

MOVIE: ALEXANDER, 2004

I've known many great men in my life, but only one colossus.

A king isn't born, he's made.

What would you do if you ever reached the end of the world?

Never will there be an Alexander like you, Alexander the Great.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Few names from ancient times are more recognizable than Alexander the Great, and we just heard a clip from the trailer of the 2004 biopic, also called *Alexander*. Though for such an epic story, the movie was pretty disappointing. We call him "The Great" to distinguish him from the 15 other important Alexanders from 500 BC to AD 600, who rate a mention in the Oxford classical dictionary. In early 334 BC, at the age of 22, Alexander set off on what would become an almost nonstop decade long military campaign eastwards from Greece.

By 330 BC, he was the master of Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Israel, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, down to the Persian Gulf. Alexander the Great operated in the same parts of the world that staged the events of the Old and New Testaments, Egypt, Babylon, Samaria, Jerusalem, Damascus, Persia. Alexander the Great subdued them all. And he also lived right in the middle of the period of alleged silence between the Old and New Testaments. People often call this the intertestamental period. Turn the page from the old to the new, and whoosh! You skip over almost 500 years, including Alexander the Great. How can this be?

Heaps of stuff happened in this period, and some of it is super important for the beginnings of Christianity. There's the rise of the Essenes and their Dead Sea Scrolls, the dominance of the Greek language, which is what the New Testament is written, and of course, the advent of the Roman Empire, which, after a rocky start, turned out to be the great catapult of Christianity. This period also saw the introduction of synagogues and the emergence of Pharisees and Sadducees.

Where did these all come from? This period is important, so why is the Bible silent about it? Is it silent about it?

In the Old Testament, God is ever present, always speaking to his people through messengers and prophets. So where did his people and prophets go? What happened to them? Did God really stop speaking until Jesus popped up 500 years later?

I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan's new book, *Why Is There Suffering?* by Bethany Sollereeder.

Every episode, we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we'll be trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

INTERVIEW BEGINS

George Athas:

Well, first of all, a disclaimer, I don't actually like the term intertestamental period.

John Dickson:

I know.

George Athas:

Yeah, I don't think ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

That's George Athas. He's the director of research and lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew at Moore Theological College in my hometown of Sydney. George has done tons of stuff, and most of its too nerdy for a podcast. But his PhD focused on the amazing 1993 discovery in Galilee of an inscription mentioning the dynasty of King David, of David and Goliath claim. It's likely the first mention of David outside the Bible. And if you're interested, his doctorate was later published by Sheffield Academic Press as the Tel Dan inscription.

He has a massive book coming out next year, I think, that covers the period between the Testaments. I've had a sneak peek and it is amazing. There's no way we're going to cover everything in his 300,000 word monster. But I tell you now, this is going to be the ultimate one hour masterclass on one of the most fascinating and neglected phases in history.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

I don't think it actually exists. But in popular perception, the intertestamental period is that bit of history that lies between the end of the writing of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament period, and that usually is seen to cover about four centuries or so. And quite often, it's characterized as a period of silence. That is prophetic silence that God wasn't doing anything with his people, he wasn't speaking to them, wasn't giving any prophetic guidance or anything like that. And hence, it is this non-canonical blank as it were sitting between the Old and New Testaments.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

This period from about 516 BC to AD 70 is commonly called the Second Temple period, because Israel's First Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. And you can read about that in the book of 2 Kings in the Old Testament. And then it was rebuilt as a second temple from about 500 BC, right through to major renovations that were still going on in the time of Jesus in the 1st century AD. Before we go any further though, here is a quick rundown of what happened to the Jews toward the end of the Old Testament.

After King Solomon, he's the immediate successor to King David, the nation of Israel splits apart the 10 tribes in the north, take their own king, and the two tribes down south continue with the kings in the line of David. So the thing to know here is that each of the 12 tribes of Israel had their own defined land. It was a bit like the medieval county system in the UK. You've got Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, and so on. And basically, the superpower, Assyria, destroyed the 10 northern counties in the 720s BC.

And it's a bit like the way the Danes conquered Northern England, leaving only Wessex in the south standing. We really have to do that Vikings episode guys. Anyway, think of Judea down south as the Wessex of ancient Israel trying to stand firm. Now there's lots of speculation and mythology about what happened to those 10 Northern tribal groups. Some of them went to Afghanistan were told, some went to America, and so on. But the facts are actually pretty boring.

Basically, the Assyrians left most of the Jewish inhabitants there in the north, and then planted their own people there as well. The story isn't any more exciting than assimilation, but that's the North. Down south, there are still two tribes left, Judah, the southern most people, and Benjamin, just to the north of them. 130 or so years after the Assyrians, the Babylonians are ruling the world. And they do what Assyria wasn't able to do. They conquer Judah and Benjamin, and destroy the Jerusalem temple. That's the first temple in 586 BC.

We have excellent archaeological evidence of this destruction, by the way, so check out the show notes. But that's only a generation later. Then a new superpower emerges, the Persians. This is a weird part of the history. As far as conquering superpowers go, the Persians are actually pretty nice.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

John Dickson:

I want to talk about Persia and the south. So the Southerners, they get exiled to Babylon. And again, the elites, but also plenty, plenty of others in the early 500s. And then the Persians conquered the Babylonians. And for some reason, they say, oh, all you do is you can go back home if you like. Now, why on earth did the Persians had that policy? And did everyone, all the Jews just pack up and go back home?

George Athas:

The Persians came along and allowed them to return, basically, as part of a more widespread policy of benefaction, the Persians weren't a traditional superpower. These people were mountain dwellers, they were nomads for most of their history. It was only about a century, a century-and-a-half since they'd become a settled people with their own political entity. And they essentially conquered the world very, very quickly. But they didn't have a huge population. They couldn't colonize the rest of the empire that they'd inherited with their own people.

So they had to think about how they were going to manage these other people. They figured that it was better to get them on side rather than brutalize them. And this involved giving them a bit more cultural freedom, freedoms related to their land. And so, they were permitted to go back to their land. One of the things that we see in the biblical literature is you can get the impression that Cyrus gave them permission to return, Cyrus, the great Persian king, he gave them permission to return and then next year they were there. But actually, no, it took quite some time, probably about 13 to 15 years before they actually did return. And it was only a small number of them that did return.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

In the British Museum to this day, there's a beautiful inscription about all this, written on a clay cylinder. It's called the Cyrus Cylinder. You should Google it. It mentions how wonderful Cyrus is, of course, and part of that is the fact that he allowed certain subjugated peoples like the Jews to return to their homelands and restore their own temples. Here's Director Mark putting on his best Cyrus.

Mark Hadley:

I returned the images of the gods to the sacred centers on the other side of the Tigris, whose sanctuaries had been abandoned for a long time, and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings.

John Dickson:

Interestingly, many Jews chose to stay in Babylon. It was a nice place after all.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

By that stage, the Judeans had been living in Babylonia for probably three to four generations. And Babylon was now their home. They knew their links back to the land of Judah, but they'd lived and grown up and put down roots in Babylon. And that's the kind of thing you generally see with second, third, fourth generation. My parents came out from Greece, to Australia. They see Australia as their home, even though they very much have ties of affection to Greece, as to why. But I see myself predominantly as an Australian. And this is my home here. And so, Judeans were in the same position.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Yes, in fact, if you've heard of the Talmud, the book that Orthodox Jews see as the completed statement of sacred law, this was compiled by Jewish scholars in Babylon, about 1000 years after all of this, so about AD 500. Okay, getting back to our story, it's now roughly 500 BC. It's been 500 years since King David, and it'll be another 500 years until Jesus. So what happened after 500 BC? For the next 100 years or so, there's a bit of a tussle between the Persians to the east and the rising power of the Greeks in the west.

Israel, of course, if you're thinking of your world map, is stuck right in the middle. They're trying to mind their own business, trying to restore their former glory, hoping that one day they'll get their own promised king descended from David, the Messiah. They had their earlier prophets say stuff like this, where the righteousness, he, the future descendant of David, will judge the needy with justice. He will give decisions for the poor and the nations will rally to him. But before there's any sign of any such Jewish king, the ancient world will receive with amazement, the greatest king the world had yet seen. Enter Alexander the Great, who turns this tussle between Greece and Persia into a tornado. The world is about to get very Greek.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

So Alexander is, in fact, riding the wave. But he's so successful that he makes this change permanent, he cemented. And from his time onwards, the Jews are no longer looking to the east, towards Persia and Mesopotamia, they're now looking west, towards the Mediterranean and Greek culture. The Greek culture was quite a bit more free, if I can put it that way. It was less conservative than Jewish culture was, and they thought very differently. But mostly what they did was they took their traditional views, the threads of their traditional views and waded them on this new Greek loom. And therefore, they

renovated the thought structures that they had for their own culture, their own religion, and that produced a lot of theological momentum as well.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Obviously, if you were living in this time, the late 300s, early 200s BC, there's no way you would have thought of this period as silent. Jews in the Holy Land were grappling vigorously with Greek language and Greek philosophy. Remember, we're only a generation or two from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. And they also had to put up with Greek politics, which suddenly got very complicated in the aftermath of Alexander's victories and untimely death.

The Jews were sometimes pushed around by the northern part of Alexander's kingdom, basically, Lebanon and Syria, which was ruled by one of Alexander's great deputy generals, Seleucus. And at other times, they were pushed around by the southern bit of Alexander's kingdom, basically, Egypt, which was ruled by one of the other great deputy generals named Ptolemy.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Alexander died in 323 BC. And for about the next 20 or so years, there was, I guess, the equivalent of a world war. And there was tooing and froing. And the Jews themselves who actually control the land that the Jews were in changed, it was about 10 times in the late 4th century BC. But there was a definitive change in 301 BC, when one of Alexander's surviving generals, Ptolemy, he besieged Jerusalem and conquered it. And one of the things he seems to have done is, well, he killed a lot of people in this brutal siege.

But he also then deported a whole lot of the population that was in Jerusalem and some of the neighboring districts over to the new city of Alexandria. And this was the beginning of the Jewish community in Alexandria, which very quickly became the biggest Jewish community in the ancient world. It was the equivalent of an ancient New York. And the center of gravity in Judaism was no longer Jerusalem, it actually did shift. But one of the things that Ptolemy seems to have done is deported some of the Davidic descendants over to Alexandria.

And one of the primary pieces of evidence for this is the tomb of what seems to be a Davidic descendant who is mentioned in the genealogy of the Davidic descendants in 1 Chronicles 3. We've got his tomb, actually, in his tombstone, in Alexandria, and ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

We're going to hear a bit about this idea of a Davidic kingdom and Davidic descendants. God had promised the Jews that a Messiah is coming, a redeemer who will liberate the Jews and usher in a new era of peace. The promised king has to come from the line of David, descended from King David himself. So the survival of Davidic descendants is key to the promised Davidic kingdom. It's why you'll find so many genealogies in the Bible.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

And that is a massive shift for people who think that Judaism needs to be a Davidic kingdom. And especially if you're someone who thought that the prophetic traditions, the prophetic promises that God had made to his people that Israel was, not just the gathering of 12 tribes, but a kingdom ruled by Davidic king who had a special relationship with God himself. Then not to have a Davidic King meant that your nation was in some way impaired. And to have Davidic descendants, they cut it off to Alexandria. It was like the Babylonian conquest all over again.

It was a real kick in the guts. But what this did was, it gave power to the priests. The priests had been gaining a lot of power during this period anyway. But the priests themselves were never really civic power holders. They were cultic officials. They took care of what was going on in the temple. But with the rise of the great kingdoms, the priests themselves become politicians. They become the political leaders of Judaism. And they don't ever relinquish that from then on.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Priests had always been important in ancient Israel. They taught about what it meant to be God's holy people. And they conducted all of the temple ceremonies from the public singing and prayers, to the ritual sacrifices of animals. But now, in the 200s BC, they were in charge of religion and politics in Jerusalem. Their vision of Israel was not so much about a messianic kingdom ruled by a descendant of David. They just wanted a stable temple focused society. They got the temple focus, but the stability, not so much. They soon found themselves at war with the northern Greek kingdom, the Seleucid kingdom. I want you to take us to the crisis point in this Hellenistic period. I want you to take us to the great Maccabean Revolt.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

The revolt itself, the Maccabean Revolt, started in 167 BC. But there was obviously a big lead up to it. Revolts don't just happen overnight. By this particular stage in the 2nd century, the Jews were no longer under the Ptolemies of Egypt, they were now under the Seleucids of Syria. Initially, the Seleucids were really generous to the Jews, gave them tax concessions, fostered the growth, the economic growth of the region, and just gave them a whole lot of freedoms, which the Jews used to think new thoughts and do new things. Unfortunately, it doesn't last very long.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Before we get to the massive revolt that's about to happen, there's a Jewish writer from this period that I want to introduce you to. Ben Sira is a classic example of a Jewish intellectual around 200 BC, who's trying to negotiate with Greek culture. He embraces the Greek love of philosophy and wisdom, but he argues that the true philosophy the true wisdom is only found by knowing Israel's God. Here are the opening lines of his surviving work. Thanks, Producer Kaley.

Kaley Payne:

All wisdom is from the Lord, and with him it remains forever. There is but one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne, the Lord. It is he who created wisdom. He lavished her upon those who love him.

John Dickson:

This perhaps sounds overly pious, but it suddenly gets very practical. Here are some Ben Sira quotes I used to have stuck on our fridge until my darling Buff removed them, Producer Kaley.

Kaley Payne:

How ample a little is for a well-disciplined person. Healthy sleep depends on moderate eating.

John Dickson:

And I love his wisdom for banquets.

Kaley Payne:

A ruby seal in a setting of gold is a concert of music at a banquet of wine, speak you who are older, for it is your right, but with accurate knowledge, and do not interrupt the music.

John Dickson:

Excellent advice.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

So on the one hand, you've got the people like Ben Sira, who are happy with certain aspects of Greek culture and Greek thinking, but they still attached to their traditional Jewish values. And I think he probably represents the majority at that point. You've also got other people who are the arch conservatives, the fundamentalists who say, no, no, no, Greek culture is totally wrong. It's incompatible with Judaism. They want to be even more conservative. Then you've got, on the other hand, the arch progressives, those who are really enamored with Greek culture, Greek ideas, and they want to embrace everything Greek. And so, you've got these dynamics at work in the Jewish nation, which are really pulling them in opposite directions.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

And those dynamics combined with some international intrigue led to the revolt, I mentioned earlier, the famous Maccabean revolution. The story is very complicated, but it basically goes like this. The Seleucid Greek kingdom up in the north starts flexing its muscles a decade or so after Ben Sira. They even try to take on the new rising power over in the west, that's the Romans. We'll hear more about the Romans when we get to the 1st century BC. But for now, the point is that the Seleucids take on the Romans back here in the early 2nd century BC.

And the Romans beat them and then demand massive reparations that make the Seleucids think they have to tighten their grip politically and financially on all of their subjugated territories, and that includes the Jews in Israel. The Seleucid king at this time is Antiochus IV. He wants a disciplined unity in

his realm to bolster his chances of taking on the Romans. Antiochus gives himself the title Epiphanes, as in the appearance of a god, and others behind his back called him Epimanes, the madman. He was slightly mad, and it doesn't go well for the Jews.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Antiochus IV in 167 BC declares that the Jews are no longer an ethnos in his kingdom. Up to that point, the Jews could observe their own culture and religion separately to everyone else in the Seleucid kingdom. They had concessions to do this. But Antiochus removed those concessions. And what that meant was that the Jews now no longer had their own special status. They could no longer be holy. They were just like any other people. And the conservative Jews basically said, "This is an attack on who we are. We are a holy nation, a holy nation belonging to Yahweh, our God.

And if we don't have that holiness, we are no longer a people." And what Antiochus does is he basically rebadges the temple in Jerusalem, from being a temple to Yahweh, to being a temple to Zeus, the Most High God. And anyone can come in and worship in any way that they like. And one of the ways that the Jews now had to show their loyalty to Antiochus was to sacrifice a pig and worship him as a god.

John Dickson:

This is perhaps the greatest front, a catastrophe for a pious Jew in this period, yes?

George Athas:

This was the abomination of desolation, which we read about in Daniel. And ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Yes, there's a passage in the Old Testament book of Daniel, that most scholars see as a reference to Antiochus' sacrilege in the temple in 167 BC. Daniel 11 reads, his armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

And so, catastrophic was this event that occurred in December 167 BC, that conservative Jews left Jerusalem.

Here's how the 1st century Jewish historian Josephus put the events. Thanks, Director Mark.

Director Mark:

Now Antiochus was not satisfied either with his unexpected taking the city, or with its pillage, or with the great slaughter he had made there; but being overcome with his violent passions, he compelled the Jews to dissolve the laws of their country, and to keep their infants uncircumcised, and to sacrifice swine's flesh upon the altar; against which they all opposed themselves, and the most approved among them were put to death.

Bacchides also, who was sent to keep the fortresses, having these wicked commands, joined to his own natural barbarity, indulged all sorts of the extremest wickedness, and tormented the worthiest of the inhabitants, man by man, and threatened their city every day with open destruction, till at length he provoked the poor sufferers by the extremity of his wicked doings to avenge themselves.

George Athas:

People fled Jerusalem. They went into hiding. Jerusalem was basically left as a Gentile city largely. And amongst those conservative Jews who left were a group of priests, who ... There's one particular family known as the Hasmonean family, the head of the family is an old priest called Mattathias. He has five sons, and his five sons are very feisty. And it's his third son, Judas, who becomes the leader of a resistance movement against Antiochus and against the liberal Jews that are very happy with Antiochus' agenda.

And he gets together almost like an underground resistance movement that actually is surprisingly successful. And it becomes more than just a resistance movement, it becomes a fully-fledged militia, and then an amateur army against the Seleucids. And each of the five brothers have what seem to be code names, because they have to operate in surreptitious ways, and Judah gets the codename hammer. Judah is the hammer, and that gets transliterated from the Hebrew, it's Yehudah HaMakabi, Judas Maccabeus. And that's where we get the term Maccabean.

John Dickson:

And it's now a famous beer that you can buy in Israel.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

If you don't know much about Judaism, you've probably still heard of Hanukkah, the Jewish festival that roughly coincides with Christmas each year. This Maccabean Revolt we're talking about is the origin story.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Well, the Maccabees were ... They were successful, but they weren't completely successful. And they were facing actual extermination at a particular battle in November 164 BC. Antiochus was himself over in the east in what's today Iran, campaigning over there. And it was one of his generals that he left behind to deal with the Maccabees. And they were battling close to the town of Hebron. And it looked like the Seleucid forces were going to totally obliterate the Maccabean forces. But the Maccabean forces it had a do or die mentality. And so, they weren't about to give up.

They were ready to face battle come what may. When all of a sudden, out of the blue, the Seleucid forces pack up and leave. And the Maccabees survive. Now the reason that the Seleucids leave is because the general in charge of that campaign received word that Antiochus had died over in the east. And now there were questions about what was going to happen with the succession. And so, he immediately abandoned his campaign against the Maccabees, and went back to the Syrian Capitol in Antioch. The Maccabees thought this was a godsend. God had finally filled the tyrant.

And so, they marched on Jerusalem, took control of the temple, dismantled the altar that had swine flesh sacrificed on it. Built a new altar and rededicated the temple. And that rededication ceremony, the word rededication in Hebrew is Hanukkah from where we get the festival.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

That particular festival commemorates the rededication of the temple under Maccabean leadership. Well, now, within 150 years of Jesus, and by the way, here's a random detail. Jesus himself celebrated the Hanukkah Festival. In John Chapter 10, we read, then came the festival of dedication, Hanukkah, in Jerusalem. It was winter and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Spoiler alert, Jesus doesn't tell them plainly. They've got to wait until spring for the Passover festival for that. Anyway, the effects of all these events were still tangible for Jews living in Jesus day. For most of them. It was recent history. They viewed it a bit like the way Americans today look back on the War of Independence in the 1770s and 1780s. The time gap between the Maccabees and Jesus was even smaller than the American independence and today. And both events shaped their people for centuries.

The Maccabeans won independence for the Jewish people. Having being ruled by the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks in their various Ptolemaic and Seleucid incarnations, the Jews are finally free. They could almost taste what it meant to have a Jewish Kingdom. After the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, one of the Maccabean brothers, Simon, becomes high priest. He's across between a holy man and a king. And from 142 BC, there is something akin to a Jewish kingdom. Wo-hoo!

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Simon establishes this new dynasty. And remembering that these guys, the Hasmonean family are priests, they rule the Jews as a high priesthood. And the question is, is this the way Judaism should be? Because if you believe the prophetic traditions, Israel needs to be Davidic kingdom, run by a Davidic king who is an actual Davidic descendant, not run by a high priest. When you go back to biblical literature and you look at the books of Kings and the books of Chronicles, the priests are employees of the king. The priests are not in charge.

And so, the question arises, what do we do now that Simon the priest is running an independent Jewish nation? And there are various solutions to this. There are people who say, but in light of the prophetic traditions, Simon and this new priestly dynasty can't be the way Judaism is meant to be. By this stage, the Davidic family, they're no longer really celebrities. People still know them. They are there, but they haven't had power for centuries. And so, it really becomes a question of, well, is that realistic? Simon's very clever. He's very diplomatic.

And he says, "Well, look, how about we put a clause into the constitution that defines my powers, that I will rule as the high priest and my sons after me as well, until a prophet arises to tell us something different?" And everyone who believes prophetic traditions and believes God still talking to the Jews, still doing things through them, still intends to raise a Davidic descendant to rule Israel. They say, yes, we're happy with that clause. We're happy to back you as long as that clause is there.

Simon himself would never have agreed to include that sunset clause on his own powers, if he honestly believed that there would be a prophet to arise, who would one day bring down the curtain on his rule.

And so, Simon and his supporters, very quickly, developed the idea that prophecy has ceased. There will be no such prophet to arise. Initially, what the Hasmonean dynasty does is they have prophetic figures endorse them because ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Hey, just a reminder, that Hasmonea is the actual family name of the Maccabees clan. That's the Hasmonean Dynasty George is talking about.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

And then eventually, they just say, there's no more prophets. There's no more prophecy. We are it, we are the complete fulfillment of God's purposes for Israel. But of course, this produces tension because there are people who are still doggedly committed to the idea that God has not reneged on his promises to David. And even though it's unknown how on earth God would bring about the fulfillment of his promises to rule through a Davidic descendant, there are people in Judaism who still trust that he will.

And those hopes for a Davidic descendant to rule Israel become more apocalyptic. When you look at the political landscape, you cannot see how it is humanly possible for a Davidic descendants to arise and rule God's covenant people. But you still believe that God will do it somehow.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

The Hasmoneans ruled the Jews and Jerusalem for about a century. It brings us to within striking distance of Jesus. In fact, the next ruler of Jerusalem, immediately after the Hasmonean dynasty, is the guy we find lording it over the Jews when Jesus is born. His name is Herod, Herod the Great. He was great, and a jerk. Stick around to meet him after the break.

Hey, before the break, I thought you might want to know about the music we're listening to right now. It's by the Israeli group, the Yamma Ensemble.

They're really into songs in ancient Hebrew and the use of ancient instruments, including the shofar, that's the high pitched ram's horn you heard at the start of the track. It's not an instrument you hear much today, unless you happen to be in the synagogue for Jewish New Year or Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This particular song is an ancient Jewish prayer known as the Mimkomcha. That means from your place. It's about God appearing in the world through that Davidic kingdom George is talking about.

The lyric say, from your place, our King, may you appear and reign over us, for we are waiting for you, when will you reign in Zion, and so on. In the show notes for this episode, we've got links to the full captivating songs from the Yamma Ensemble, who kindly gave us a great deal to play these tracks on the show. Okay, now to that break.

SPONSOR BREAK: ZONDERVAN

Today's Undeception is brought to you by Zondervan's new book, Why Is There Suffering? by Bethany

Sollereeder. We're actually talking to Bethany for an episode later in the season, all about suffering and evil.

It's one that will really stretch your thinking. Bethany is trying to do something really different with this new book, in a way she's responding to criticism that efforts to provide adequate explanations for why God would allow suffering in the world are exploitative of the suffering of others and can, in fact, distract us from the task of alleviating that suffering. If we can justify why suffering exists, then it's okay that some people suffer.

Instead of telling you what to think when it comes to suffering and evil in the world, Bethany's written this sort of choose your own adventure style book. She lets the reader explore some of the theological and non-theological possibilities of suffering by making choices along the journey. At the end of each chapter, you get to choose which direction and therefore which chapter you read next. It's a journey of discovery, and it's fascinating. I can't wait to introduce you to Bethany Sollereeder on our show pretty soon.

In the meantime, check out her new book, *Why Is There Suffering?* It's available at Amazon. Or you can find out more by going to zondervan.com.

SPONSOR BREAK: ANGLICAN AID

John Dickson: Beautiful India is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. Rates of domestic violence in the country are soaring and violence against women is often seen as an appropriate action. It happens here as well. Anglican Aid supports a safe house in the city of Bangalore in India, offering refuge for women and children fleeing abuse.

The safe house offers crisis accommodation, counseling, medical care, legal aid, and skills training to help women get back on their feet. You can help support these women who dare to seek a better life. I am a big supporter of Anglican Aid's work. I trust them and urge you to go to anglicanaid.org.au. That's anglicanaid.org.au to support their wonderful work.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

We're exploring the events of the almost 500 years of supposed silence in the intertestamental period, the period between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

We've met the merciless Assyrians and Babylonians, the relatively enlightened Persians, the world conquering Greeks and their successes, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. And we've met the Jews who were crushed, exiled, repatriated, conquered, and then who fought back to win a stunning victory through Judas Maccabeus, the hammer, and his Hasmonean family of priest kings. They ruled an independent Jerusalem for the first time in nearly half a millennium. But now, things get tricky. It's 63 BC.

And those Westerners over the other side of the Mediterranean in Italy, have been winning victory upon victory against the Greeks in the East, Carthaginians in the south, that's the Punic Wars you might remember from ancient history. And soon, they'll take on Gaul or what we call France, and then Britain as well. In 63 BC, the Romans come knocking on Jerusalem's door.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

John Dickson:

So you've got the Hasmoneans who are doing their best to have a thoroughly Jewish Kingdom on their own terms. And then in 63 BC, the Romans come to town and say, mm, we'll have this. How did the Romans change things for the land into which Jesus would, a generation later, be born?

George Athas:

The Romans initially were friends of the Jews. So the Maccabees initially courted the Romans as friends and allies of some description, and the Hasmoneans got on with the Romans. But then, Rome entered into that period in the 1st century BC, which saw the transition from Old Republic to what would eventually become, I guess, what we call the Roman Empire, the Principate under Augustus, and Julius Caesar fits into that, and Pompey the great and all the upheaval that occurred in Rome at that time.

Because the Jews are interacting politically with the Romans who are dominating the Mediterranean at this point, you cannot be in the Mediterranean and not be influenced by the Romans. The Hasmoneans have to start picking sides as the Romans begin their civil wars, civil wars between Pompey and Julius Caesar, and then Octavian and Mark Antony. And eventually, what happens in 63 BCs, Pompey goes on a quest, and he conquers Jerusalem. And the Roman tax collectors were rapacious.

There was a massive redistribution of wealth, people lost their land because they couldn't pay their taxes. People were sold into slavery to try and pay off their debts. And all that kind of thing happened very quickly. And so, the Jews, although they had once seen the Romans as friends and allies, now saw them very quickly as oppressors, people who didn't have the best interests of the Jews at heart. And as they came in, those who still held to Davidic hopes saw Roman intervention as making it even more remote, the possibility that there would be a Davidic descendant who would rule the Jews. It becomes so unrealistic at this point. And it feels like another nail in the coffin.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

In the middle of all this, a Jewish convert, named Antipater, has been garnering political power, first, with the Hasmoneans, and now with the Romans. He's largely unknown today, outside certain nerdy circles. But he's a really important figure because the Romans trust him and elevate him in Jerusalem politics. So much so that he's able to marry off his son, the young Herod, soon to be Herod the Great to a Jewish princess from the renowned Hasmonean family. Everything is set for a new dynasty, the Herodian dynasty, a quasi-Jewish royal family, 200% loyal to Rome, but we're nowhere near a revived kingdom of David.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

And the Roman start to trust him to do what the Romans want within Judea. When Antipater dies, it's one of his sons, Herod, who ends up as the one that the Romans really, really trust. And he eventually is the one that the Romans install as king of the Jews.

John Dickson:

This is Herod the Great late into whose reign, Jesus is born. What was his impact on Jerusalem and Judea? I guess we have to talk about his renovations of the temple and what that meant for the Jewish people.

George Athas:

That was, I think, probably the biggest move that Herod made. As king of the Jews, he built a massive monument at David's tomb in Jerusalem, marble and columns and all sorts of things. So he also then rebuilds the temple on a massive scale. So massive that while the inner part of the temple took about 8 to 12 years to complete, the whole complex itself was still being built in Jesus' day 46 to 50 years later, and ironically, was only totally completed four years before the Jewish revolt, which led to its destruction. The platform that Herod built for the temple is so enormous, it's 35 football fields big. To this day, it is still the biggest manmade platform on earth. And he did this without any modern engineering. It is just absolutely stunning.

John Dickson:

Yes. And I think I'm not exaggerating saying that some of the foundation stones, which you can go and see to this day, were 500 tons.

George Athas:

Yeah. They were enormous, absolutely enormous. And ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Actually, I did get a bit overexcited there. The foundation stone I'm talking about, which you can go and visit for yourself, is a mere 300 tons. And we just don't know how they got them into position. There's still quite an engineering debate about it.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Absolutely. He rebuilds the temple as a way of establishing his dynasty and establishing his credentials as someone approved by God to rule the Jews. So Herod adopts that. And he basically takes on the persona of Solomon in rebuilding the temple, trying to draw all of Judaism together to worship at this temple, not just the Jews within the land of Judah itself, but drawing Jews from all over the diaspora. And we know that they came, Gentiles even came to see this magnificent temple.

And so, this was a massive challenge to those who believed in Davidic hopes, because he was someone who was doing something that was fairly similar to what they hoped a Davidic king would do. But it's Herod doing it, not a Davidic king. And Herod himself is actually only half Jewish. He's actually got Edomite or Edomite ancestry as well as Nabatean Arab ancestry. And so, there are issues about whether he even qualifies to lead the nation of the Jews. Plus, he himself he's quite a tyrant. His ethics aren't exactly a golden standard. And he's very quick to brutalize people that are in opposition to him. He purges the Jewish elite and puts in a new elite. He starts determining who the high priest is at will. And so, he's definitely the one who's calling the shots.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

And here we are at Jesus birth, which roughly coincides with King Herod's last days at the end of 5 BC and beginning of 4 BC. This Herod is the one who, according to the Gospel of Matthew, is concerned about the news of a descendant of King David recently born in Bethlehem. And he has all the male infants of the town killed. It sounds dramatic, but based on the tiny size of the town, it was probably only a handful of children. Still terrible, but it wasn't going to make the Jerusalem times. We have no extra biblical evidence for this particular event.

But we do have evidence that Herod did stuff like this all the time. He killed his own offspring when he thought they were a bit hungry for the throne. And in his final pain ridden days, we also know he pre-arranged to have some well-loved Jewish nobles killed on the day of his death. Why? He wanted Jerusalem to mourn the day of his death. He reasoned that even though the population wasn't going to lament him, he could still force them to weep and wail on the day of his passing. True story.

So loads of stuff happened between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. It is far from a silent period. It's no surprise then that, according to George, some important spiritual stuff was written during this so-called intertestamental period.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Well, some of literature ends up in Old Testament itself. Contrary to what people think about this so-called intertestamental period, there was biblical literature written during this time. We have, for example, the book of the 12 prophets. Now, when you open your English Bible to the contents page and you look towards the end of the Old Testament, you'll see 12 different prophets, 12 different books, they are actually one single book in the Hebrew canon. Someone ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

George is talking here about the books in our modern Bibles known as the Minor Prophets, open to the contents page and check out Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and so on.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

Someone compiled them together in probably the early 3rd century BC in order to say, God has not finished with his people. The words of past prophets have not expired. God has not reneged on those promises. Those promises haven't lapsed. And whoever was there compiled the book of the 12 felt that the prophetic word needed to be reissued for new audiences, so that they could keep their hopes alive, the prophetic hopes of having a Davidic descendant rule them, to keep those hopes alive. So there's the book of the 12 prophets.

Chronicles was finished off in this particular era, as was Ezra and Nehemiah. Ecclesiastes, I would argue, was written by a Davidic descendant. Unfortunately, we don't know his name, but written by Davidic descendant in the late 200s BC. And he's ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

George spins me out sometimes. The traditional view is that Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, the direct son of King David, way back in the 900 BC. George and plenty of other experts, actually, place it much later, as he says in the late 200s BC.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

That's the Greek period. And he's looking at the world and seeing all the folly and evil that's going on. And he can't figure out why God doesn't do something about this. And he despairs and hopes that God would do something, but he just can't see what could possibly be done. And it's a very pessimistic book. I would also argue that Song of Songs is written during the Maccabean revolt. It actually presents us with a parable of God's relationship with his people. And regardless of when you might date the book of Daniel, its center of gravity is also that period of the Maccabees.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Beyond the biblical books, there's a ton of other theological works being written at this time, and some of it has relevance to the rise of Christianity.

George Athas:

Yeah, there's a lot of literature that, I guess, we would classify it as apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature is basically the Jewish version of Platonic Greek philosophy. So that the Jews adapted platonic philosophy and they came up with this apocalyptic literature. So we've got books like 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, as well as a whole lot of other books that were spawned from that particular literature. The book of ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

1 Enoch, by the way, is actually quoted in the New Testament, in Jude 14, if you want to look that up. This isn't necessarily because Jude thought 1 Enoch was Old Testament scripture, it wasn't. But he did think it made an excellent theological point about the coming judgment of God. And so, it was worth citing with approval.

George Athas:

The book of Jubilees, which has been found amongst the Dead Sea scrolls, retellings of biblical stories, such as the Genesis Apocryphon. And then there's the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves, which seem to be in large measure, the products of the Essenes, who were kind of a priestly group with a very apocalyptic outlook on the world. And they had particularly strong views about how the temple should operate, and therefore how Jewish culture should operate.

They were interpreting biblical literature and looking at their own times and what was going on and trying to discern fulfilment of prophetic promises. And they're writing about this kind of stuff, as well as just copying out biblical texts as well. And so, there is a whole stack of literature that emerges in this time. We also have things like the book of 1 and 2 Maccabees, two separate books there. They're not two volumes at the one work. They are two completely separate books, but both are advocating for why the Hasmonean family, and that is the Maccabees, should be ruling Israel.

You have Ben Sira, for example, who's also writing his particular book, which is largely a wisdom bookie. It's advice on how you should live within Judaism, what's right and what's wrong. And there are other tales that get written as well. You've got things like the Book of Judith, the Book of Tobit, which are really interesting stories, but they each have a political agenda behind them as well.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

We're going to put a selection of these so-called intertestamental texts in the show notes, a little bit of history from the book of 1 Maccabees, some crazy apocalyptic from 1 Enoch, more of the excellent wisdom of Ben Sira, and a lovely passage from the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Cave 4 about the coming Messiah. These aren't biblical texts, of course, but they give us a real palpable sense of what Jews were hoping for in the period immediately before Jesus. Reading them is like putting on 1st century lenses. They're not nearly as important as the Old Testament texts.

George would make this point too, but they do tell us how the Old Testament promises were being interpreted in the time of Jesus. And so, they help us know something about the way Jesus and the apostles aimed their message in history context matters.

Here's some more music we were keen to play in this episode. It's Michael Levy playing a recreated biblical lire, the Kinnaur, it's called. We heard a bit of his music earlier in the show as well. The Kinnaur was an ancient Israelite stringed instrument, like a lire or harp.

And it's mentioned throughout the Psalms, of course, the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, but also in Josephus, the 1st century Jewish writer, and it's depicted on ancient Jewish coins. It's worth googling, Kinnaur on ancient coins. They're beautiful.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

George Athas:

So who should rule Israel? Should it be a king? Should it be a priest? Should a priest even be a king, is a question that gets raised? Do Samaritans belong in there? What do we do with the Gentiles? There were some Gentiles who really like our culture, really like our laws. How do we relate to them? Do we let them in? Do we shun all Gentiles? How do we relate to the land? What about all the Jews that are living outside the land? Because the land itself is really, really important within the law in the Torah. So, what about everyone who's living outside the land?

What about foreign regimes? What do we do with them? And do we have a messiah who's going to come and free us from foreign oppression and reinvigorate our nation and give us our independence? And if there is such a figure such a Messiah coming, what exactly is he going to be like? Is he a priest? Is he a Davidic descendant? Is he just anyone who can be a really great warrior, doesn't matter where he's from? All of those questions are impinging on the Jewish nation as we turn into the 1st century.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

And different groups respond to these issues in different ways. This really has to be held in mind here. In the century, immediately before Jesus, there were different kinds of Judaisms, Sadducees, Essenes, Pharisees, zealots. So I asked George to give us a rundown.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

John Dickson:

We're going to do a rapid fire, we're going to pretend this as a game, a rapid fire Q&A about the different factions or groups amongst the Israelites in this period, Sadducees, go.

George Athas:

Priestly group that prefer the law to profits and they're all about preserving the status quo, happy to engage with foreign empires, as long as they are the ones ruling Israel as priests.

John Dickson:

Not so happy with the Sadducees are the Essenes, tell us.

George Athas:

The Essenes were also a priestly group who think that they should be running Judaism, not the Sadducees. They don't really like foreign empires at all. But they also becomes pacifists who withdraw from society, because they are just fed up with society and can't see how on earth anything is going to change unless God himself moves into it. And in the meantime, they're just going to live their quiet monastic lives here on the side.

John Dickson:

And that's where we think of the Qumran community and the caves where these Dead Sea scrolls without. Excellent, the Essenes. The Pharisees, the Pharisees.

George Athas:

The hardline, rightwing fundamentalists who say that they deserve to determine what Jewish culture is like, and they are going to go even more conservative than the Bible itself. And so, they come up with this new Oral Law, which has a whole lot of new kinds of regulations, very legalistic, that they think is how Judaism should operate, that it's pleasing to God. But it's swinging people away from biblical ideals towards even more conservative ideals.

John Dickson:

And slightly later, the zealots.

George Athas:

These are the guys who will pick up a sword and kill anyone who's not Jewish in order to gain Jewish independence. Some of whom actually were, it seems, Davidic descendants from Galilee.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

These are the main factions of Judaism in the 1st century, to which we could also add the Jesus movement. It's easy to forget that for the first few decades of what we call Christianity, many Christians

saw themselves as just true Jews, the ones who had recognized Israel's Messiah. Modern Judaism, in all its forms, derives from the Pharisees. There's probably a whole episode in that. And modern Christianity in all its forms derives from that other rival Judaism of the first century started by Jesus. And then there's an institution that arose in this period. And it proved central to the success of both Pharisee Judaism and the Judaisms that followed and the Christian church. I'm talking about the synagogue.

George Athas:

The synagogues first seem to have arisen in Egypt among the Jews that were taken down to Egypt, and started living there. They were called prayer houses in Egypt. And they were places where Jews could come together and pray towards Jerusalem. So they continue to see Jerusalem as their religious heartland. And they came together. And not only did they pray towards Jerusalem at these prayer houses, but they were also places where Jews could just congregate together. It was a bit of a culture club as well. And it fostered this ongoing Jewish identity.

And so, it kept a very healthy Jewish identity alive that wasn't then diluted by the other cultures around them in the diaspora. In Palestine, the synagogues start to arise a little later than what they do in Egypt. In Egypt, our earliest evidence for a synagogue, I think, is about 275 BC. The synagogues in Palestine seem to have arisen in the 1st century BC, and it was largely the result of Pharisees who, in the early to mid-1st century BC, held a lot of political power.

And one of the ways that they wanted to control people and set the agenda was by creating these institutions, these teaching institutions, basically schools. And so, there was no set curriculum. It wasn't centralized in any way. But people who had a reputation for being able to teach and give authoritative opinion started schools. Initially, these were just teaching kids how to read the Torah. But then, some of those particular teachers got really big reputations, and they became the rabbis. And it's interesting that Jesus himself is called just such a person, a rabbi.

Unlike, I guess, the typical church building today, the synagogue really was a merging of a religious institution like what a church that we have today, and a school. And it's interesting that Jesus makes a habit of going to these places with his disciples, his students, and engages in debate with the Pharisees. So the Pharisees were the movers and shakers when it came to the synagogues in Palestine.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

The Pharisees weren't the only movers and shakers in the synagogues. Soon, Jesus and his disciples were also creating a stir in the synagogues. It's one of the key themes of the Gospels, just open it up and you'll see Jesus preaching in these Jewish prayer houses or school houses, and he's getting a wide hearing. And then we see in the decades after Jesus, as recorded in the Book of Acts in the New Testament, the apostles do heaps of their preaching in the synagogues.

And not just in Judea and Galilee where Jesus worked, but throughout Asia Minor, what we call Turkey, and in Macedonia and Greece, the original stomping ground of Alexander the Great. And pretty soon, they were making headway in the synagogues of the imperial capitol. We have pretty good evidence that Jews loyal to the Messiah, Jesus, were causing a stir in the Roman synagogues as early as the mid-40s AD. That's just 10 or so years after Jesus.

And George even reckons that Paul's letter to the Romans, one of the most important texts in the New Testament, was in part written to encourage the Christians of Rome, some of whom are Jews, others not, to stay in unity with the synagogues. The point of all of this is to know that Christianity didn't just pop out of nowhere with brand new ideas fallen from heaven. It is a rich part of the history of second

temple or intertestamental Judaism. Jesus himself didn't fall out of heaven. I mean, theologically, he did, but you know what I mean.

We can't say that the Old Testament closes around 500 BC. It's silent for the next half millennium. And then Jesus suddenly appears to fulfill all those ancient prophecies. No. Jesus was a real part of the giant stream of Jewish history and tradition that stretched back in continuity for centuries. Jesus was a climactic figure in this unbroken Jewish story.

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

John Dickson:

So tell me, in what ways Jesus' own mission and teaching were shaped by these events and texts and movements in the so-called intertestamental period?

George Athas:

When Jesus talks about himself fulfilling the Old Testament and then the apostles follow that up with what they write in the New Testament saying that same thing, they are not saying that there are these Nostradamus like predictions in the Old Testament that Jesus happens to fulfill in a kind of jaw dropping way. It's like, wow, that's pretty cool. That was predicted centuries beforehand. Rather, what they see as fulfillment is Jesus been the culmination of God's centuries long work with his covenant people, Israel.

And he'd sent prophets to keep guiding the nation and keep them on track to hit the goal, which was ultimately the arrival of Jesus. That's what they're seeing. And so, propose that there is this hiatus of four centuries, however long you want it to be, doesn't make sense of the New Testament and the way that Jesus sees the climax of the Israel story. I mean, imagine if you're reading a book and then all of a sudden, you rip out a few 100 pages, and then finally you get to the climax and you go, oh, I can see how that relates to what's going on in the first part of the book.

But you've missed so much, and you're going to perhaps not appreciate the climax as much. And so, that's really what knowing about this period, what happens, what gets written, how theology develops, why that's so important. The second thing I'd want to say is, it's important to understand how Jesus relate to the Hasmoneans. Because as I've said, the Hasmoneans established themselves as a kingdom of priests. And that kind of language is straight out of Exodus, out of an authoritative text in the Bible. And so, they portrayed themselves as the fulfillment of God's purposes. But then, what does that say about God's other promises to rebuild the nation under a Davidic king? So when Jesus comes along as a Davidic descendant, this is huge.

John Dickson:

I want to read a quotation from Jesus' sermon, one of them in the synagogue. And in Luke's gospel, it's presented as the paragon of what Jesus came to bring. So what I want to do is I want to read this for my listeners, this brief portion of what Jesus is saying. And then I want you to take us to that 1st century synagogue and hear what he says with the ears of a 1st century Jewish era, who knows all about this bridging period, who has hopes and hears Jesus say these words, what are they thinking?

Jesus took the scroll and read, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, since he anointed me to be herald to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release for the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, to let the

abused go free, to proclaim an amnesty of the Lord, the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, began by saying to them, today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

George Athas:

It's such a breathtaking scene, isn't it? If you were in that synagogue listening, you were someone who was on the end of centuries of uncertainty, centuries of disappointment, centuries of abuse, the Jews had gone from being subjects of one empire to subjects of another empire constantly. And even when Jews themselves gained independence, the dynasty that ended up ruling them abused them as well. And when the Romans came along, people were losing their livelihoods. They were losing everything. They were losing family members to wars.

They were losing family members to slavery. They were losing their land, sometimes to people who claimed to be the champions of Judaism, who claimed to be representative of God himself. You'd be hoping that God would somehow intervene, that God would enter history, that he would take on the enemies of his people, that he would put things right, that following God's law, doing what God wanted, believing God and putting your faith in the prophetic traditions would not be a means of oppression. That if somehow you believe that God would do something that you were on the receiving end of abuse. These people are suffering, and along comes a Davidic descendant and says, no more.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Something tells me you're going to want the show notes for this episode. So head to undeceptions.com and check out the growing library of resources about this and the 50 or so other topics we've covered on the show. And while you're there, send us a question. We love your questions. You can write to us straight from the homepage, or scroll down to the bottom of that page and send us a voice message. We hope to play your message and answer your question later in the season. And if you happen to accidentally click the donate button, we'll, go where the wind blows.

Next episode, War is a Horror. Can there really be any place for it in a civilized society? It was Christian intellectuals like Augustan and Thomas Aquinas who taught the West when and how a war should be conducted within the bounds of justice. But how well do the rules of just war hold up in today's world? Did they ever hold up? See you.

CREDITS

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