

Key Historical Stages and Rulers

1. Persian Period (539–332 BCE)

Theme: Return, rebuilding, restoration under Persian imperial policy.

Key Dates & Figures

- 722 BCE — Sargon II (Assyria) destroys Northern Kingdom (Israel).
- 586 BCE — Nebuchadnezzar II (Babylon) destroys Jerusalem and the First Temple, beginning exile.
- 539 BCE — Cyrus the Great (Persia) conquers Babylon and allows Jews to return.
- 520–516 BCE — Temple rebuilt under Darius I → Second Temple completed.
- 458 BCE — Ezra leads reforms.
- 445 BCE — Nehemiah rebuilds the walls under Artaxerxes I.
- 400s–300s BCE — Persian administration continues; Judea is a small province (Yehud).

Why it matters: This period defines Jewish identity post-exile—Torah, Temple, and community life.

2. Greek (Hellenistic) Period (332–167 BCE)

Theme: Hellenisation and rising cultural tension in Judea.

Key Dates & Figures

- 332 BCE — Alexander the Great conquers the Near East, including Judea.
- 323 BCE — Alexander dies. His empire divided among generals.
- 301–200 BCE — Judea ruled by Ptolemies (Egypt).
- 200–167 BCE — Judea ruled by Seleucids (Syria).

Oppressive Seleucid Rule

- 175–164 BCE — Antiochus IV Epiphanes intensifies enforced Hellenisation.
- 167 BCE — Antiochus IV desecrates the Temple → Abomination of Desolation → sparks revolt.

Why it matters: Greek cultural pressure sets the stage for Jewish resistance and identity reform.

3. Maccabean / Hasmonean Period (167–63 BCE)

Theme: Revolt → independence → expansion → internal conflict.

Key Dates & Figures

- 167–160 BCE — Maccabean Revolt under Mattathias and his sons.
 - 166–160 BCE — Judas Maccabaeus leads military campaigns.
- 164 BCE — Temple purified → Hanukkah.
- 160–142 BCE — Jonathan Apphus leads and gains political power.
- 142 BCE — Simon Thassi achieves independence → tribute removed.
- 140 BCE — Simon declared High Priest, Governor, and Leader.
- 134–104 BCE — John Hyrcanus I expands Judea.
- 104–76 BCE — Alexander Jannaeus (king) expands through conquest.
- 76–67 BCE — Salome Alexandra restores Pharisee influence.

Why it matters: For a century, Judea is an independent Jewish state with its own kings, priests, and foreign policy.

4. Roman Period (63 BCE–early 1st century CE)

Theme: Roman control, puppet kings, and rising messianic expectation.

Key Dates & Figures

- 63 BCE — Pompey the Great (Rome) conquers Jerusalem; Judea becomes a Roman client state.

- 37 BCE — Herod the Great (backed by Rome) becomes King of Judea.
- 20–10 BCE — Herod expands and glorifies the Second Temple.
- 4 BCE — Herod dies; kingdom divided among his sons (Archelaus, Antipas, Philip).
- 6 CE — Judea becomes a Roman province under direct rule.

Why it matters: This is the immediate historical background of the New Testament—Roman rule, Herodian politics, and messianic tension.

Summary

- Persian Period (539–332 BCE): Restoration under Persian rule, beginning with Cyrus's decree.
 - Greek Period (332–167 BCE): Hellenistic domination from Alexander to Antiochus IV.
 - Maccabean Period (167–63 BCE): Jewish revolt and a century of independent Hasmonean rule.
 - Roman Period (63 BCE–1st c. CE): Roman dominance beginning with Pompey, leading to Herod and the early New Testament context.
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