC). Jews revolt against Antiochus IV led by the Macabee family (162 BC). Gain independence (commemorated by Hannakuh). Jewish kings rule until 63 BC when Rome conquers Palestine.
5. Herod the Great. Idumean (Edomite) not Jewish by blood although Idumeans converted to Judaism and Herod married a Hasmonean princess. Appointed King of the Jews by the Romans, he rules Palestine from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC (some dispute this and say 1 BC). Substantial renovation of the temple and built other public buildings in Jerusalem. Murdered or executed many of his own family. Herodians are the party of Herod and his successors.
6. During the Roman period, the Jews revolt time and again trying to regain their independence. Jewish hopes naturally gravitated to a Messiah who would deliver them from Rome just as the Macabees delivered them from Greece. One of the Dead Sea scrolls calls the Messiah the Son of God.

B. Rise of Rome

1. Legendary founding (753 BC). City state similar to the cities of Greece. Republic ruled by a deliberative body of leading citizens - the Senate.
2. Rivalry with Carthage. By the 3rd Century BC, Rome controlled all of Italy and came into conflict with the North African maritime power of Carthage. Rome and Carthage fight the 1st Punic War, and Rome gains control of Sicily and later Corsica and Sardinia. Rivalry unresolved.
3. 2nd Punic War was famous and decisive. From Spain, Hannibal of Carthage crosses the Alps and ravishes Italy. He defeats every Roman army sent against him (crushing the last and largest one at Canae), but is unable to capture Rome or other major cities. Rome counters by invading Spain to cut off his supply lines and then invades North Africa to advance against Carthage itself. Defeat of Carthage (202 BC) against impossible odds is the defining moment in Roman history. Rome gains control of entire Western Mediterranean (North Africa and Spain).
4. Later Roman conquests: In the 2nd Century BC, Rome conquers Macedonia and Greece (146 BC) **fulfilling the 400 year old prophecy in Daniel 2 that a 4th kingdom would replace the Greeks and set the stage for the coming of the Kingdom of God.** Carthage is completely destroyed in the 3rd Punic War (Cato). In the 1st Century BC, Rome conquers Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and Egypt in the East (by Pompey), and France and England in the West (by Julius Caesar). By 50 BC, Rome rules every shore touched by the Mediterranean Sea.

C. Roman Empire

1. Transition from Republic to Empire. Julius Caesar crosses the Rubicon (49 BC) and initiates civil war against Republicans led by Pompey. Caesar is victorious and proclaims himself dictator for life. Assassinated on the floor of the Senate in 44 BC. Civil war continues between Republicans and Caesarians.
2. Victory of Julius Caesar's nephew Octavian in 27 BC. Official beginning of the Roman Empire. Changed his name to what? AUGUSTUS CAESAR. Ruled 27 BC to 14 AD. **Mentioned in Luke 2:1.**
3. Measured in terms of the longevity of the institutions he established, Augustus Caesar was arguably the most successful ruler in world history. The Roman Empire he founded would rule the entire Mediterranean world for another 500 years.
4. *Pax Romana*. Roman Legions stationed throughout the Empire. General peace and political stability. No political boundaries across the entire Mediterranean World. Local autonomy and respect for local culture, but zero tolerance for revolt. Built aqueducts, roads and bridges (many still in use today). Incredible disparity between rich and poor; slavery; brutality. "Bread and circuses" to keep the masses content in Rome. People in need of good news in an environment where good news could spread easily. **Rom 5:6 "at just the right time...Christ died for the ungodly."**

Subsequent Roman Emperors mentioned by name in NT:

Tiberias (reigned 14 AD - 39 AD – appointed Pontius Pilate) – Luke 3:1;

Claudius (reigned 42 – 52 AD) – Acts 18:2;

Also notable is Nero (reigned 52 – 68 AD), the first Roman persecutor of Christians. He ordered the executions of Peter and Paul. Consider 1 Pet 3:17: honor the king (emperor).

Even after the city of Rome fell to Germanic invaders in 476 AD, the Eastern Roman Empire of Constantinople endured for another 1,000 years. This Eastern “Byzantine” Empire survived the initial onslaught of Islam in the 7th Century AD, and although diminished, did not succumb to repeated Islamic assaults until 1453 AD, when the Ottoman Turks finally captured Constantinople and the last living vestige of the Roman Empire was swept away.