

To the Teacher

The information below is to help you in teaching the lesson. Do not read this page to the students. Instead, teach the information in your own words. Be sure to complete the student's lesson as well. Scripture references in parentheses are for further study, to round out the information given in the lesson. Be familiar with these passages as well, to provide additional Scriptures to your students.

Lesson 35 – Intertestamental History (Teacher's Lesson)

Study Notes:

This period in history is not documented in canonical Scripture, but is pivotal for understanding the background of the world of Jesus' day. If you are interested in some of the history of the Maccabean rebellion, the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees (found in some Catholic Bibles) are interesting reading. However, remember that these books are not considered canonical Scripture, and thus not authoritative.

****Special – The Canon of Scripture****

How did our Bible come about? The "canon" of Scripture is simply the accepted collection of inspired Scripture. It is best to understand this process, not as the ascribing of authority by the Church to certain Biblical writings, but rather the recognition by the Church of the inherent authority of God's divinely inspired written Word.

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| 1. Synagogue | A. Political party who believed in radical resistance. |
| 2. Greek | B. Center of Jewish sacrificial system, destroyed by the Babylonians, and again by the Romans. |
| 3. Pharisees | C. Place of worship, influenced early Christianity & Islam. |
| 4. Zealots | G. Religious group of the priestly upper-class. |
| 5. Temple | E. The "separated ones." |
| 6. High Priest | F. The language of the New Testament. |
| 7. Romans | D. Chief religious authority for Jews. Also exercised some political authority. |
| 8. Sadducees | H. Rulers of Jerusalem in Jesus' day. |

Application: This information is intended as a basic help in the study of the Bible. For more in-depth treatment of the history of the Bible, consult a good Bible handbook or historical atlas.

Lesson 35 – Intertestamental History

Where Did It Come From?

Does your family have any traditions that have been handed down by more than one generation?

Most students of the Bible are more familiar with the New Testament than the Old, but anyone who has read both has noticed some distinct differences. The language “feels” different, the culture is different, and there are some groups and institutions in place in the New Testament which just weren’t there in the Old Testament. Most of the events which shaped these differences took place between roughly 400 B.C. and 100 A.D. This period is known as the “Intertestamental Time.”

Language

In your Bible, the New Testament and Old Testament are written in the same language, but the original writings were not. In the time between the testaments, Alexander the Great conquered the land from Greece all the way to Persia, including the land of Palestine. Because of his policies, Greek became the common language of the land. The writing of the New Testament in Greek (as opposed to the Hebrew of the Old Testament) helped the Gospel to spread rapidly in the early days of Christianity. The influence of Greek culture also makes the New Testament more understandable to us, since Western society has also been influenced by Greek ideas.

Politics

In the New Testament, Jerusalem is under Roman domination, but the Romans had not been heard of in the Old Testament. The Roman Empire grew up during the intertestamental time, and they brought uniformity of culture throughout the known world. The reason that the Romans had such a strong presence is that Israel had always been uncooperative with conquerors. Several rebellions occurred during the intertestamental years, the most important one being the Maccabean rebellion.

Religion

The major effect of the Babylonian captivity was an extreme focus on studying, interpreting, and teaching the Law. This was further developed during the intertestamental years. The lack of the centralized Temple worship during the exile posed a major problem for religious Jews. Small groups grew up centered around study of the Scriptures. These eventually led to the development of the synagogue. Synagogue worship was centered around recitation of Scriptures, Psalms (probably sung), and a sermon. The synagogue strongly influenced, not only Judaism, but also early Christianity and Islam as well. The focus of the Pharisees on the keeping of the Law led to a rigid, but spiritually cold legalism in Jesus’ day, in which the strict letter of the law was kept, but the spirit was ignored.

Groups

Several groups exist in the New Testament which were not mentioned in the Old. These groups include the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots. These groups grew up in the intertestamental time. The priests existed in the Old Testament, but their role changed in during these years.

Pharisees – The Pharisees probably had their beginnings in a group called the *Hasidim*, meaning “separated ones.” The Pharisees were lay people (not priests), and were very concerned with strict observance of the Law. They developed a complex collection of interpretations and rules which were based upon the authority of teachers who had gone before them.

Sadducees – The Sadducees left no writings of their own, but from other sources, we can understand a bit of what they believed. They were closely tied in with the priesthood, and some may even have been priests themselves. They were more upper-class economically, and were very concerned about guarding their prosperity. They also had a stricter view of Scripture than the Pharisees. They saw only the first five books of Moses as Scripturally authoritative. This created many doctrinal differences between them and the Pharisees.

Zealots – The Zealots were a political party who were radically opposed to Roman occupation. They endorsed, and employed violent means to overthrow the government. It is likely that the disciple Simon, if not officially a member of this party, at least held to its philosophy. A sect of this party, called the “dagger men” carried a hidden dagger and had assigned persons to assassinate when the word was given by their superiors.

Priests & Chief Priests – Although the priesthood was existent in the Old Testament, some significant changes occurred during the intertestamental period. When there was no temple (it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.), one would think that the priesthood would decline, or even disappear. However, when the temple was rebuilt (by Zerubbabel between 520 and 515 B.C., and renovated and rebuilt by Herod in 20 B.C., with construction continuing into Jesus’ time), the priesthood came once more into power. During the intertestamental years, the high priesthood became not only a religious, but a political position. This led to a gradual moral decline of the priestly office. On more than one occasion, the high priesthood was bought with money and political promises. When Herod became king in A.D. 37, he used the high priesthood as a reward to political supporters. Finally, before the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D. 70, the high priest would often hire his own “protection force” to not only collect his tithes, but also those that belonged to ordinary priests.

Now, let's see what we've learned. Match the group or institution on the left with its description on the right.

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Putting It Together

All of these groups had a profound effect upon the world of Jesus' day. God used the historical events of the intertestamental time to prepare the way for what He was about to do in sending His Son, Jesus. In our next lesson, we will see how the history of the New Testament shapes our understanding of Scripture.

Scripture Memory:

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Proverbs 19:21