

## Theologies of the Messiah: Class Three

### The Greek Period, Hasmoneans, & Romans

## THE GREEK PERIOD, HASMONEANS, & ROMANS

### BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW [OPEN WITH DANIEL 7:9-14]

We begin once more in the time of the United Kingdom from around 1050-930 BC when all the tribes stood together under one king. The good old days were under king David when the kingdom was strong and quite often victorious and the king was faithful (mostly). But, there was a rebellion in around 930 BC and the kingdom divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrian Empire and, in 587 BC, the southern kingdom fell to the Babylonian Empire. The people were exiled to Babylon until 538 BC when Cyrus the Great, a Persian king, defeated the Babylonians and claimed their territories. Cyrus not only let the people go home, he declared religious freedom in the empire and even supported efforts to rebuild the Temple and restore its services. The Second Temple was said to have been rebuilt starting in 520 BC and was rededicated in 515 BC.<sup>1</sup>

Not everyone returned from exile, but several waves of returnees did come back to rebuild. In 456 BC, the Bible tells us about 50,000 Judeans came back with Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>2</sup> In this period, the people worked to restore not just the walls and buildings, but also their life of faith, their scriptures, and their new life together.



1. "Alexander Mosaic" from the House of the Faun in Pompeii (c. 100 BC) depicting Alexander fighting king Darius III of Persia.

Some time passed and King Philip II had formed a Greek-Macedonian army that was working to conquer/liberate, first the Greek states, and then large empires. He had planned to attack the Persian empire when, in 336 BC, he was assassinated.<sup>3</sup> His son Alexander the Great took over the campaign and was victorious in 333/2 BC when he conquered the Persian Empire.

Alexander died on June 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>, 323

BC. There wasn't a clear line of succession so his empire was divided between four generals who eventually divided themselves into two camps: the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. The Ptolemies started out with Egypt and the Seleucids had Mesopotamia and Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> The Ptolemies controlled the land of Israel from 301-200 BC, but they were regularly embroiled in conflict with the Seleucids. In the year 200 BC, the Seleucids defeated the Ptolemies (locally) and gained control of Jerusalem and Judah.<sup>5</sup>

In the year 168 BC, there was civil unrest among the Jews when they heard a rumor that the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes had died in battle in Egypt. This rumor was false. In response to these riots, Antiochus IV directed his troops to build a military settlement in Jerusalem. He seized the Temple and rededicated it to the worship of Zeus, sacrificing pigs on

the altar. He made the Jewish religion illegal, burned scrolls of scripture, banned circumcision, and if any were found practicing the Jewish faith, they were burned alive.<sup>6</sup>

2. Yehuda Maccabee, Or Torah Synagogue in Acre, Israel.



Judas Maccabeus rallied the people to revolt against the Seleucid army. Though they were fewer in number and less well armed, they used guerilla warfare and were victorious. The Seleucid army was also fighting a different war with the Armenians, which drew some of their forces. In 165 BC, Judas took back the Temple and cleansed it. That rededication is celebrated by Jews every year at Chanukah. When Antiochus IV died in 164, the next Seleucid king put a stop to the persecutions. Judas was their leader and his brother Jonathan was the High Priest. Their dynasty was called Hasmonean. They successfully ousted the garrison at Jerusalem and stopped paying tribute in 142 BC.<sup>7</sup> The Hasmoneans had charge over Israel in a semi-independent sense from 167-110 BC, they were completely independent from 110-63 BC, and they became a client state of the Romans from 63-37 BC when Herod the Great rose to power. The Herodian dynasty lasted until 6 AD, when they came under direct Roman rule. This continued until about 480 AD.<sup>8</sup>

The Romans taxed the Jews heavily and regularly visited religious persecution on them. The First Jewish-Roman War was a Jewish revolt to try to regain independence from 66-73 AD. In 70 AD, the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.<sup>9</sup> There was another major Jewish uprising against Rome from 115-117 AD with heavy losses for both sides. In 131 AD, the Emperor Hadrian built a Temple for Jupiter on the former site of the Jewish Temple and barred Jews from living in Jerusalem. He also renamed the province Palaestina. The Bar Kochba revolt was from 132 to 136 AD, led by Simon Bar Kokhba (literally "Simon, son of the star"). Emperor Hadrian suppressed this revolt and exiled Jews from all of Judea, but not Galilee. This revolt had greater loss of life than the First Jewish-Roman War.<sup>10</sup>

## MESSIAH AND APOCALYPSE

We have seen in these time periods there have been massive upheavals, glorious victories and unthinkable defeats. Particularly in times of persecution, people started to wonder: what happens to the righteous who are persecuted and killed? The apocryphal book 2

Maccabees was written around 124 BC.<sup>11</sup> In it, there is a story set just before the Maccabean revolt during the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. A woman has seven sons. Each son is tortured and killed one after the other for refusing to eat pork (which is against Jewish law). In 2 Maccabees 9:9, one of the sons says, "You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to live again forever, because we are dying for his laws."



3. The Apocalypse of Saint John from the "Beato Valcavado," an illuminated manuscript, Oveto, 970.

While previously, theology (messianic and other) had focused on the hope that faithfulness would bring God's justice into my time now, increasingly, people were starting to place ultimate justice in what Jews called "the world to come." Ideas about the end times didn't ignore the reality of suffering, rather they included times of great suffering before the earth was restored with the coming of a/the messiah. Rather than just being a symbol of this new age, more people began to believe that the Messiah was the one who would bring it about. Language about this Messiah became more and more superhuman as in the Daniel 7 passage read at the beginning of class (written between 165 and 160 BC).<sup>12</sup> Daniel 12:2-4 also talks about the dead rising to life. These ideas are echoed in 1 Enoch, an apocalyptic, apocryphal work. This portion is from the *Book of Similitudes*, which was written in the early first century BC.<sup>13</sup>

### 1 Enoch 51:1-5

<sup>1</sup>And in those days shall the earth also give back that which has been entrusted to it, And Sheol also shall give back that which it has received, And hell shall give back that which it owes. <sup>5a</sup>For in those days the Elect One shall arise, <sup>2</sup>And he shall choose the righteous and holy from among them: For the day has drawn nigh that they should be saved. <sup>3</sup>And the Elect One shall in those days sit on My throne, And his mouth shall pour forth all the secrets of wisdom and counsel: For the Lord of Spirits hath given (them) to him and hath glorified him. <sup>4</sup>And in those days shall the mountains leap like rams, And the hills also shall skip like lambs satisfied with milk, And the faces of [all] the angels in heaven shall be lighted up with joy. <sup>5b</sup>And the earth shall rejoice, And the righteous shall dwell upon it, And the elect shall walk thereon."

## **1 Enoch 62:2-6, 9, 11-15**

<sup>2</sup>And the Lord of Spirits seated [the Elect One] on the throne of His glory, And the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, And the word of his mouth slays all the sinners, And all the unrighteous are destroyed from before his face.

<sup>3</sup>And there shall stand up in that day all the kings and the mighty, And the exalted and those who hold the earth, And they shall see and recognize How he sits on the throne of his glory, And righteousness is judged before him, And no lying word is spoken before him. <sup>4</sup>Then shall pain come upon them as on a woman in travail, [And she has pain in bringing forth] When her child enters the mouth of the womb, And she has pain in bringing forth.

<sup>5</sup>And one portion of them shall look on the other, And they shall be terrified, And they shall be downcast of countenance, And pain shall seize them, When they see that Son of Man Sitting on the throne of his glory. <sup>6</sup>And the kings and the mighty and all who possess the earth shall bless and glorify and extol him who rules over all, who was hidden... <sup>9</sup>And all the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who rule the earth Shall fall down before him on their faces, And worship and set their hope upon that Son of Man, And petition him and supplicate for mercy at his hands.... <sup>11</sup>And He will deliver them to the angels for punishment, To execute vengeance on them because they have oppressed His children and His elect <sup>12</sup>And they shall be a spectacle for the righteous and for His elect: They shall rejoice over them, Because the wrath of the Lord of Spirits rests upon them, And His sword is drunk with their blood.

<sup>13</sup>And the righteous and elect shall be saved on that day, And they shall never thenceforward see the face of the sinners and unrighteous. <sup>14</sup>And the Lord of Spirits will abide over them, And with that Son of Man shall they eat And lie down and rise up for ever and ever. <sup>15</sup>And the righteous and elect shall have risen from the earth, And ceased to be of downcast countenance. And they shall have been clothed with garments of glory

1. What stands out to you in these passages?
2. Earlier, there were only a few isolated passages about resurrection of individuals (like when Elijah raises the widow's son from the dead in 1 Kings 17). Why do you think the belief in a general resurrection from the dead grew out of this time period?
3. Why do you think the imagery of childbirth was used to describe the pain of the kings and the mighty?
4. Some of the language seems to relish the pain and punishment of the kings and the mighty. Do you think this is right? Should we be satisfied that ultimate justice is done or should we still have empathy, even in the punishment our enemies?

## MESSIAH OF ALL

After the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, things were not going perfectly with the Hasmoneans. Early on, the leader of state, Jonathan Apphus, had also been made the High Priest in 153 BC.<sup>14</sup> Following this, many of the leaders of state also held the office of High Priest. A party arose, the Pharisees, who held that their king and High Priest needed to be different people. They also saw the people adopting more and more Greek customs and abandoning Jewish tradition. They argued that their own laws and traditions should still be practiced. The King/High Priests often sided with the Sadducees, who did not see a problem with adopting some Greek customs. One King/Priest, Alexander Jannaeus reigned from around 103-76 BC. He was widely seen as cruel and oppressive. For example, sometime in the 90's, he was officiating in the Temple for the Feast of Tabernacles.



4. Model of the Second Temple at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

He “demonstrated his displeasure against the Pharisees by refusing to perform the water libation ceremony properly: instead of pouring it on the altar, he poured it on his feet. The crowd responded with shock at his mockery and...pelt[ed] him with...citrons. Outraged, he ordered soldiers to kill those who insulted him, which lead to the massacre of six thousand people in the Temple courtyard. With further frustration, Alexander had wooden barriers built around the altars preventing people from sacrificing.”<sup>15</sup>

This led to civil war and major loss of life. Theologically, this and other conflicts were a big disappointment. The Hasmoneans were clearly not launching a messianic age. This led to a revival of messianic literature and hopes for restoration – whatever that would mean under a uniting Messiah.<sup>16</sup> In some of the new writings, this hope wasn't just a national one – it included the Gentiles and the nations around them. The *Psalms of Solomon* is a collection of psalms from the second half of the first century BC.<sup>17</sup>

### **Psalms of Solomon 17:32-36**

“Taught by God, the Messiah will be a righteous king over the gentile nations.

There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days,  
for all shall be holy and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.

He will not rely on horse and rider and bow,  
nor will he collect gold and silver for war.

Nor will he build up hope in a multitude for a day of war.  
 The Lord himself is his king, the hope of the one who has a strong hope in God.  
 He shall be compassionate to all the nations, who reverently stand before him.  
 He will strike the earth with the word of his mouth forever;  
 he will bless the Lord's people with wisdom and happiness.  
 And he himself will be free from sin, in order to rule a great people.  
 He will expose officials and drive out sinners by the strength of his word"

1. What stands out to you in this passage?
2. Imagine that you were living under the strain and violence of this time period. How does this Psalm confront the abuses of power by the leaders?
3. Why do you think some people started to believe that all the nations would worship God and know the Messiah?

### DISAPPOINTMENTS & DIFFERENCES



5. "Bar Kochba" by Arthur Szyk, 1927, Paris.

Jewish and Christian theologies of the messiah drew from the same well. Ultimately, each side was grasping hold of diverging interpretations, which contributed to the separation of the two as distinct faiths. Often in the Gospels, people ask Jesus if he is the Messiah to come. Indeed, many arose claiming to be the messiah during this period. One of the last major figures to make this claim, Simon bar Kochba, rose to lead a revolution against Rome in 132 AD and it was bloody and disastrous. Broadly speaking, after this Jews put much less emphasis on their theology of the messiah (though, they did offer counter-argument to Christian messianic theology). One still finds some discussion in the Talmud (Jewish discussions about theology and practice

compiled around 500, but the writings are from earlier times):

### Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a

Rabbi Alexandri says: Rabbi Yahoshua ben Levi raises a contradiction between two depictions of the Messiah. It is written: "There came with the clouds of heaven, one like unto a son of man...and there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom...his dominion is an everlasting dominion (Daniel 7:13-14). And it is written: 'Behold, your king will come to you; he is just and victorious; lowly and riding upon a donkey and upon a colt, the foal of a donkey' (Zechariah 9:9).

Rabbi Alexandri explains: If the Jewish people merit redemption, the Messiah will come in a miraculous manner with the clouds of heaven. If they do not merit redemption, the Messiah will come lowly and riding upon a donkey.

King Shapur of Persia said to Shmuel mockingly: You say that the Messiah will come on a donkey; I will send him the riding horse that I have.

Shmuel said to him: Do you have a horse with one thousand colors like the donkey of the Messiah? Certainly his donkey will be miraculous

Jewish theologies challenged Jesus as Messiah because he neither rebuilt nor restored the Temple (it was destroyed), he had no formal reign as king, and he did not immediately usher in an era of peace or wisdom. They said that his people were not redeemed – they continued to be persecuted and exiled.<sup>18</sup> Christians, by contrast, held up Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, Son of David, and the apocalyptic figure associated with the end times. Christians argued that Christ united the holy offices of priest, prophet, and king within himself and that the Messianic Age and final judgment would happen at the Second Coming.<sup>19</sup>

### **1 Thessalonians 4:14-17**

<sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

1. What stands out to you in these passages?
2. Compare the passage from the Talmud with the one from 1 Thessalonians. What is the role of people when the Messiah comes (or comes again)? How do you see awe and praise expressed in these very different passages?
3. As noted above, the idea that the Messiah would come, leave, and return hadn't been a part of messianic theology before Jesus. Why do you think this was?
4. We've looked at a lot of different messianic theologies: fully human ones, political leaders, warriors, priests, teachers, and the Messiah of the end times/final judgment. What do you see as the most important aspects of messianic theology?

## WHAT DOES THE MESSIAH DO?

In this time period:<sup>20</sup>

- Gather all Jews home to Israel
- Overthrow Rome
- Be a king in the line of David
- Be the Great High Priest
- Rebuild and Restore the Temple, Purify its Rituals
- Know and Teach the Law and Commandments to the People
- Fight wars for God in a kingdom that is the equal of others around it (though violent imagery declines)
- Show other nations that God is God so that even Gentiles worship
- Lead the resurrection of the dead
- Judge the living and the dead
- Usher in the end times (i.e. destroy the world) and make a new world (the world to come) in an age of peace

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<sup>1</sup> "Second Temple Judaism," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Temple\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple_Judaism) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>2</sup> "History of Israel," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Israel#Babylonian\\_Persian\\_and\\_Hellenistic\\_periods\\_\(586%E2%80%93337\\_BCE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Israel#Babylonian_Persian_and_Hellenistic_periods_(586%E2%80%93337_BCE)) (accessed 12/9/19).

<sup>3</sup> "Philip II of Macedon," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip\\_II\\_of\\_Macedon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Macedon) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>4</sup> "Alexander the Great," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_the\\_Great#Death\\_and\\_succession](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great#Death_and_succession) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>5</sup> Lendering, Jona. "Messiah, Roots 1: The Hasmonaeans." Livius.org.

<https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-1-the-hasmonaeans/> (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>6</sup> Lendering, "Roots 1."

<sup>7</sup> Lendering, "Roots 1."

<sup>8</sup> "Messiah in Judaism," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah\\_in\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_in_Judaism) (accessed 12/17/19). See also "Second Temple Judaism," Wikipedia.

<sup>9</sup> "Second Temple Judaism." Wikipedia.

<sup>10</sup> "History of Israel," Wikipedia.

<sup>11</sup> "2 Maccabees," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2\\_Maccabees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2_Maccabees) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>12</sup> "Messiah in Judaism," Wikipedia. See also Lendering, Jona, "Messianic Motifs: 'Son of.'" Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-7-son-of/> (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>13</sup> Lendering, "Messianic Motifs."

<sup>14</sup> "Jonathan Apphus." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan\\_Apphus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Apphus) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>15</sup> "Alexander Jannaeus." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Jannaeus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Jannaeus) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>16</sup> Lendering, "Messiah, Roots 1."

<sup>17</sup> Lendering, Jona. "Messiah #2: Sage or Teacher." Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-3-sage/> (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>18</sup> "Judaism's View of Jesus," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism%27s\\_view\\_of\\_Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism%27s_view_of_Jesus) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>19</sup> "Christianity and Judaism," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity\\_and\\_Judaism#The\\_Messiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_and_Judaism#The_Messiah) (accessed 12/17/19).

<sup>20</sup> "Messiah," Wikipedia. See also "Judaism's Views of Jesus." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism%27s\\_view\\_of\\_Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism%27s_view_of_Jesus) (Accessed 12/3/2019). Lendering, Jona. "Messiah #13: Eschatological King." Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-13-eschatological-king/> (accessed 12/17/19). Lendering, Jona. "Messiah #10: Messianic Expectations." Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-10-messianic-expectations/> (accessed 12/17/19).