

The Blank Page In Your Bible

Midweek Teaching Series

Part 2 - The Rule of the Ptolemies

Intertestamental Period

The 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments is known as the Intertestamental Period. We can look back at these silent years and define them using the Greek word *pleroma*, which means the fullness of time. Paul uses this phrase in Galatians 4: 4-5 when he says,

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

So much of what we see unfolding in this intertestamental period was prophesied by Daniel. In Daniel chapter 8 we can see the events of the life of Alexander the Great and those who came after him foretold. There will be much more to come from the book of Daniel, but for part 2 we will focus on the prophecy told in verse 8 of chapter 8. There we read,

Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

As we saw in part 1 the four horns that come out of the broken horn are the four generals who succeeded Alexander the Great (Alexander being the great horn that was broken). The four generals are named Cassander, Ptolemy, Antigonus and Seleucus. The key players from this list are Ptolemy and Seleucus.

Key dates to add to the historical timeline:

445 BC	Walls of Jerusalem completed
430 BC	Biblical Silence
386 BC	Plato starts "The Academy" in Athens
356 BC	Birth of Alexander the Great
333 BC	End of Persian Empire
323 BC	Death of Alexander the Great
321 BC	Death of Alexander's successor (Perdiccas)
283 BC	Death of Ptolemy I (Soter)
246 BC	Death of Ptolemy II (Philadelphus)

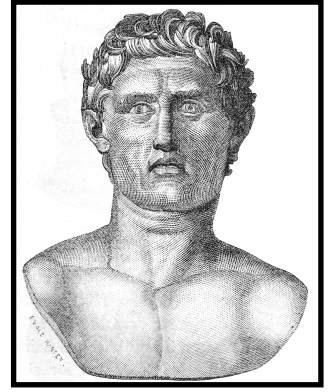
Map of the Greek Empire



Ptolemy I (Sorter)

Ruled: 323 BC – 283 BC

In late 322 or early 321 BC, Alexander's body was in Syria, on its way to Macedon, when it was captured by Ptolemy I. He brought Alexander's remains back to Egypt, interring them at Memphis, but they were later moved to Alexandria where a tomb was constructed for them. Alexander wished to be buried at the Temple of Zeus Ammon in the Siwa Oasis of ancient Libya. In burying the remains of Alexander in Egypt Ptolemy believed in a prophecy that stated Alexander's greatness would be continued wherever he was buried.



The remainder of the reign of Ptolemy I was about securing his power and position in Egypt. In 285 BC, Ptolemy made his son Ptolemy II his co-regent and Ptolemy died in December 283 BC aged 84 or 85.



Ptolemy II (Philadelphus)

Ruled: 283 BC – 246 BC

The second ruler of the Ptolemaic line provides us with the opportunity to explore the world of Hellenism in more depth. With his father having secured the Ptolemaic throne in the southern part of the Greek Empire, Ptolemy II could start establishing the society at the heart of his vision, which was closely linked to that of Alexander the Great.

The City -

Syncretism in Religion -

The Library -

The Septuagint -

'Koine' - the common for of Greek -

The Greek Model Advancing the Gospel

Read: Acts 28: 25-29

In these verses we read how Paul, at the end of his ministry, shows clearly that the gospel of Jesus Christ was for all people. The development of life throughout Biblical Palestine was the work of Ptolemy II. His development of cities, roads and a common language made it possible for the gospel to spread far and wide.

Application for Today

There is still much for us to learn from this period in history as we see God at work. The Decapolis was built so that Ptolemy II could ensure the security of his empire, but in the times of Jesus it would become the region that would respond to the good news of the gospel. In Matthew 4:25 we read,

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

No one could have imagined the impact the gospel would have on the Gentile world, yet they were the ones who responded to Jesus. Going back to Galatians 4: 4-5 we need to remember that these events in history are not by accident. Although Scripture is silent for 400 years, God was at work in human society so that everything would be in place for the melting pot into which Christ came and also for the spread of the gospel as the Greek empire would give way to the rule of Rome.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Galatians 4: 4-5

God is at work in every place and at every time. We may not always recognise it immediately, but he continues to rule and reign, and work all things in time so that his plan of salvation will flow from one generation to the next.



Questions

1. Looking back in history, how have you seen God at work even though it didn't seem so at the time?
2. What confidence can you take from this that God is at work in the here and now? How will this shape your prayers?
3. How can this be a message of hope to our own hearts and a reason for our hope that we can share with others?