



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 102 - It's Intermission - Scenery Change! (Period between the Old Testament and New Testament)

Much of the information we have about the time period between the Old and New Testaments is found in the books of 1st and 2nd Maccabees, which are in the Apocrypha and were part of Martin Luther's German Bible. In fact, Luther strongly recommended reading these books. The writings of Josephus also offer us much information.

When the curtain closed on the Old Testament, the Persians were ruling the world. They had permitted the Jews to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple and the city walls. By the time the curtain reopens on the New Testament the scenery has changed dramatically. The Persians are gone, and the mighty Roman Empire is ruling the world.

- How much has your world changed since you were young?
- How have those changes affected who you are?
- What big events in your life changed you the most?

Israel saw some tremendous changes during the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments. One of the biggest was the fall of the Persian Empire to Alexander the Great. Everywhere he went Alexander brought the culture and language of the Greeks.

- What advantage would the Christian missionaries and the New Testament writers receive from Alexander's spread of Greek, which resulted in it being the universal language throughout the Roman Empire?
- How has the Internet opened a door for us to share the Gospel throughout the world?

Some scholars hold that Alexander died from venereal disease, while others believe that alcoholism did him in. Perhaps it was a combination of both. In any case, Alexander's dissolute lifestyle led to an early death. His successors would battle between themselves, and Israel would be caught in the middle. But the most dangerous part of this struggle involved an attempt to overwhelm the Old Testament culture and religion with that of the Greeks. As the books of 1st and 2nd Maccabees make clear, some of the Jewish leadership welcomed it as well.

- What was so dangerous about the Jews abandoning their Old Testament heritage for the Greek culture that was filling the world?
- What pressures do our culture, the Internet and social media impose to overwhelm our Christian faith?

The Maccabees were sons of a Jewish priest named Mattathias, who rebelled against the Greeks and reestablished temple worship in Jerusalem. Also known as the Hasmoneans, the Maccabees ruled Judea and served as high priests until the Romans came under Pompey in 63 B.C. Pompey wasn't out to conquer the world but he did establish the Roman government over Palestine.

- How would you determine when it is time to suffer in silence for your faith and when it is time to stand up and boldly defend your Christian faith?

For the average Jew, the Roman Empire was seen most clearly in the face of governors like Herod or Pilate.

- From what you know of the New Testament, how much impact did rulers like Herod and Pilate have on the people of Judah and Galilee?
- How much impact do government officials have on your life and community?

In this place and time, under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus Christ would come forward to fight the world's most important battle—not against flesh and blood—but against our spiritual enemies. He alone could defeat Satan, sin, death and hell, and it was a battle He finished on the cross. And because Jesus won, He promises life eternal to all who believe and trust in Him.