

We will begin the 3rd lecture on “An Introduction to the New Testament.” /Today, we will learn about the background knowledge that is required for reading and studying the New Testament. /In the New Testament, especially the Gospels and Acts, we encounter people like the Pharisees and Sadducees.

/They are the names of Jewish sects that existed during Jesus’ time. /If we want a better understanding of the New Testament in its historical context, we have to study the characteristics of the different sects of Judaism that existed at the time.

/We need to know about these people because they are the ones who make up the Jewish background of the church. /We must also have knowledge about **the Roman background and the Greek background** if we want to understand the New Testament. /During the time, politically, Judea was colonized by Rome while it was culturally a part of Greek culture. Therefore, in order to understand the New Testament’s language, lifestyles, customs, politics, religion, philosophy, society, economy, and geography, we must know about the social background.

/However, Christianity’s **Jewish background** is far more important than these things. /As Doctor J.G. Machen says, the Roman background and Greek background share a relationship with Christianity’s surrounding environment, /but Judaism has a relationship with the very essence of Christianity.

/In other words, Christianity has its roots in the revelations of the Old Testament times, and Jesus, the gospel, and the church came from Jews. /Jesus’ ministry also happened, for the most part, in Judea, which makes it very important for us to understand the Jewish background of the New Testament.

/The Jews of the time lived under Roman colonialism. /They paid taxes to the Roman government, of which they were directly under the rule. /Luke 2:1 says, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.”

/Caesar Augustus was Roman emperor of the time. /Because Rome’s emperor issued an order, every person in the Roman Empire had to be registered, so Joseph had to return to Bethlehem, the place of his family register.

/In this way, Judea was under Roman rule during Jesus’ time and during the apostolic age, during which Roman governors were appointed to rule over the region of Judea. /The Persian Empire had also appointed governors.

/The people who led the Jews who returned from Babylonian exile had the title of governor. /Haggai 2:2 says that Zerubbabel was governor of Judah, /and Nehemiah 8:9 introduces Nehemiah as governor.

/As we are well aware, Pilate, the one who interrogated Jesus, was also governor. /Quirinius was governor of Syria when Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be

registered, /and Felix and Festus, those who interrogated Paul, were also governors of Judea.

/However, because Jewish society had more religious color than the other regions of the Roman Empire, /the Roman government took this into account and allowed a degree of religious freedom.

/And we have the Sanhedrin council, which was made up of the Jews' religious leaders. / The leader of the Sanhedrin council was the high priest, and the council members were priests, scholars of the law, scribes, and elders.

/The Sanhedrin usually dealt with Israel's religious problems, and it also had political and legal functions, but the governor of Judea had the final authority.

/That is why Caiaphas, the high priest who interrogated Jesus, did not sentence Jesus but sent him to Pilate's court. /**There were various sects in Judaism.**

/These sects formed about 400 years prior to Christ's coming, during the inter-testamental period. /In the 1st century AD, the Jewish historian Josephus said this about the various sects of Judaism.

/ "There are three major Jewish sects. /The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes."

/Most of the Jews living in Israel were not directly affiliated with these groups, as they were farmers, fishermen, merchants, and carpenters. /In spite of this, the religious, social, and political leaders of Jewish society were the minority group of people who belonged to the Pharisees and Sadducees.

/We will first learn about the **Pharisees**. /The Pharisees were one of the two largest sects in Judaism. /We think that people who opposed the Hellenistic policies that continued after Alexander's empire led the formation of this group.

/These people wanted to thoroughly keep the Jewish faith, the faith of their people. /They firmly believed that the scripture of their ancestors, the entire Old Testament, is the word of God.

/The priests, who were centered around the Jerusalem temple, played a key role for the Sadducees. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were centered around the synagogue, and scribes and scholars of the law played a key role for them.

/In an effort to interpret the law and keep it, the Pharisees devoted themselves to studying and teaching the law. /However, because of this tendency, the Pharisees were trapped within the lines of doctrine and formalities. /They went beyond what was required to commit the error of adding the genes of the scribes and elders to the law.

/The Pharisees did believe in the resurrection, the final judgment, the existence of angels and spirits, and they taught these things as they prayed, fasted, and gave tithes. In this way, they had a passion for the law and had some good doctrine. However, by adding to the law the genes of the elders, /they abandoned righteousness, steadfast love, and faith, which are more important than the law. They turned away from their nature.

/For these reasons, Jesus frequently and severely criticized the Pharisees. /It is a great sin to subtract from the word of God, but adding to the word is a greater sin.

/Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, saying, “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”

/We will learn about the second group, the **Sadducees**. /We think that the Hebrew word “saduqi” comes from the name Zadok, who was a priest of David’s time. /The Zadok family carried on its line of priests until the Maccabeus era.

/The leaders of the Sadducees were the priests, and it naturally followed that they were dispersed around Jerusalem and the temple. /Unfortunately, they came to accept the Hellenistic policies of the Seleucid dynasty, and in turn, they were given the position of high priest and also political power. They emerged as skilled people of Jewish society.

/That is why we often call the Sadducees “people of the high priest.” Acts 5:17 bears witness about this. / “But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy.”

/Because religion was a central part of Jewish society, the priests and their head, the high priest, who were in charge of offerings, which was the core practice of Judaism, naturally assumed political power. /The Sadducees of Jesus’ time were not only religious leaders, but they were also the wealthy nobility who had political power.

/The high priest, who was the chief of the Sadducees, was the head of the Sanhedrin council. /The Sanhedrin council was made up of 70 members, and including the high priest, who is the head, there were a total of 71 members.

/The Sadducees were the leaders of the Sanhedrin council, but in reality, in order to maintain their vested rights, they had to keep the Roman government in mind. /For this reason, most of the members made political calculations and came up with decisions after coming to an agreement with the Roman government.

/Because the members colluded with the authorities of the world, the Jewish public did not support the Sadducees. /Instead, they sympathized more with the Pharisees, who held the genes of their ancestors in high regard.

/The Pharisees criticized the Sadducees for being renegades, for being traitors to their ancestors. /Also, for your information, the Sadducees rejected predestination while they emphasized free will. They also did not believe in the doctrine of angels and resurrection.

/Third, we have the Essenes, who were another Jewish sect. /Their name isn't mentioned in the New Testament. /However, based on the accounts of 1st century Jewish philosopher Philo, Jewish historian Josephus, and Roman geographer Pliny, there were about 4,000 members of the Essenes.

/The Essenes lived very simply lives of abstinence and self-control. /In order to become an official member of this sect, a person would have to undergo three years of strict training.

/To become a member of the Essenes, one would have to give up all his possessions and live in the community. /Many Essenes lived in celibacy, and they also held internal purity in high regard. They prayed at the appointed time and continued to read and study the Old Testament. They lived lonely lives isolated from the world.

/The Essenes lived in cave-like places in the Western wilderness of Judea. /We can say that they had a soteriological and apocalyptic faith of waiting for the Messiah. /The Essenes originated in the middle of the 2nd century BC in the wilderness of Judea called Qumran.

/Fourth, **the Zealots**. /Josephus said the following. "In the 6th year AD, when Judea was colonized by Rome, Judas of Galilee, who led a revolt against the Romans and their census, founded this sect. The fourth Jewish sect was the Zealots."

/These people were called the Zealots. /They were opposed to paying taxes to Rome under the belief that doing so is betraying God, Israel's true king.

/They thought in the following way. / "In the past, the Maccabeus brothers used force to fight against and defeat the Seleucid kings to claim Jewish independence. If the Jews revolt against the current Roman rule, God will help us and free us from foreign domination."

/Though Judas and the people of Galilee failed in their revolt, and even though Judas was killed, his surviving family members carried on their patriotic desire for Jewish freedom and independence.

/As it is recorded in Acts 21:38, revolutionaries known as the Sicarii stirred up a revolt in the middle of the 1st century. /The word "sica" refers to assassins who carried daggers with them.

/These people concealed daggers in their clothing and walked through the crowds of festivals to stab and kill people who cooperated with Roman officials. /They heightened the tension in the Palestinian region in the 1st century.

/In the year 73 AD, the Sicarii met their end with the fall of the Masada fortress, but their spirit was carried on. /For your reference, one of Jesus' twelve disciples was "Simon the Zealot." He was member of the Zealots. Luke 6:15.

/Next we will study the Herodians. /The Herodians were not a specific sect or group, but they were people in Jewish society with a certain political perspective.

/The Herodians supported the royal family of Herod, and they also supported the Roman government that granted authority to the royal family. /These people were a minority. /However, for their political gains, the Herodians would allow the Pharisees and Sadducees to join them.

/In the Gospels, we find the Herodians working with the Pharisees to find fault in Jesus and conspire to kill him. /The Herodians appear in Mark 3:6; Mark 12:13; Matthew 22:16.

/Sixth, the Samaritans. /Samaria was the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament times. /However, when Israel fell to the Assyrian empire, the people of leadership were scattered across the different regions of the Assyrian empire.

/Assyrian officials and citizens came to live in Israel, which led to the Israelites intermarrying with the Assyrians. /This produced many Israelites of mixed-blood, and it caused their faith to go bad.

/When Nehemiah and the people of Judah were building the temple of Jerusalem after their return from Babylon, the Samaritans disturbed the building process. /For such historical and religious reasons, the Jews no longer acknowledged the Samaritans as people of the covenant.

/The Jews treated the Samaritans as Gentiles. Luke 17:18. /The Samaritans built their temple on Mount Gerizim, and in many ways, their faith was similar to that of the Jews.

/They believed in and worshiped the one and only God, they forbade idols, and they were faithful to the laws given through Moses. They believed they were the chosen people.

/In John 4, as Jesus passes through Samaria, he encounters a Samaritan woman in Sychar and converses with her. /Jesus also gave the command, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8.

/Lastly, as our seventh group we have the **Proselytes, those who joined the Jewish faith.** /In their blood, they are Gentiles, but the Proselytes are those who converted to Judaism because of their preference for Judaist teachings.

/The Bible refers to them as "God-fearers." /The Proselytes were drawn to Judaism's idea of the one and only God and Judaism's high level of morality. They came to live as

members of Jewish communities. Some Proselytes did not fully convert to Judaism, but they agreed with Judaist ideas.

/For example, Acts 10 introduces Cornelius, who was one of these people. /Proselytes did not form a particular sect within Judaism. /However, they confidently participated as members of the Jewish synagogue.

/They especially formed large groups in Jewish synagogues that were scattered all around the foreign lands. Acts 17:4.

/One thing we must remember is that during Jesus' time, the Jews were scattered all over the Roman Empire. /We refer to these scattered Jews as "diaspora."

/They did not live together in the Palestinian region but were scattered all around the world because after Judah fell to Babylon, many Jews were taken captive to Babylon. This began the diaspora.

/After their time in Babylon, they lived through the Persian, Greek, and Roman times. Some Jews did return to the Palestinian land, but many settled in foreign lands.

/We believe that many Jewish communities were created in Syria, Antioch, Alexandria of Egypt, and Rome. /Wherever the Jews went, they did not forget their national and religious identity. They continued to establish synagogues, teach the Old Testament Bible, and worship the Lord God.

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/Although they lived in foreign lands, the Jews regularly collected offerings for the Jerusalem temple. They oftentimes went to Jerusalem during the great feasts and participated in the feasts.

/In their regular lives, the Jews lived with the synagogues of their respective regions as their center.

/In this way, Jewish synagogues were built all over the Roman Empire, and later, when evangelists like the Apostle Paul preached the gospel, they preached it in these synagogues. These preachers were able to effectively bear witness about the fact that Jesus Christ fulfilled the gospel that was promised in the Old Testament.

/This concludes our 3rd lecture on "An Introduction to the Old Testament."