

CRS101

BACKGROUND TO CHRISTIANITY



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Course Code: CRS 101

Course Title: Background to Christianity

Course Units: 3 Units

Series 1: Intertestamental Period – History and Literature

Part 1.1: The Intertestamental Period

- 1.1.1 Meaning and scope of the Intertestamental Period
- 1.1.2 Historical background between the Old and New Testaments
- 1.1.3 Religious conditions of the period

Part 1.2: Political History of the Intertestamental Period

- 1.2.1 Persian rule and its influence
- 1.2.2 Greek (Hellenistic) rule and Hellenisation
- 1.2.3 Roman rule and its impact on Jewish life

Part 1.3: Jewish Sects and Religious Movements

- 1.3.1 The Pharisees
- 1.3.2 The Sadducees
- 1.3.3 The Essenes and other groups

Part 1.4: Intertestamental Literature

- 1.4.1 Apocryphal books
- 1.4.2 Pseudepigraphal writings
- 1.4.3 The Dead Sea Scrolls

Part 1.5: Messianic Expectations in the Intertestamental Period

- 1.5.1 Development of Messianic hope
- 1.5.2 Political and religious dimensions of Messianism
- 1.5.3 Preparation for the New Testament era



INTRODUCTION

The period between the Old and New Testaments is often described as silent, yet it was far from inactive. This Intertestamental era was marked by significant historical, political, and religious developments that shaped the environment into which Christianity was born.

Understanding this background is essential, as it provides you with the context needed to appreciate the foundations of Christian thought and practice. By exploring the history and literature of this period, you will be better equipped to see how Judaism and surrounding cultures influenced the emergence of Christianity.

The aim of this Series is to guide you through the historical and literary features of the Intertestamental period, enabling you to **analyse** its cultural, political, and religious contexts, and to **evaluate** how these developments prepared the ground for the birth of Jesus Christ and the rise of Christianity.

We shall begin by examining the historical background of the Intertestamental period. Next, we will move on to the political and cultural contexts shaped by Persian, Greek, and Roman influences. Following that, we will explore the literary contributions of the era, including the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and synagogue traditions. Afterwards, we will consider the religious and theological themes such as apocalyptic thought, angels, demons, and views on life after death. Finally, we will conclude with a study of Jewish Messianic expectations, showing how these hopes influenced early Christian beliefs and practices.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 1.1 Define the historical background of the Intertestamental period and explain its relevance to Christianity.

SLO 1.2 Analyse the political and cultural contexts shaped by Persian, Greek, and Roman influences.

SLO 1.3 Explain the major literary contributions of the Intertestamental period, including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

SLO 1.4 Evaluate religious and theological themes such as apocalyptic thought, angels, demons, and views on life after death.

SLO 1.5 Assess Jewish Messianic expectations during the Intertestamental period and their impact on early Christianity.

1.1 Historical Background of the Intertestamental Period

The Intertestamental period refers to the time between the close of the Old Testament writings and the beginning of the New Testament era. This period, often described as “silent” because no canonical scriptures were produced, was in fact filled with significant historical, cultural, and religious developments. These changes shaped the environment into which Jesus Christ was born and Christianity emerged.



1.1.1 From Old Testament to Intertestamental Period

The transition from the Old Testament to the Intertestamental period was marked by the end of prophetic voices such as Malachi and the anticipation of divine intervention. During this time, the Jewish people experienced foreign domination and longed for restoration. The absence of new prophetic writings did not mean inactivity, but rather a reshaping of Jewish identity under external influences.

Key Term: *Prophecy* refers to messages delivered by individuals believed to be inspired by God, often concerning guidance, warning, or future events.

Fill in the blank: The last prophetic voice before the Intertestamental period was _____.

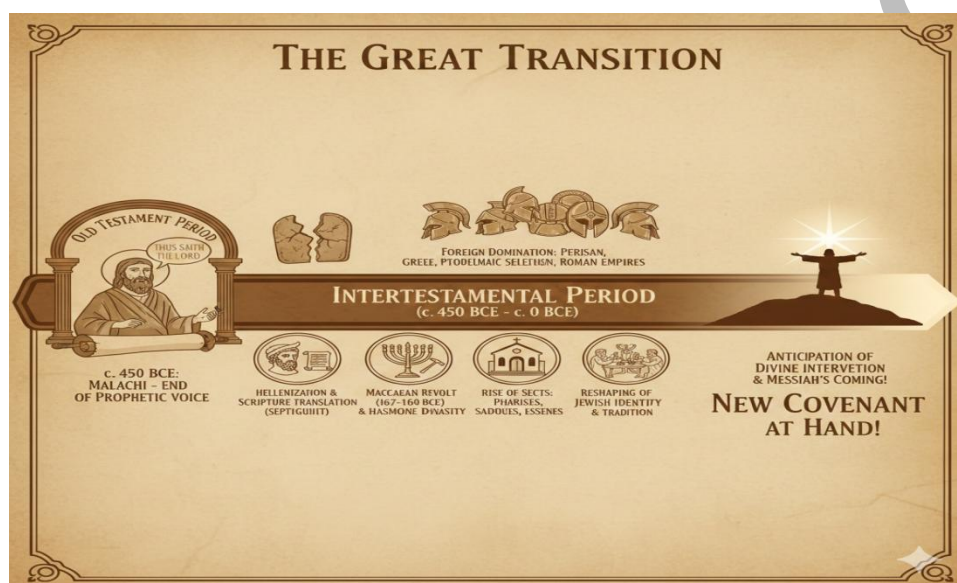


Figure 1.1 Timeline showing transition from Old Testament to Intertestamental period

1.1.2 Key Historical Events and Developments

The Intertestamental period was characterized by successive foreign powers ruling over the Jewish people.

- The **Persian Empire** allowed the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.
- The **Greek Empire**, under Alexander the Great, introduced *Hellenism*, which influenced language, philosophy, and daily life.
- The **Roman Empire** eventually established control, bringing political stability but also oppression through taxation and governance.

Key Term: Hellenism refers to the spread of Greek culture, language, and ideas across conquered territories, influencing local traditions and practices.

These events created a complex environment where Jewish traditions interacted with foreign cultures. As you study this, notice how such interactions shaped religious thought, worship practices, and expectations of divine deliverance.



Fill in the blank: The cultural influence introduced by Alexander the Great during the Intertestamental period is called _____.

Figure 1.2: Timeline showing Persian, Greek, and Roman rule over Judea



Plate 1.1 Artistic depiction of Alexander the Great's influence on Jewish culture

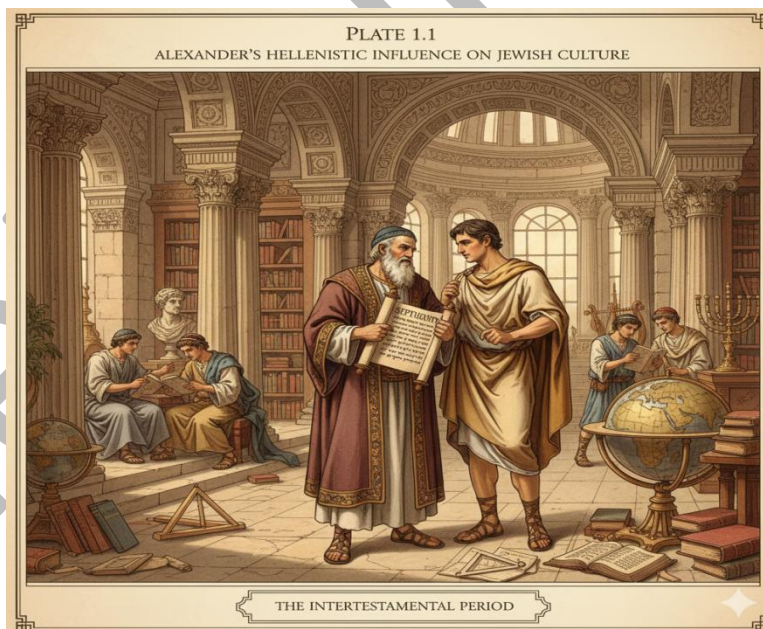


PLATE 1.1 ALEXANDER HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE ON JEWISH CULTURE

Pilot Questions 1.1

Linked to SLO 1.1 and SLO 1.2

1. The period between the Old and New Testaments is called the:



- A. Prophetic Age
- B. Intertestamental Period
- C. Apostolic Age
- D. Messianic Age

2. Which empire allowed the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple?

- A. Roman Empire
- B. Greek Empire
- C. Persian Empire
- D. Babylonian Empire

3. The spread of Greek culture and language during the Intertestamental period is known as:

- A. Judaism
- B. Prophecy
- C. Hellenism
- D. Apocalypticism

4. The absence of prophetic writings during the Intertestamental period meant:

- A. Complete silence and inactivity
- B. A reshaping of Jewish identity under foreign influence
- C. The end of Jewish religious practices
- D. The immediate rise of Christianity

5. Match the empire with its contribution:

- A. Persian Empire → Allowed Jews to rebuild the temple
- B. Greek Empire → Spread of Hellenistic culture
- C. Roman Empire → Political stability but oppression

1.2 Political and Cultural Contexts

The Intertestamental period was deeply influenced by successive empires, each leaving its mark on Jewish society. These political and cultural contexts shaped the religious environment into which Christianity was later born. By studying the Persian, Greek, and Roman influences, you will see how external powers affected Jewish traditions, worship, and expectations.

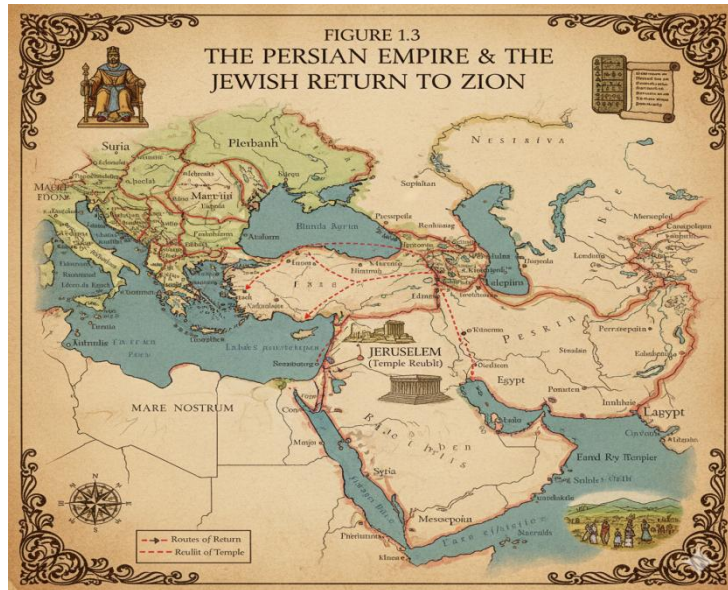
1.2.1 Persian Influence

The **Persian Empire** allowed the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This period reinforced the centrality of the **Torah**, defined as the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which became the foundation of Jewish law and teaching. Persian tolerance gave the Jewish people space to re-establish their religious identity, even though they remained under foreign rule.

Fill in the blank: The empire that permitted the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple was the _____.

Figure 1.3: Map showing the Persian Empire and the Jewish return from exile.





1.2.2 Greek Influence

The **Greek Empire**, under Alexander the Great, introduced **Hellenism**, defined as the spread of Greek culture, language, and philosophy across conquered territories. This influence was evident in education, architecture, and religious thought.

While some Jews embraced aspects of Hellenism, others resisted strongly, leading to divisions within Jewish society. As you reflect on this, notice how cultural exchange can enrich traditions but also create tension within communities.

Key Term: Hellenism refers to the spread of Greek culture, language, and philosophy across conquered territories, influencing local traditions and practices.

Fill in the blank: The spread of Greek culture and language during the Intertestamental period is called



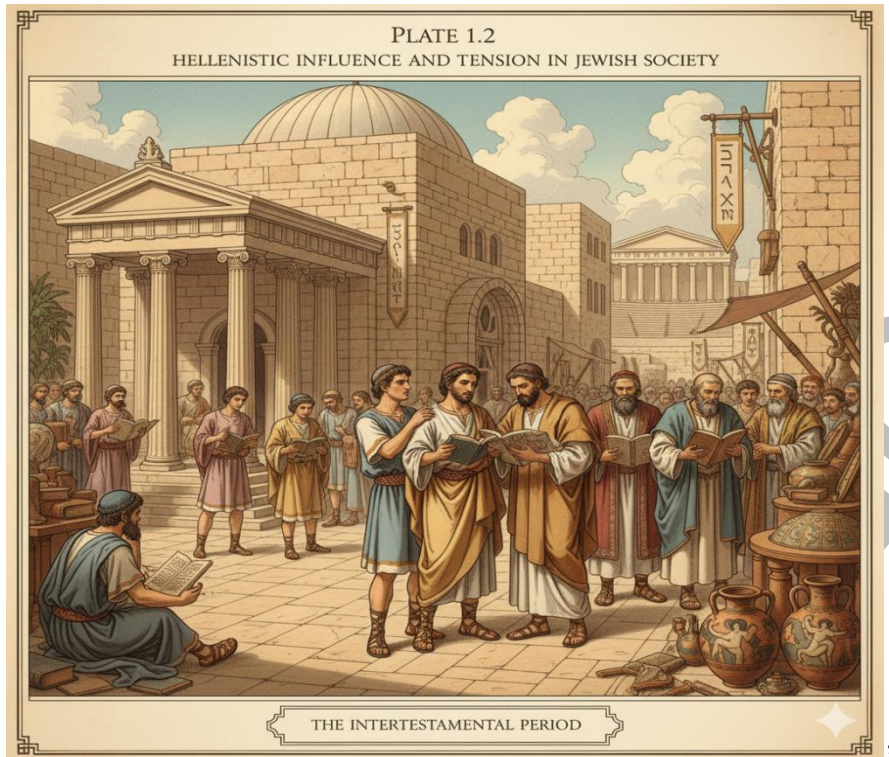


Plate 1.2 Artistic depiction of Hellenistic influence on Jewish society

1.2.3 Roman Influence

The **Roman Empire** eventually took control of Judea, bringing political stability but also heavy taxation and oppression. Roman governance introduced new administrative systems and infrastructure, such as **roads** and **aqueducts**, which facilitated communication and trade.

However, Roman rule also intensified Jewish longing for deliverance, contributing to heightened **Messianic expectations**, defined as the hope for a divinely appointed leader who would restore Israel and establish God's kingdom.

As you reflect on this, notice how Roman infrastructure improved daily life but also deepened resentment, shaping the religious environment into which Christianity was born.

Key Term: Messianic expectations refer to the hope for a divinely appointed leader who would restore Israel and fulfil God's promises.

Fill in the blank: The empire that introduced roads, aqueducts, and taxation during the Intertestamental period was the _____.



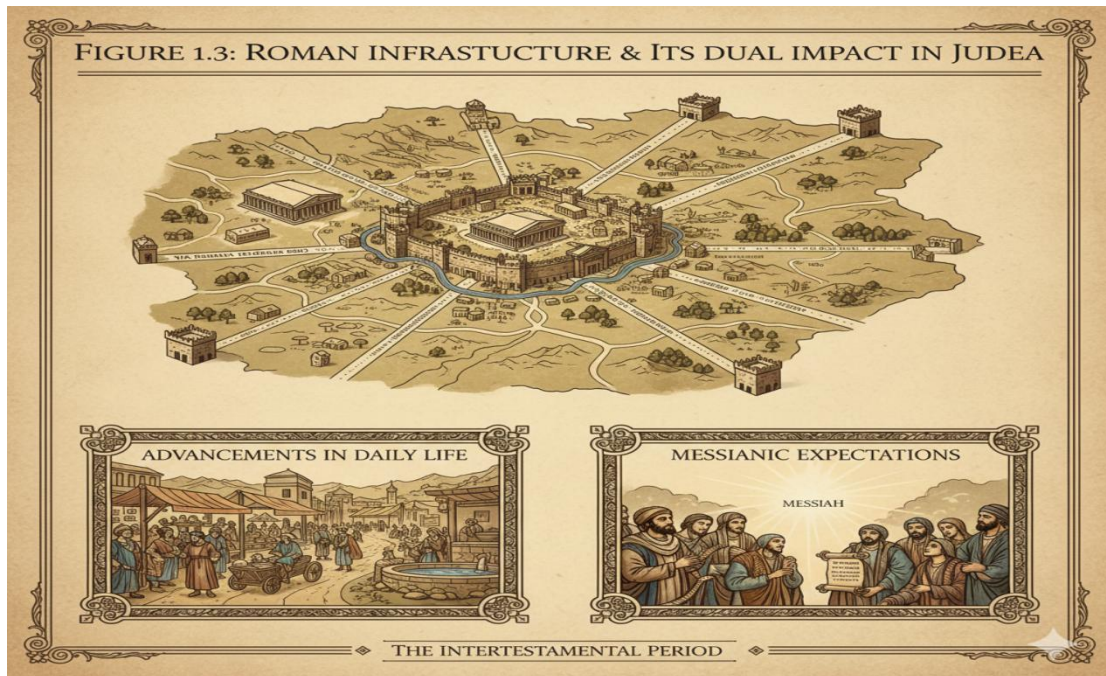


Figure 1.3 Diagram of Roman infrastructure such as roads and aqueducts in Judea

Pilot Questions 1.2

Linked to SLO 1.2

1. Which empire allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem?
 - A. Greek Empire
 - B. Roman Empire
 - C. Persian Empire
 - D. Babylonian Empire
2. The spread of Greek culture and philosophy across conquered territories is known as:
 - A. Judaism
 - B. Prophecy
 - C. Hellenism
 - D. Apocalypticism
3. Roman rule in Judea was characterised by:
 - A. Complete religious freedom
 - B. Heavy taxation and oppression
 - C. Abandonment of infrastructure
 - D. Withdrawal from political control
4. Match the empire with its contribution:



Persian Empire → Allowed Jews to rebuild the temple

Greek Empire → Spread Hellenistic culture

Roman Empire → Introduced taxation and infrastructure

5. The Jewish longing for a divinely appointed leader during Roman rule is referred to as:

- A. Prophecy
- B. Messianic expectations
- C. Torah traditions
- D. Apocrypha

1.3 Literary Contributions of the Intertestamental Period

The Intertestamental period produced a rich body of literature that shaped Jewish thought and laid foundations for early Christianity. These writings, though not part of the Hebrew Bible, reveal the religious, cultural, and social concerns of the time. They include the **Apocrypha**, the **Pseudepigrapha**, and traditions centred on the **synagogue** and the **Torah**.

1.3.1 Apocrypha

The **Apocrypha** refers to a collection of Jewish writings produced during the Intertestamental period that were included in some versions of the Old Testament but excluded from the Hebrew canon. These texts provide insight into Jewish history, wisdom, and religious practices. Books such as *Tobit*, *Judith*, and *Maccabees* highlight themes of faithfulness, resistance, and divine guidance.

Key Term: Apocrypha – Jewish writings included in some versions of the Old Testament but excluded from the Hebrew Bible.

Fill in the blank: The collection of Jewish writings included in some versions of the Old Testament but excluded from the Hebrew canon is called _____.



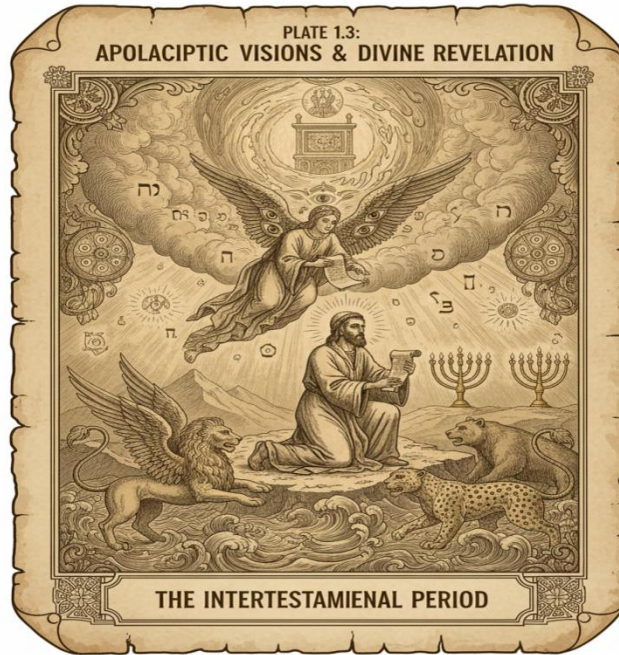


Plate 1.3 Artistic depiction of apocalyptic imagery from the Pseudepigrapha

1.3.3 Synagogue and Torah Traditions

The **synagogue** became a central institution during the Intertestamental period, serving as a place of worship, teaching, and community gathering. It provided a focal point for Jewish life, ensuring that faith and identity were preserved even under foreign rule.

The **Torah**, defined as the foundational law and teaching contained in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, was read and studied regularly. These traditions strengthened Jewish identity and ensured continuity of faith despite external domination.

As you reflect on this, notice how the synagogue and Torah practices gave the Jewish people resilience and unity, preparing the ground for the religious environment into which Christianity was later born.

Key Terms:

Synagogue – A central institution of Jewish worship, teaching, and community gathering.

Torah – The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, regarded as the foundation of Jewish law and teaching.

Fill in the blank: The central institution of Jewish worship and teaching during the Intertestamental period was the _____.



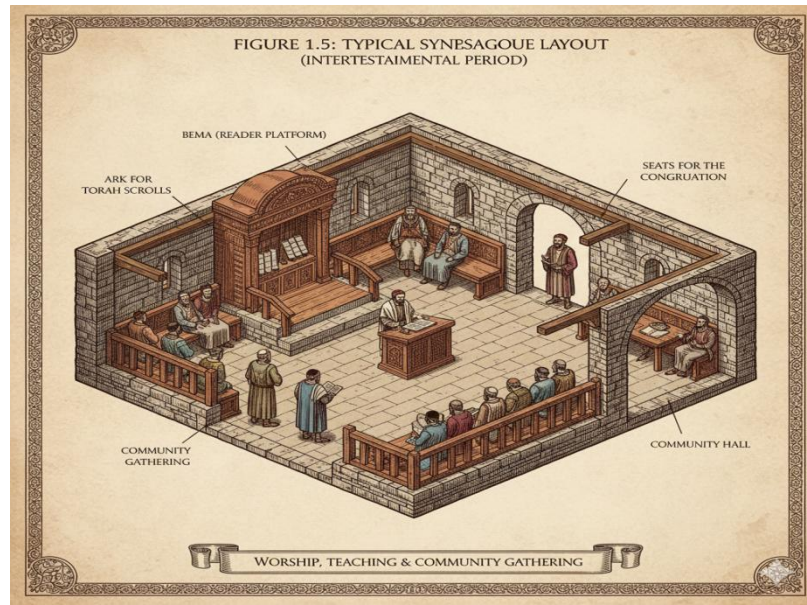


Figure 1.5 Diagram of a typical synagogue layout in the Intertestamental period

Pilot Questions 1.3

- The collection of Jewish writings excluded from the Hebrew canon but included in some Old Testament versions is called:
 - Torah
 - Apocrypha
 - Pseudepigrapha
 - Synagogue
- Jewish writings falsely attributed to ancient figures such as Enoch or Moses are known as:
 - Torah
 - Apocrypha
 - Pseudepigrapha
 - Synagogue
- Which institution became central to Jewish worship and teaching during the Intertestamental period?
 - Temple
 - Synagogue
 - Palace
 - Academy
- The Torah refers to:
 - The first five books of the Hebrew Bible
 - The Apocryphal writings
 - The Pseudepigrapha texts
 - The Roman law codes
- Match the literary contribution with its description:

Apocrypha → a. Jewish writings excluded from Hebrew canon but included in some Old Testament versions

Pseudepigrapha → b. Writings falsely attributed to ancient figures, often apocalyptic

Synagogue traditions → c. Institution for worship, teaching, and community gathering



1.4 Religious and Theological Themes

The Intertestamental period was not only marked by political and cultural changes but also by profound **religious and theological developments**. These themes reveal how Jewish communities interpreted their circumstances, expressed their faith, and prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

In this Part, we will explore three key areas:

Apocalyptic thought

Concepts of angels and demons

Views on life after death and the Kingdom of God

By studying these themes, you will see how Jewish beliefs evolved under foreign rule and how they shaped expectations for divine deliverance.

1.4.1 Apocalyptic Thought

Apocalyptic thought refers to a way of interpreting history and human experience through visions of divine intervention, cosmic battles, and the ultimate triumph of God. These writings often emerged during times of oppression, offering hope that God would soon act to deliver His people.

Books such as *Daniel* and later apocalyptic texts in the **Pseudepigrapha** emphasized themes of judgement, resurrection, and the establishment of God's kingdom. As you reflect on this, notice how apocalyptic visions gave oppressed communities courage and hope for the future.

Key Term: Apocalyptic thought – A type of literature that interprets history through visions of divine intervention, cosmic battles, and God's ultimate triumph.

Fill in the blank: The type of literature that interprets history through visions of divine intervention and cosmic battles is called _____.

Figure 1.10: Diagram illustrating apocalyptic themes such as divine judgement, resurrection, and cosmic conflict.



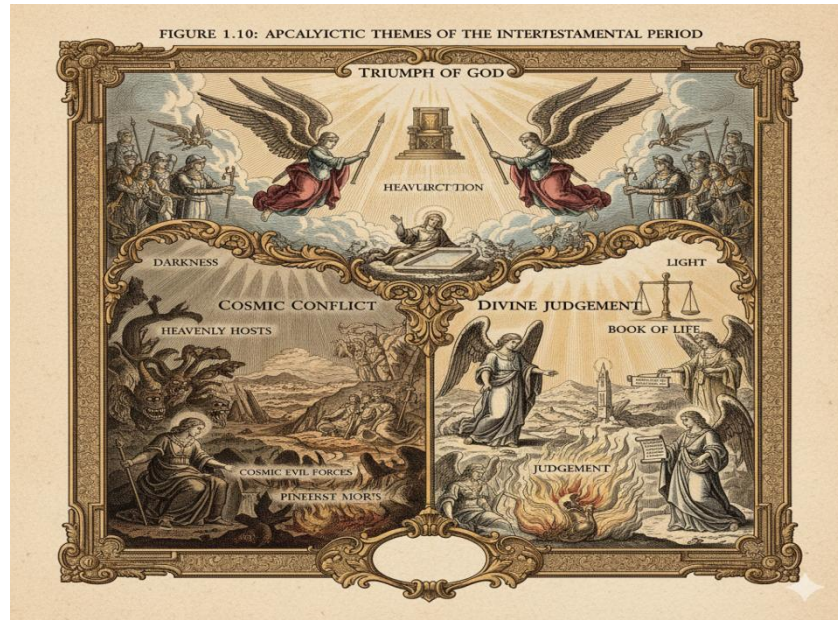


Figure 1.6 Diagram illustrating apocalyptic themes such as divine judgement and cosmic conflict

1.4.2 Concepts of Angels and Demons

During this period, Jewish thought developed more detailed ideas about **angels** and **demons**.

Angels were understood as spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God. They were often depicted as protectors and guides, offering reassurance that God was present and active in human affairs.

Demons were seen as spiritual beings associated with evil and opposition to God's purposes. They symbolized temptation, destruction, and the unseen forces that threatened human faithfulness.

These concepts reflected the growing belief in unseen powers influencing human life. As you reflect on this, notice how the idea of angels and demons shaped Jewish understanding of divine protection and spiritual conflict.

Key Terms:

Angels – Spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God, often seen as protectors and guides.

Demons – Spiritual beings associated with evil and opposition to God's purposes, symbolising temptation and destruction.

Fill in the blank: Spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God are called _____.

Figure 1.11: Artistic depiction of angels and demons in Jewish thought. **AI Prompt Suggestion:**



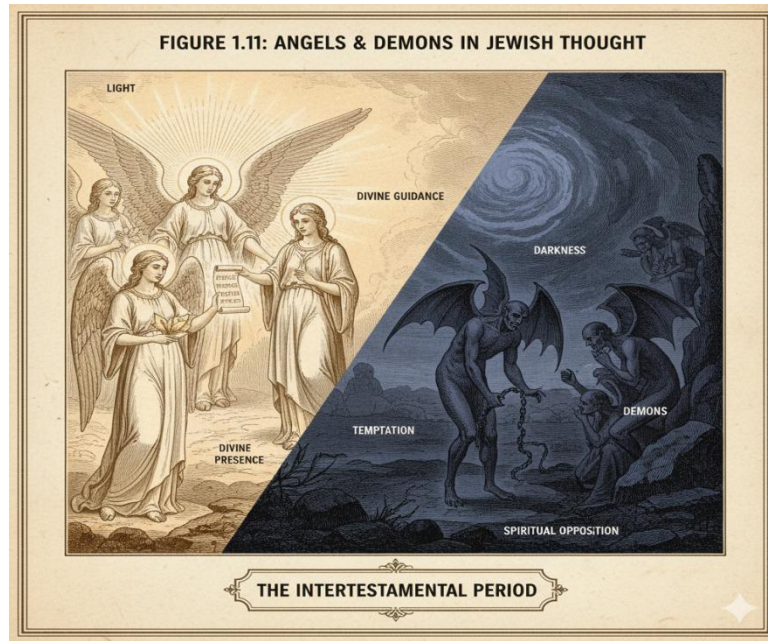


Plate 1.4 Artistic depiction of angels and demons in Jewish thought

1.4.3 Views on Life after Death and the Kingdom of God

The Intertestamental period saw increasing reflection on **life after death**, defined as the belief that human existence continues beyond physical death, often in the form of resurrection or judgement. This belief gave hope to oppressed communities, assuring them that God's justice would ultimately prevail.

Alongside this, the **Kingdom of God** was understood as the future reign of God over all creation, bringing justice, peace, and restoration. These ideas shaped expectations for the Messiah and prepared the way for early Christian teaching.

As you reflect on this, notice how these beliefs offered comfort and resilience, helping Jewish communities endure hardship while anticipating divine deliverance.

Key Terms:

Life after death – The belief that human existence continues beyond physical death, often expressed through resurrection or judgement.

Kingdom of God – The future reign of God over all creation, bringing justice, peace, and restoration.

Fill in the blank: The belief that human existence continues beyond physical death, often through resurrection or judgement, is called _____.





Figure 1.12: Diagram showing Jewish views on resurrection and the Kingdom of God.

Pilot Questions 1.4

1. The type of literature that interprets history through visions of divine intervention is called:
 - A. Apocrypha
 - B. Apocalyptic thought
 - C. Pseudepigrapha
 - D. Torah
2. Spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God are known as:
 - A. Prophets
 - B. Angels
 - C. Demons
 - D. Priests
2. Spiritual beings associated with evil and opposition to God's purposes are called:
 - A. Angels
 - B. Demons
 - C. Apostles
 - D. Judges
3. The belief that human existence continues beyond physical death is referred to as:
 - A. Resurrection
 - B. Prophecy
 - C. Torah traditions
 - D. Synagogue worship
4. The Kingdom of God was understood during the Intertestamental period as:
 - A. The reign of earthly kings
 - B. The future reign of God bringing justice and peace
 - C. The Roman Empire's political system



D. The rebuilding of the temple only

1.5 Messianic Expectations in the Intertestamental Period

One of the most significant themes of the Intertestamental period was the growing expectation of a **Messiah**, defined as a divinely appointed leader who would deliver Israel and establish God's kingdom. These hopes were shaped by centuries of foreign domination, religious reflection, and prophetic traditions.

Messianic expectations not only influenced Jewish life but also laid the foundation for the emergence of Christianity. As you study this, notice how these hopes gave oppressed communities resilience and inspired anticipation for God's intervention.

1.5.1 Jewish Messianic Hope

Jewish communities longed for a Messiah who would restore Israel's independence, rebuild the temple, and bring justice.

Some envisioned a **political leader** who would overthrow foreign powers.

Others anticipated a **spiritual figure** who would usher in divine peace and renewal.

These hopes were fueled by prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures and intensified under oppressive regimes such as the Romans.

Key Term: Messianic hope – The expectation of a future deliverer who would fulfil God's promises to Israel.

Fill in the blank: The expectation of a future deliverer who would restore Israel and fulfil God's promises is called _____.



Figure 1.13: Artistic depiction of Jewish Messianic hope during Roman rule. ”

1.5.2 Influence on Early Christianity

Early Christians interpreted **Jesus Christ** as the fulfilment of these Messianic expectations. While many Jews anticipated a political liberator, Christians proclaimed Jesus as the **spiritual Messiah** who inaugurated the Kingdom of God through his life, death, and resurrection.

This reinterpretation of Messianic hope became central to Christian theology and distinguished Christianity from other Jewish movements of the time. As you reflect on this, notice how the Christian understanding of Jesus reshaped Jewish expectations and laid the foundation for a new faith tradition.

Key Term: Messiah – A divinely appointed leader; in Christianity, Jesus is understood as the spiritual Messiah who fulfils Jewish hopes and establishes God’s kingdom.

Fill in the blank: Early Christians proclaimed Jesus as the _____ who fulfilled Jewish Messianic expectations.

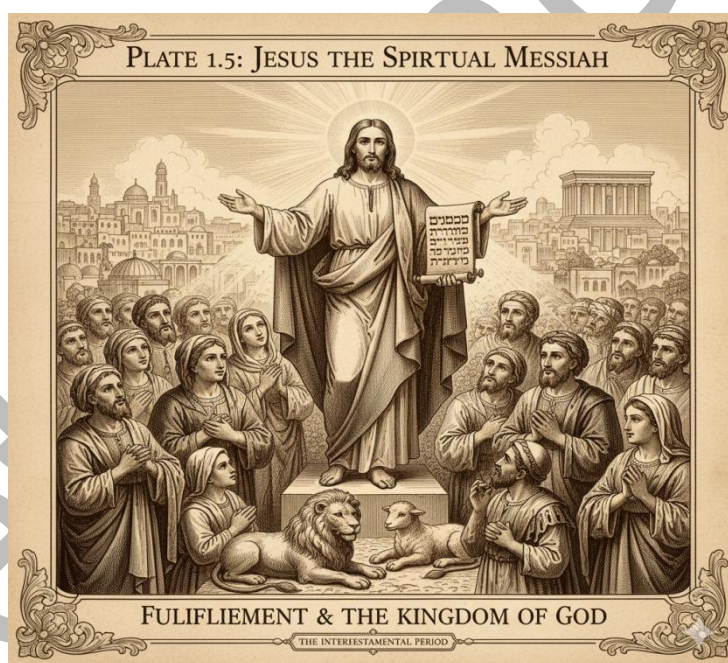


Plate 1.5 Artistic depiction of Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish Messianic hope

Pilot Questions 1.5

1. The expectation of a future deliverer who would restore Israel is called:
 - A. Prophecy
 - B. Messianic hope
 - C. Apocrypha
 - D. Synagogue tradition
2. Jewish Messianic expectations during the Intertestamental period were fuelled by:
 - A. Roman oppression and prophetic traditions



- B. Greek philosophy alone
 - C. Persian tolerance only
 - D. Complete independence of Israel
3. Early Christians proclaimed Jesus as:
- A. A political liberator only
 - B. The spiritual Messiah fulfilling God's promises
 - C. A Roman governor
 - D. A Greek philosopher
4. Which concept became central to Christian theology as a reinterpretation of Jewish Messianic hope?
- A. Torah law
 - B. Kingdom of God
 - C. Apocalyptic visions
 - D. Synagogue worship
1. Match the expectation with its interpretation:
- Jewish Messianic hope → a. Anticipation of a political or spiritual deliverer
 - Early Christianity → b. Proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah fulfilling God's promises

Summary of Series 1: Intertestamental Period: History and Literature

This Series has guided you through the historical and literary background of the Intertestamental period, highlighting its importance for understanding the world into which Jesus Christ was born and Christianity emerged. By exploring the political, cultural, religious, and theological developments of this era, you have gained insight into how Jewish identity was shaped under foreign rule and how expectations for divine deliverance grew stronger.

We began with the historical background, tracing the transition from the Old Testament to the Intertestamental period and the key events that defined it. We then examined the political and cultural contexts under Persian, Greek, and Roman influence, followed by the literary contributions of the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and synagogue traditions. Moving on, we considered religious and theological themes such as apocalyptic thought, angels and demons, and views on life after death. Finally, we explored Jewish Messianic expectations and their influence on early Christianity.

In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to:

Define the historical background (SLO 1.1).

Analyse the political and cultural influences (SLO 1.2).

Explain the literary contributions (SLO 1.3).

Evaluate the religious and theological themes (SLO 1.4).

Assess the Messianic expectations and their impact on early Christianity (SLO 1.5).

Glossary of Terms

Angels: Spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God, often seen as protectors and guides.

Apocalypse / Apocalyptic thought: A way of interpreting history through visions of divine intervention, cosmic battles, and the ultimate triumph of God, often written during times of oppression to give hope.

Apocrypha: A collection of Jewish writings from the Intertestamental period included in some versions of the Old Testament but excluded from the Hebrew Bible.



Demons: Spiritual beings associated with evil and opposition to God's purposes, symbolising temptation and destruction.

Hellenism: The spread of Greek culture, language, and philosophy across conquered territories, strongly influencing Jewish society during the Intertestamental period.

Kingdom of God: The future reign of God over all creation, bringing justice, peace, and restoration.

Messiah / Messianic hope: The expectation of a divinely appointed leader who would deliver Israel and establish God's kingdom.

Pseudepigrapha: Jewish writings falsely attributed to ancient figures such as Enoch or Moses, often containing apocalyptic visions and moral teachings.

Prophecy: Messages delivered by individuals believed to be inspired by God, often concerning guidance, warning, or future events.

Synagogue: A central institution of Jewish worship, teaching, and community gathering during the Intertestamental period.

Torah: The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, regarded as the foundation of Jewish law and teaching.

Life after death:

Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. Which empire allowed the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem?
 - A. Greek Empire
 - B. Roman Empire
 - C. Persian Empire
 - D. Babylonian Empire
2. The spread of Greek culture and philosophy across conquered territories is known as:
 - A. Judaism
 - B. Prophecy
 - C. Hellenism
 - D. Apocalypticism
3. Spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God are called:
 - A. Prophets
 - B. Angels
 - C. Demons
 - D. Priests
4. The collection of Jewish writings excluded from the Hebrew canon but included in some Old Testament versions is called:
 - A. Torah
 - B. Apocrypha
 - C. Pseudepigrapha
 - D. Synagogue
5. Early Christians proclaimed Jesus as:
 - A. A political liberator only
 - B. The spiritual Messiah fulfilling God's promises
 - C. A Roman governor
 - D. A Greek philosopher

Short-Answer Questions



6. Define prophecy and explain its role in the transition from the Old Testament to the Intertestamental period.
7. Describe the significance of the synagogue during the Intertestamental period.
8. Identify one major difference between the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha.
9. Explain how Roman infrastructure (such as roads and aqueducts) influenced Jewish society during the Intertestamental period.
10. Summarize the Jewish understanding of life after death during the Intertestamental period.

Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyse the impact of Hellenism on Jewish society, highlighting both positive and negative influences.
12. Evaluate the role of apocalyptic thought in sustaining Jewish hope during times of oppression.
13. Assess how Messianic expectations shaped the religious environment and prepared the way for early Christianity.
14. Discuss the literary contributions of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, explaining how they reflect the concerns of Jewish communities.
15. Examine the theological significance of the Kingdom of God as understood in the Intertestamental period and its reinterpretation in early Christianity.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. c. Persian Empire
2. c. Hellenism
3. b. Angels
4. b. Apocrypha
5. b. The spiritual Messiah fulfilling God's promises

Short-Answer Questions

6. Prophecy refers to messages delivered by individuals inspired by God, guiding or warning His people. It marked the close of the Old Testament and set the stage for the Intertestamental period.
7. The synagogue was the central institution for worship, teaching, and community gathering, ensuring continuity of Jewish faith under foreign rule.
8. The Apocrypha were included in some Old Testament versions but excluded from the Hebrew canon, while the Pseudepigrapha were writings falsely attributed to ancient figures.
9. Roman infrastructure improved communication and trade but also reinforced foreign control and taxation, intensifying Jewish resentment.
10. Life after death was increasingly understood as resurrection or judgement, offering hope of divine justice.

Long-Answer Questions

11. Hellenism introduced Greek language, culture, and philosophy, enriching education and architecture but also creating divisions among Jews who resisted assimilation.
12. Apocalyptic thought sustained hope by portraying God's ultimate victory over oppression, encouraging perseverance in faith.
13. Messianic expectations created anticipation for deliverance, which early Christians interpreted as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.



14. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha reflect Jewish struggles with identity, suffering, and divine justice, offering wisdom, history, and apocalyptic visions.

15. The Kingdom of God was seen as God's future reign of justice and peace; early Christians reinterpreted it as inaugurated through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Concept Check Questions

Objective Questions

1. Which empire allowed the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem?
 - A. Greek Empire
 - B. Roman Empire
 - C. Persian Empire
 - D. Babylonian Empire
2. The spread of Greek culture and philosophy across conquered territories is known as:
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 - B. Prophecy
 - C. Hellenism
 - D. Apocalypticism
3. Spiritual beings who serve as messengers and agents of God are called:
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 - B. Angels
 - C. Demons
 - D. Priests
4. The collection of Jewish writings excluded from the Hebrew canon but included in some Old Testament versions is called:
 - A. Torah
 - B. Apocrypha
 - C. Pseudepigrapha
 - D. Synagogue
5. Early Christians proclaimed Jesus as:
 - A. A political liberator only
 - B. The spiritual Messiah fulfilling God's promises
 - C. A Roman governor
 - D. A Greek philosopher

Short-Answer Questions

6. Define prophecy and explain its role in the transition from the Old Testament to the Intertestamental period.
7. Describe the significance of the synagogue during the Intertestamental period.
8. Identify one major difference between the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha.
9. Explain how Roman infrastructure (such as roads and aqueducts) influenced Jewish society during the Intertestamental period.
10. Summarize the Jewish understanding of life after death during the Intertestamental period.



Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyze the impact of Hellenism on Jewish society, highlighting both positive and negative influences.
12. Evaluate the role of apocalyptic thought in sustaining Jewish hope during times of oppression.
13. Assess how Messianic expectations shaped the religious environment and prepared the way for early Christianity.
14. Discuss the literary contributions of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, explaining how they reflect the concerns of Jewish communities.
15. Examine the theological significance of the Kingdom of God as understood in the Intertestamental period and its reinterpretation in early Christianity.

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

- D. Persian Empire
- C. Hellenism
- B. Angels
- B. Apocrypha
- B. The spiritual Messiah fulfilling God's promises

Short-Answer Questions

Prophecy refers to messages delivered by individuals inspired by God, guiding or warning His people. It marked the close of the Old Testament and set the stage for the Intertestamental period.

The synagogue was the central institution for worship, teaching, and community gathering, ensuring continuity of Jewish faith under foreign rule.

The Apocrypha were included in some Old Testament versions but excluded from the Hebrew canon, while the Pseudepigrapha were writings falsely attributed to ancient figures.

Roman infrastructure improved communication and trade but also reinforced foreign control and taxation, intensifying Jewish resentment.

Life after death was increasingly understood as resurrection or judgement, offering hope of divine justice.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response: Hellenism introduced Greek language, culture, and philosophy, enriching education and architecture but also creating divisions among Jews who resisted assimilation. **Value-added response:** Beyond the Series, Hellenism also influenced the spread of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), which later became crucial for early Christians in communicating scripture across the Greco-Roman world.

Basic response: Apocalyptic thought sustained hope by portraying God's ultimate victory over oppression, encouraging perseverance in faith. **Value-added response:** Outstanding learners may note that apocalyptic themes later influenced New Testament writings such as *Revelation*, showing continuity between Jewish and Christian traditions.



Basic response: Messianic expectations created anticipation for deliverance, which early Christians interpreted as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. **Value-added response:** Advanced learners may highlight those differing expectations (political vs spiritual Messiah) explain why some Jews accepted Jesus while others did not, shaping early Christian-Jewish relations.

Basic response: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha reflect Jewish struggles with identity, suffering, and divine justice, offering wisdom, history, and apocalyptic visions. **Value-added response:** Learners may add that these writings influenced later Christian thought, with themes such as resurrection and angelology appearing in New Testament texts.

Basic response: The Kingdom of God was seen as God's future reign of justice and peace; early Christians reinterpreted it as inaugurated through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. **Value-added response:** Outstanding learners may connect this to broader theological debates in Christianity about whether the Kingdom is present now or fully realized in the future.

References and Attributions

Figures and Plates

- *Figure 1.1 Timeline showing transition from Old Testament to Intertestamental period.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Create a timeline diagram showing the transition from Old Testament prophets to the Intertestamental period" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Plate 1.1 Artistic depiction of Alexander the Great's influence on Jewish culture.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Generate an artistic illustration of Alexander the Great spreading Hellenistic culture in the Near East" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Figure 1.2 Map showing Persian Empire and Jewish return from exile.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Generate a labelled map of the Persian Empire highlighting Jerusalem and the Jewish return from exile" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Plate 1.2 Artistic depiction of Hellenistic influence on Jewish society.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Create an artistic illustration showing Hellenistic influence on Jewish education and architecture" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Figure 1.3 Diagram of Roman infrastructure such as roads and aqueducts in Judea.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Generate a labelled diagram of Roman roads and aqueducts in Judea during the Intertestamental period" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Figure 1.4 Timeline of Apocryphal writings in the Intertestamental period.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Create a timeline diagram showing major Apocryphal writings such as Tobit, Judith, and Maccabees" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Plate 1.3 Artistic depiction of apocalyptic imagery from the Pseudepigrapha.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Generate an artistic illustration of apocalyptic imagery from Jewish Pseudepigrapha writings" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Figure 1.5 Diagram of a typical synagogue layout in the Intertestamental period.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Generate a labelled diagram of a synagogue layout during the Intertestamental period" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- *Figure 1.6 Diagram illustrating apocalyptic themes such as divine judgement and cosmic conflict.*

AI-generated using prompt: "Generate a diagram showing apocalyptic themes including divine judgement, resurrection, and cosmic battles" (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).



- Plate 1.4 Artistic depiction of angels and demons in Jewish thought.

AI-generated using prompt: “Create an artistic illustration showing angels as messengers of God and demons as forces of evil” (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- Figure 1.7 Diagram showing Jewish views on resurrection and the Kingdom of God.

AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram illustrating Jewish beliefs about resurrection and the Kingdom of God” (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- Figure 1.8 Diagram showing different Jewish views of the Messiah (political vs spiritual).

AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram comparing Jewish expectations of the Messiah as political leader vs spiritual deliverer” (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

- Plate 1.5 Artistic depiction of Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish Messianic hope.

AI-generated using prompt: “Create an artistic illustration showing Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of Jewish Messianic expectations” (Microsoft Copilot graphic tool).

Open Educational Resources (OER) Search Strings Suggested

- “Intertestamental period timeline diagram OER”
- “Persian Empire map Jewish return OER”
- “Hellenism Jewish culture OER image”
- “Roman infrastructure Judea OER diagram”
- “Apocrypha timeline OER diagram”
- “Jewish Pseudepigrapha apocalyptic imagery OER image”
- “Intertestamental synagogue layout OER diagram”
- “Apocalyptic literature themes diagram OER”
- “Jewish angels and demons OER image”
- “Jewish resurrection Kingdom of God diagram OER”
- “Jewish Messianic expectations diagram OER”
- “Jesus Messiah fulfilment Jewish hope OER”

Course Code: CRS 101

Course Title: Background to Christianity

Course Units: 3 Units

Series 2: Jewish Background and Cultural Foundations of Christianity

2.1 Jewish Religious Institutions and Practices

2.1.1 The Temple and its significance (SLO 2.1)

2.1.2 The Synagogue as a centre of worship and teaching (SLO 2.1)

2.1.3 Festivals and rituals in Jewish life (SLO 2.1)

2.2 Jewish Scriptures and Traditions

2.2.1 The Torah and its role in daily life (SLO 2.2)

2.2.2 Oral traditions and rabbinic teaching (SLO 2.2)

2.2.3 Influence of the Septuagint (Greek translation of Hebrew Scriptures) (SLO 2.2)



2.3 Jewish Sects and Movements

2.3.1 Pharisees and their emphasis on law (SLO 2.3)

2.3.2 Sadducees and temple-centred authority (SLO 2.3)

2.3.3 Essenes and apocalyptic communities (SLO 2.3)

2.3.4 Zealots and political resistance (SLO 2.3)

2.4 Cultural Interactions and Influences

2.4.1 Impact of Hellenism on Jewish society (SLO 2.4)

2.4.2 Roman governance and Jewish identity (SLO 2.4)

2.4.3 Cross-cultural exchanges shaping early Christianity (SLO 2.4)

2.5 Messianic Expectations and Fulfilment in Christianity

2.5.1 Varied Jewish hopes for a Messiah (SLO 2.5)

2.5.2 Early Christian reinterpretation of Messianic promises (SLO 2.5)

2.5.3 Continuity and divergence between Judaism and Christianity (SLO 2.5)

INTRODUCTION

In the last Series, we explored the historical and literary developments of the Intertestamental period, gaining insight into the political, cultural, and theological contexts that shaped Jewish life and prepared the way for Christianity. Building on that foundation, this Series turns our attention to the Jewish background and cultural environment in which Christianity first emerged. Understanding these roots is essential, as they provide the framework for interpreting the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the early church.

The aim of this Series is to help you appreciate the religious institutions, traditions, and cultural influences of Judaism, and to show how these elements contributed to the foundations of Christianity. By the end of the Series, you should be able to explain the significance of Jewish practices, identify the role of different sects and movements, and evaluate the cultural interactions that shaped early Christian thought.

We shall commence this Series by examining Jewish religious institutions and practices, focusing on the temple, the synagogue, and the festivals that defined Jewish life. Next, we will explore Jewish scriptures and traditions, including the Torah, oral teachings, and the Septuagint. Following that, we will consider the major Jewish sects and movements such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. Moving on, we will analyse the cultural interactions and influences of Hellenism and Roman governance on Jewish identity. Finally, we will bring the Series to a close by studying Messianic expectations and how they were reinterpreted in early Christianity.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

Part 1 Jewish Religious Institutions and Practices



- SLO 2.1 describe the role of Jewish religious institutions such as the temple, synagogue, and festivals in shaping community life.

Part 2 Jewish Scriptures and Traditions

- SLO 2.2 explain the significance of Jewish scriptures and traditions, including the Torah, oral teachings, and the Septuagint.

Part 3 Jewish Sects and Movements

- SLO 2.3 analyse the beliefs and practices of major Jewish sects and movements such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots.

Part 4 Cultural Interactions and Influences

- SLO 2.4 evaluate the cultural influences of Hellenism and Roman governance on Jewish identity and practice.

Part 5 Messianic Expectations and Fulfilment in Christianity

- SLO 2.5 assess the variety of Jewish Messianic expectations and demonstrate how these were reinterpreted in early Christianity.

Part 1 Jewish Religious Institutions and Practices

2.1.2 The synagogue as a centre of worship and teaching

The synagogue was a local institution that emerged during the exile and became central to Jewish life. Unlike the temple, which was unique and located in Jerusalem, synagogues were found in many towns and villages. They served as places for prayer, reading of the scriptures, and teaching. Rabbis and teachers guided communities in interpreting the Torah.

Synagogues also functioned as community centres, reinforcing Jewish identity in diverse cultural settings.

Fill in the blank: The synagogue was primarily a place for _____ and teaching.





Plate 2.1 A synagogue gathering in the Intertestamental period

2.1.3 Festivals and rituals in Jewish life

Jewish festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were central to religious and cultural identity. These festivals commemorated historical events and celebrated God's provision. Rituals such as circumcision and dietary laws reinforced covenantal identity and distinguished Jews from surrounding cultures.

Festivals also provided opportunities for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, strengthening unity among dispersed communities.

Fill in the blank: Passover commemorated the _____ from Egypt.





Box 2.1 Selected Jewish festivals and their meanings

Part 2 Jewish Scriptures and Traditions

2.2 Jewish Scriptures and Traditions

Jewish scriptures and traditions formed the foundation of religious life and identity. They provided guidance for worship, ethics, and community practices, while also shaping expectations about God's covenant and future redemption. By studying these sources, you will gain insight into how early Christianity emerged from within a Jewish scriptural framework.

2.2.1 The Torah and its authority

The Torah refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally attributed to Moses. It is considered the most authoritative scripture in Judaism, containing laws, narratives, and instructions that define the covenant relationship between God and Israel. The Torah was read publicly in synagogues and memorised by students, ensuring its central role in Jewish life.

Fill in the blank: The Torah is made up of the first _____ books of the Hebrew Bible.



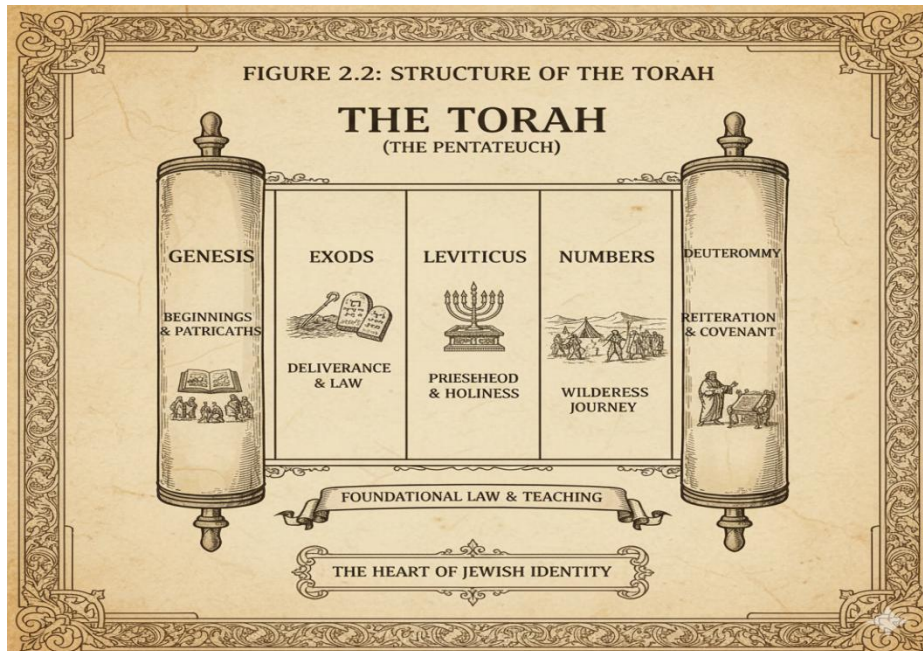
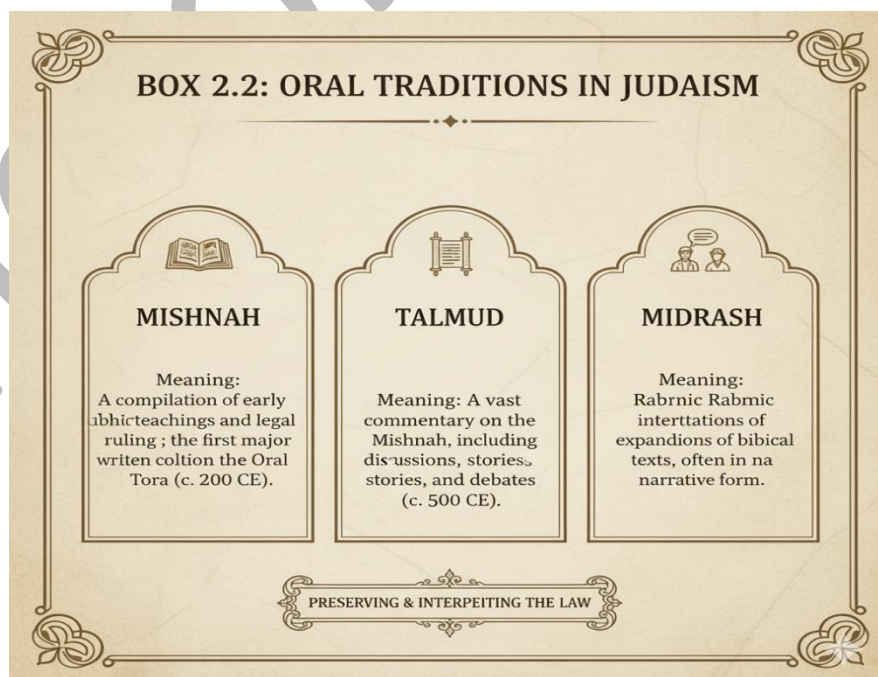


Figure 2.2 Structure of the Torah

2.2.2 Oral traditions and interpretations

Alongside written scripture, oral traditions developed to explain and apply the Torah to daily life. These traditions included interpretations, rulings, and teachings passed down by rabbis. Over time, they were compiled into texts such as the Mishnah and later the Talmud. Oral traditions ensured that Jewish law remained adaptable to new circumstances.

Fill in the blank: Oral traditions were later compiled into texts such as the _____.



Box 2.2 Examples of oral traditions in Judaism

2.2.3 The Septuagint and its influence

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures produced in Alexandria. It was widely used among Jews living in Greek-speaking regions and later became influential in early Christianity. Many quotations of scripture in the New Testament are drawn from the Septuagint, showing its importance in bridging Jewish and Christian traditions.

Fill in the blank: The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into _____.



Part 3 Jewish Sects and Movements

2.3 Jewish Sects and Movements

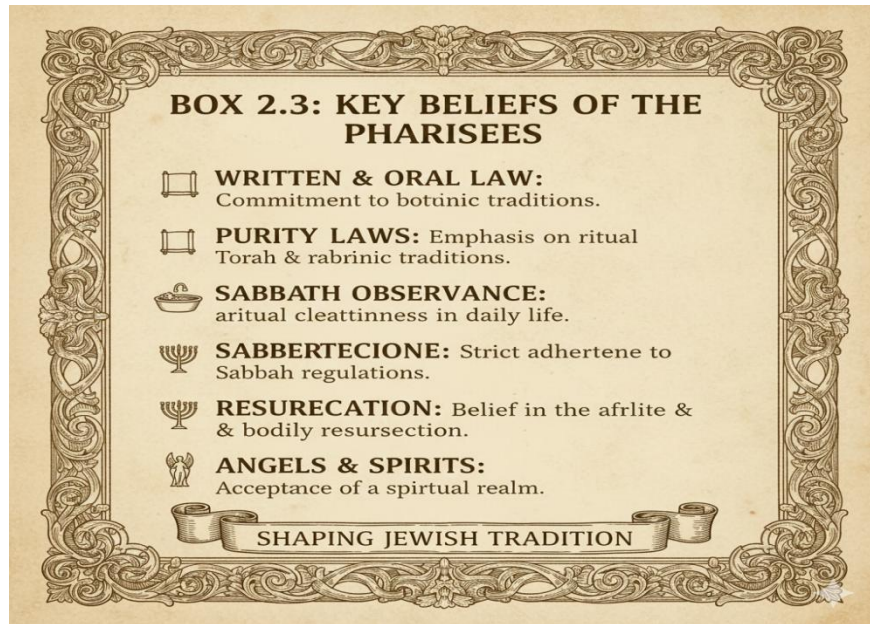
During the Second Temple period, several Jewish sects and movements emerged, each with distinctive beliefs and practices. These groups influenced the religious and political climate of the time and shaped the background against which Christianity developed. By studying them, you will better understand the diversity of Jewish thought and the tensions that existed within the community.

2.3.1 The Pharisees

The Pharisees were a group committed to strict observance of the Torah and oral traditions. They emphasised purity laws, Sabbath observance, and the authority of rabbis in interpreting scripture. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels, which distinguished them from other groups.

Fill in the blank: The Pharisees placed strong emphasis on the _____ traditions alongside the written Torah.





Box 2.3 Key beliefs of the Pharisees.

2.3.2 The Sadducees

The Sadducees were a priestly aristocratic group closely associated with the temple. They rejected oral traditions and accepted only the written Torah as authoritative. Unlike the Pharisees, they denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. Their influence was significant in temple administration and politics, but their power declined after the destruction of the temple.

Fill in the blank: The Sadducees accepted only the _____ as authoritative scripture.

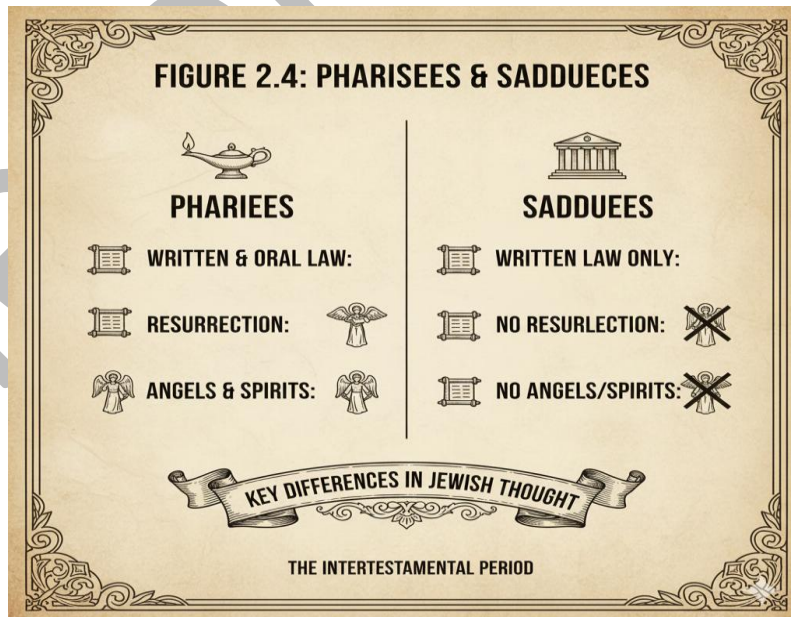


Figure 2.3 Comparison of Pharisees and Sadducees



2.3.3 The Essenes

The Essenes were a separatist community known for their strict discipline and communal lifestyle. They withdrew from mainstream society to live in isolated settlements, such as Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The Essenes emphasized purity, apocalyptic expectations, and preparation for God's coming kingdom.

Fill in the blank: The Dead Sea Scrolls are associated with the _____ community.

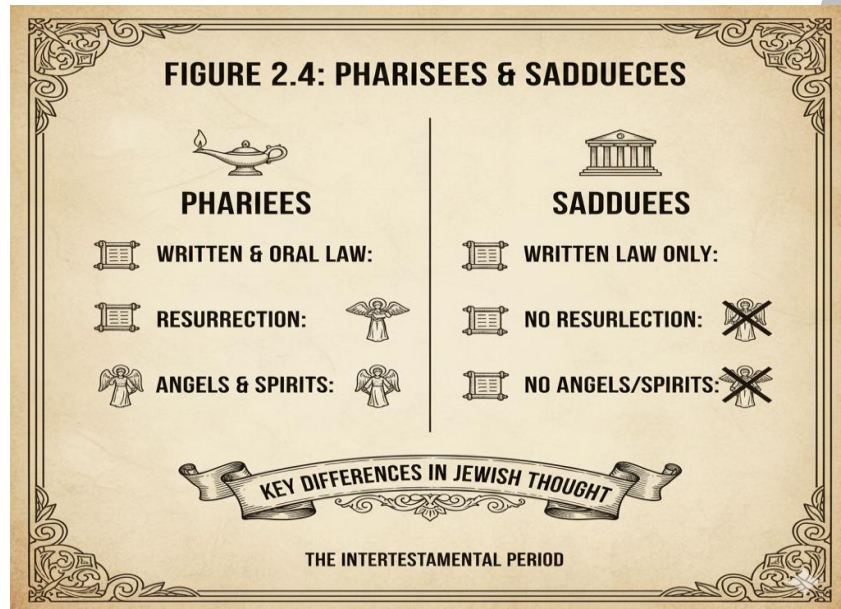


Plate 2.3: The Essenes of Qumran

2.3.4 The Zealots

The Zealots were a revolutionary movement that sought to overthrow Roman rule through armed resistance. They were motivated by religious zeal and a desire to restore Jewish independence. Their actions contributed to the Jewish revolt against Rome, which ultimately led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Fill in the blank: The Zealots were primarily known for their resistance against _____ rule.



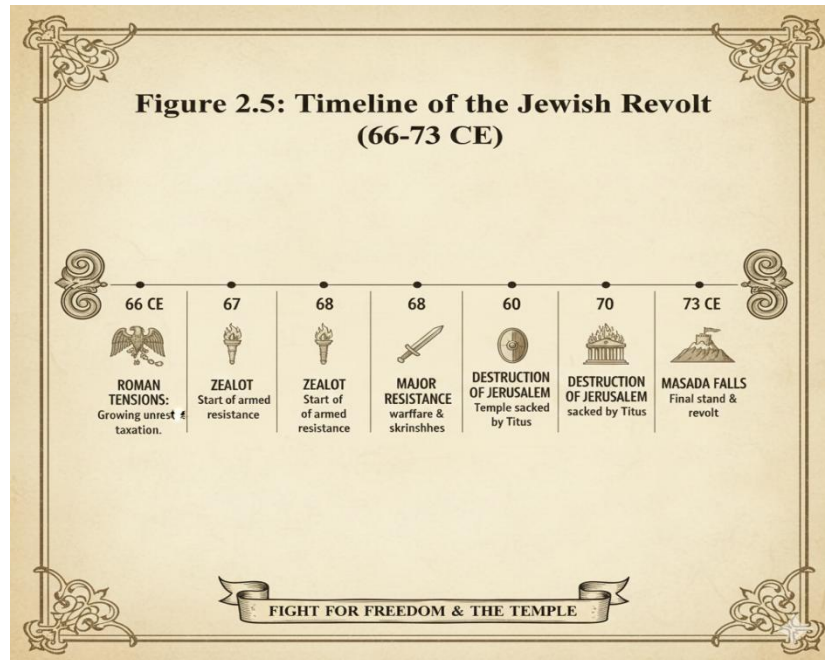


Figure 2.4 Timeline of the Jewish revolt

Part 4 Cultural Interactions and Influences

2.4 Cultural Interactions and Influences

Jewish life during the Second Temple period was shaped not only by internal traditions but also by external cultural forces. The spread of Hellenism (Greek culture) and the dominance of Roman governance created both opportunities and challenges for Jewish identity. Understanding these influences helps us see how Judaism adapted and how Christianity emerged in dialogue with broader cultural currents.

2.4.1 The impact of Hellenism

Hellenism refers to the spread of Greek language, philosophy, and customs following the conquests of Alexander the Great. Many Jews adopted aspects of Greek culture, such as language and education, while others resisted, fearing it would compromise their covenantal identity. This tension is evident in Jewish writings of the time, which often wrestle with balancing tradition and cultural adaptation.

Fill in the blank: Hellenism spread widely after the conquests of _____ the Great.



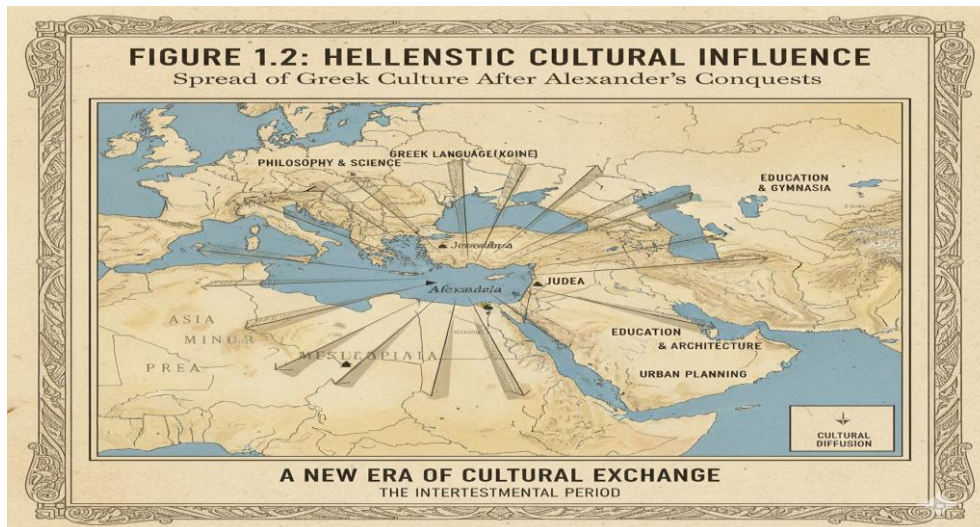


Figure 2.5: Spread of Hellenistic Culture

2.4.2 Roman governance and Jewish society

The Romans established control over Judea in the first century BCE. Roman governance brought infrastructure, taxation, and military presence. While some Jews benefited from Roman order and trade, others resented foreign rule and its impact on religious freedom. Roman governors, such as Pontius Pilate, often clashed with Jewish leaders, creating tensions that shaped the political environment of Jesus' ministry.

Fill in the blank: Roman governance in Judea was marked by heavy _____ and military presence.



Plate 2.4 Roman soldiers stationed in Judea

2.4.3 Cultural tensions and identity



The interaction of Jewish traditions with Greek and Roman culture created ongoing cultural tensions. Some Jews embraced aspects of foreign culture, while others insisted on strict separation to preserve covenantal identity. These tensions contributed to sectarian divisions and fuelled debates about how to remain faithful to God in a changing world.

Fill in the blank: Cultural tensions arose as Jews debated how to preserve their _____ identity.



Box 2.4 Cultural influences on Jewish identity

Part 5 Messianic Expectations and Fulfilment in Christianity

2.5 Messianic Expectations and Fulfilment in Christianity

Jewish communities in the Second Temple period held diverse expectations about the coming of a Messiah. The term Messiah means “anointed one” and referred to a future leader chosen by God to deliver Israel. These expectations varied, ranging from hopes for a political liberator to visions of a spiritual redeemer. Early Christianity reinterpreted these expectations, presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of them in ways that both aligned with and challenged traditional views.

2.5.1 Varieties of Jewish Messianic expectations

Different Jewish groups anticipated the Messiah in unique ways. Some expected a kingly figure like David who would restore national independence. Others envisioned a priestly leader who would purify worship and uphold the covenant. Apocalyptic groups, such as the Essenes, anticipated a heavenly deliverer who would bring God’s kingdom through dramatic intervention.

Fill in the blank: The Messiah was often expected to be a future _____ chosen by God.



Influence	
Influence	Impact
Hellenism	Exposure to Greek language, philosophy, and customs
Roman governance	Loss of political autonomy; payment of taxes

Box 2.4 Cultural influences on Jewish identity

Box 2.5 Varieties of Jewish Messianic expectations

2.5.2 Reinterpretation in early Christianity

Early Christians proclaimed that Jesus fulfilled Messianic hopes, but in unexpected ways. Instead of leading a military revolt, Jesus emphasised spiritual renewal, forgiveness, and the coming of God's kingdom. His death and resurrection were interpreted as the ultimate act of salvation, redefining what it meant to be the Messiah. This reinterpretation became central to Christian identity and distinguished it from other Jewish movements.

Fill in the blank: Early Christians proclaimed that Jesus fulfilled Messianic hopes through his _____ and resurrection.



2.5.3 Continuity and contrast

While Christianity reinterpreted Messianic expectations, it also maintained continuity with Jewish traditions. The use of scripture, covenantal themes, and prophetic fulfilment linked Christianity to its Jewish roots. At the same time, the universal scope of salvation and the emphasis on faith in Christ marked a significant contrast.

Fill in the blank: Christianity maintained continuity with Jewish traditions but emphasised universal _____ through Christ.



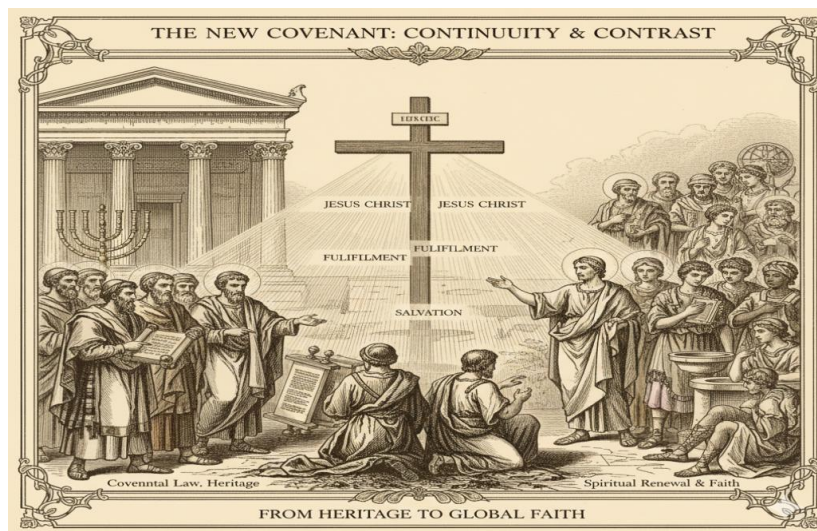


Figure 2.6 Continuity and contrast in Messianic expectations

SERIES SUMMARY

This Series has explored the Jewish background and cultural foundations that shaped the environment in which Christianity emerged. Its purpose has been to provide learners with a clear understanding of the institutions, scriptures, sects, cultural influences, and Messianic expectations that defined Jewish life during the Second Temple period. By examining these elements, you have gained insight into the religious and social context that influenced the earliest Christian communities.

Across the Parts, we began with Jewish religious institutions such as the temple, synagogue, and festivals, before moving to the authority of scriptures and oral traditions, including the Septuagint. We then considered the diversity of Jewish sects and movements, from Pharisees and Sadducees to Essenes and Zealots, and explored the impact of Hellenism and Roman governance on Jewish identity. Finally, we examined the range of Messianic expectations and how Christianity reinterpreted them in the person of Jesus. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to describe these institutions, explain the role of scriptures and traditions, analyse the beliefs of different sects, evaluate cultural influences, and assess how Messianic hopes were fulfilled in early Christianity.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Essenes: A Jewish sect that lived in isolated communities, such as Qumran, and emphasised purity, discipline, and apocalyptic expectations. They are closely associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls.



Hellenism: The spread of Greek language, culture, and philosophy following the conquests of Alexander the Great. It influenced many aspects of Jewish life during the Second Temple period.

Messiah: A term meaning “anointed one,” referring to a future leader chosen by God to deliver Israel. Jewish groups held different expectations of the Messiah, which early Christians believed were fulfilled in Jesus.

Oral traditions: Teachings and interpretations of the Torah passed down verbally by rabbis and later compiled into texts such as the Mishnah and Talmud. These traditions helped apply scripture to daily life.

Pharisees: A Jewish sect that emphasized strict observance of the Torah and oral traditions. They believed in the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels.

Sadducees: A priestly aristocratic group associated with the temple. They accepted only the written Torah as authoritative and rejected beliefs such as resurrection and angels.

Septuagint: A Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures produced in Alexandria. It was widely used among Jews in Greek-speaking regions and influenced early Christian writings.

Synagogue: A local Jewish institution that served as a place for prayer, scripture reading, and teaching. Synagogues also functioned as community centres, especially outside Jerusalem.

Temple: The central place of worship in Jerusalem, regarded as the dwelling place of God’s presence. It was the site of sacrifices, festivals, and priestly rituals.

Torah: The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally attributed to Moses. It is the most authoritative scripture in Judaism, containing laws, narratives, and instructions for covenantal life.

Zealots: A Jewish revolutionary movement that resisted Roman rule through armed struggle. Their actions contributed to the Jewish revolt against Rome in the first century CE.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which institution was regarded as the dwelling place of God’s presence in Jerusalem? (Linked to SLO 2.1)
 - A. Synagogue
 - B. Temple
 - C. Septuagint
 - D. Torah
2. The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into: (Linked to SLO 2.2)
 - A. Latin
 - B. Greek
 - C. Aramaic
 - D. Hebrew
3. Which Jewish sect emphasized oral traditions and believed in resurrection? (Linked to SLO 2.3)
 - A. Sadducees
 - B. Zealots
 - C. Pharisees
 - D. Essenes
4. Roman governance in Judea was marked by: (Linked to SLO 2.4)
 - A. Heavy taxation and military presence
 - B. Complete religious freedom
 - C. Abolition of synagogues
 - D. Elimination of oral traditions
5. Early Christians proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah primarily through his: (Linked to SLO 2.5)
 - A. Military victories
 - B. Death and resurrection



- C. Temple rituals
- D. Translation of scriptures

Short-Answer Questions

1. Describe the role of synagogues in Jewish community life during the Second Temple period. (Linked to SLO 2.1)
2. Explain the significance of oral traditions in interpreting the Torah. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
3. Analyze one key difference between the beliefs of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
9. Evaluate the impact of Hellenism on Jewish identity. (Linked to SLO 2.4)
10. Assess how early Christians reinterpreted Jewish Messianic expectations in the person of Jesus. (Linked to SLO 2.5)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Discuss the importance of Jewish festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles in reinforcing covenantal identity. (Linked to SLO 2.1)
12. Analyze the influence of the Septuagint on early Christianity, particularly in the use of scripture in the New Testament. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
13. Compare and contrast the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots, highlighting their impact on Jewish society. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
14. Evaluate the cultural tensions created by Hellenism and Roman governance, and explain how this shaped Jewish identity. (Linked to SLO 2.4)
15. Assess the continuity and contrast between Jewish Messianic expectations and their fulfilment in Christianity. (Linked to SLO 2.5)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Multiple Choice Questions

1. b) Temple
2. b) Greek
3. c) Pharisees
4. a) Heavy taxation and military presence
5. b) Death and resurrection

Short-Answer Questions

6. Synagogues served as places for prayer, scripture reading, teaching, and community gathering.



7. Oral traditions explained and applied the Torah to daily life, later compiled into the Mishnah and Talmud.
8. The Pharisees believed in resurrection and angels, while the Sadducees rejected both.
9. Hellenism introduced Greek language, philosophy, and customs, creating tensions with Jewish traditions.
10. Early Christians proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, emphasising spiritual renewal, forgiveness, and salvation through his death and resurrection.

Long-Answer Questions

11. Basic response: Festivals commemorated historical events and reinforced covenantal identity through rituals and pilgrimages.

Value-added response: They also strengthened unity among dispersed communities and provided opportunities for theological reflection on God's provision.

12. Basic response: The Septuagint made scriptures accessible to Greek-speaking Jews and influenced Christian scripture use.

Value-added response: Its widespread use shaped theological debates, and many New Testament quotations are drawn directly from it.

13. Basic response: Pharisees emphasized oral traditions, Sadducees focused on the temple, Essenes lived communally, and Zealots resisted Rome.

Value-added response: Together, these sects reveal the diversity of Jewish thought and highlight tensions that shaped the context of Jesus' ministry.

14. Basic response: Hellenism introduced Greek culture, while Roman governance imposed political control, creating cultural tensions.

Value-added response: These influences forced Jews to negotiate identity, leading to sectarian divisions and shaping responses to foreign rule.

15. Basic response: Christianity reinterpreted Messianic hopes in Jesus, focusing on spiritual salvation rather than political liberation.

Value-added response: It maintained continuity with Jewish traditions but expanded salvation universally, marking a significant theological shift.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 2]

Part 1 Jewish Religious Institutions and Practices

- The temple in Jerusalem was regarded as the dwelling place of God.
- The synagogue was primarily a place for prayer and teaching.
- Passover commemorated the deliverance from Egypt.

Part 2 Jewish Scriptures and Traditions

- The Torah is made up of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.
- Oral traditions were later compiled into texts such as the Mishnah.
- The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek.

Part 3 Jewish Sects and Movements

- The Pharisees placed strong emphasis on the oral traditions alongside the written Torah.
- The Sadducees accepted only the written Torah as authoritative scripture.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls are associated with the Essene community.



- The Zealots were primarily known for their resistance against Roman rule.

Part 4 Cultural Interactions and Influences

- Hellenism spread widely after the conquests of Alexander the Great.
- Roman governance in Judea was marked by heavy taxation and military presence.
- Cultural tensions arose as Jews debated how to preserve their covenantal identity.

Part 5 Messianic Expectations and Fulfilment in Christianity

- The Messiah was often expected to be a future leader chosen by God.
- Early Christians proclaimed that Jesus fulfilled Messianic hopes through his death and resurrection.
- Christianity maintained continuity with Jewish traditions but emphasised universal salvation through Christ.

General References

- Collins, J. J. (2014). *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Grabbe, L. L. (2000). *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*. London: SCM Press.
- Sanders, E. P. (1992). *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE*. London: SCM Press.
- Wright, N. T. (2012). *The New Testament and the People of God*. London: SPCK.

Illustrations and OER Sources

Part 1 Jewish Religious Institutions and Practices

- **Figure 2.1 Layout of the Jerusalem temple**
 - Suggested OER search string: "Jerusalem temple layout diagram OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Generate a labelled diagram of the Jerusalem temple layout during the Second Temple period."
- **Plate 2.1 A synagogue gathering in the Intertestamental period**
 - Suggested OER search string: "ancient synagogue illustration OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of a Jewish synagogue gathering with scripture reading."
- **Box 2.1 Selected Jewish festivals and their meanings**
 - Suggested OER search string: "Jewish festivals summary table OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Generate a table summarising Jewish festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles with meanings."

Part 2 Jewish Scriptures and Traditions

- **Figure 2.2 Structure of the Torah**
 - Suggested OER search string: "Torah five books diagram OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Generate a labelled diagram showing the five books of the Torah with brief descriptions."
- **Box 2.2 Examples of oral traditions in Judaism**
 - Suggested OER search string: "Jewish oral traditions Mishnah Talmud summary OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Generate a table listing examples of Jewish oral traditions and their significance."
- **Plate 2.2 Jewish scholars working on the Septuagint**
 - Suggested OER search string: "Septuagint translation Jewish scholars illustration OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of Jewish scholars translating scriptures into Greek in Alexandria."

Part 3 Jewish Sects and Movements

- **Box 2.3 Key beliefs of the Pharisees**
 - Suggested OER search string: "Pharisees beliefs practices summary OER"
 - AI-generated prompt: "Generate a table listing the key beliefs and practices of the Pharisees."
- **Figure 2.3 Comparison of Pharisees and Sadducees**



- Suggested OER search string: “Pharisees Sadducees comparison chart OER”
- AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram comparing the beliefs of Pharisees and Sadducees.”
- **Plate 2.3 The Essenes at Qumran**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Essenes Qumran community illustration OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of Essenes living communally at Qumran.”
- **Figure 2.4 Timeline of the Jewish revolt**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Jewish revolt timeline Zealots OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a timeline diagram of the Jewish revolt against Rome highlighting the role of the Zealots.”

Part 4 Cultural Interactions and Influences

- **Figure 2.5 Spread of Hellenistic culture**
 - Suggested OER search string: “map spread of Hellenism OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a map diagram showing the spread of Hellenistic culture after Alexander the Great.”
- **Plate 2.4 Roman soldiers stationed in Judea**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Roman soldiers Judea illustration OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of Roman soldiers enforcing governance in Judea.”
- **Box 2.4 Cultural influences on Jewish identity**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Jewish identity Hellenism Roman governance summary OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a table summarising cultural influences of Hellenism and Roman governance on Jewish identity.”

Part 5 Messianic Expectations and Fulfilment in Christianity

- **Box 2.5 Varieties of Jewish Messianic expectations**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Jewish Messianic expectations summary table OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a table summarising Jewish Messianic expectations: kingly, priestly, apocalyptic.”
- **Plate 2.5 Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Jesus teaching kingdom of God illustration OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God to his disciples.”
- **Figure 2.6 Continuity and contrast in Messianic expectations**
 - Suggested OER search string: “Jewish Christian Messianic expectations comparison diagram OER”
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing continuity and contrast between Jewish and Christian Messianic expectations.”

Course Code: CRS 101

Course Title: Background to Christianity

Course Units: 3 Units

Series 3: Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences on Early Christianity

Part 1 Persian Influence on Jewish and Christian Thought

- 3.1.1 The Persian Empire and Jewish return from exile
- 3.1.2 Zoroastrian concepts and their parallels in Jewish thought (angels, dualism, eschatology)
- 3.1.3 Persian administrative models and their impact on Jewish governance

Part 2 Greek Influence and Hellenistic Culture



- 3.2.1 Alexander the Great and the spread of Hellenism
- 3.2.2 Greek philosophy and its interaction with Jewish wisdom traditions
- 3.2.3 The Septuagint and the role of Greek language in early Christianity

Part 3 Roman Political and Social Structures

- 3.3.1 Roman governance in Judea and its impact on Jewish society
- 3.3.2 Roman law, citizenship, and infrastructure (roads, trade, communication)
- 3.3.3 Roman religious tolerance and conflict with Jewish practices

Part 4 Cultural Interactions and Identity Formation

- 3.4.1 Jewish responses to foreign cultural influences
- 3.4.2 The shaping of early Christian identity in a multicultural world
- 3.4.3 Continuity and contrast between Jewish traditions and Greco-Roman culture

Part 5 Legacy of Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences

- 3.5.1 Lasting contributions to Christian theology and practice
- 3.5.2 Political and cultural frameworks inherited by the early Church
- 3.5.3 The universalization of Christianity within the Greco-Roman world

INTRODUCTION

In the last Series, we explored the Jewish background and cultural foundations that shaped the environment in which Christianity first emerged. Building on that foundation, this Series turns our attention to the wider world of Persian, Greek, and Roman influences. These empires not only provided the political and cultural backdrop of the New Testament but also introduced ideas, structures, and practices that deeply affected both Judaism and the early Christian movement. Understanding these influences will help you appreciate how Christianity developed within a complex web of cultural interactions.



The aim of this Series is to examine the contributions of Persian, Greek, and Roman civilizations to the shaping of early Christianity. By the end, you will be able to identify, explain, and evaluate how these external forces influenced Jewish traditions and Christian identity.

We shall commence this Series by considering the Persian Empire and its impact on Jewish thought and governance. Next, we will move on to the spread of Hellenism, exploring how Greek language, philosophy, and culture interacted with Jewish traditions and early Christian writings. Following that, we will examine Roman political and social structures, including governance, law, and infrastructure, and their effect on Jewish society. We will then continue with a study of cultural interactions and identity formation, highlighting how Jews and Christians negotiated their place in a multicultural world. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the lasting legacy of Persian, Greek, and Roman influences on Christian theology, practice, and expansion.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 3.1 analyse the influence of Persian rule on Jewish thought, governance, and religious practices,

SLO 3.2 explain how Hellenistic culture and Greek philosophy shaped Jewish traditions and early Christian writings,

SLO 3.3 evaluate the impact of Roman political, legal, and social structures on Jewish society and the early Christian movement,

SLO 3.4 assess the ways in which Jewish and Christian identities were negotiated within a multicultural Greco-Roman world, and

SLO 3.5 describe the lasting legacy of Persian, Greek, and Roman contributions to Christian theology, practice, and expansion.

3.1 Persian Influence on Jewish and Christian Thought

The Persian Empire played a crucial role in shaping Jewish life after the Babylonian exile. Its policies of tolerance and restoration allowed the Jewish people to return to their homeland, rebuild the temple, and re-establish their religious practices. Persian ideas also influenced Jewish thought, particularly in areas such as angelology, eschatology, and governance, which later provided a foundation for early Christian concepts.

3.1.1 The Persian Empire and Jewish return from exile

The Persian Empire was a vast kingdom established by Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BCE. It was known for its policy of allowing conquered peoples to maintain their traditions and religious practices. For the Jews, this meant the opportunity to return from Babylonian exile, rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and restore their covenantal worship.

Fill in the blank: Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return from _____ exile.



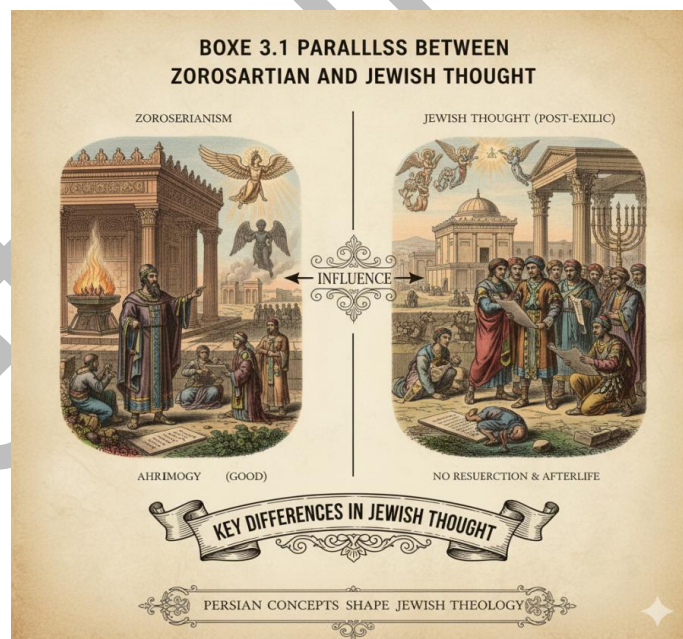


Figure 3.1 The Persian Empire and Jewish return from exile

3.1.2 Zoroastrian concepts and their parallels in Jewish thought

Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion of Persia, founded by the prophet Zoroaster. It emphasised the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the role of angels and demons, and the expectation of a final judgement. These ideas influenced Jewish thought during the Persian period, contributing to beliefs about resurrection, angelic beings, and eschatology.

Fill in the blank: Zoroastrianism emphasized the cosmic struggle between _____ and evil.



Box 3.1 Parallels between Zoroastrian and Jewish thought

3.1.3 Persian administrative models and Jewish governance

The Persians introduced efficient administrative models, including provincial governance and local leadership structures. Jewish society adopted some of these practices, such as the role of governors and scribes, which



helped organize community life. These models influenced later Jewish governance and provided frameworks that early Christian communities adapted in their organization.

Fill in the blank: Persian administrative models included provincial governance and local _____ structures.



Plate 3.1 Persian officials administering provinces

3.2 Greek Influence and Hellenistic Culture

The spread of Greek culture, known as Hellenism, profoundly shaped the world in which Judaism and Christianity developed. Greek language, philosophy, and customs became dominant across the eastern Mediterranean, influencing education, literature, and religious thought. These cultural currents provided both challenges and opportunities for Jewish communities and later for the early Christian movement.

3.2.1 Alexander the Great and the spread of Hellenism

Alexander the Great was the Macedonian ruler whose conquests in the fourth century BCE spread Greek culture across vast territories. His empire introduced Greek language, art, and institutions into regions including Judea. For Jews, this meant exposure to new ideas and practices, which some embraced while others resisted to preserve covenantal identity.

Fill in the blank: The spread of Greek culture across the eastern Mediterranean is known as _____.



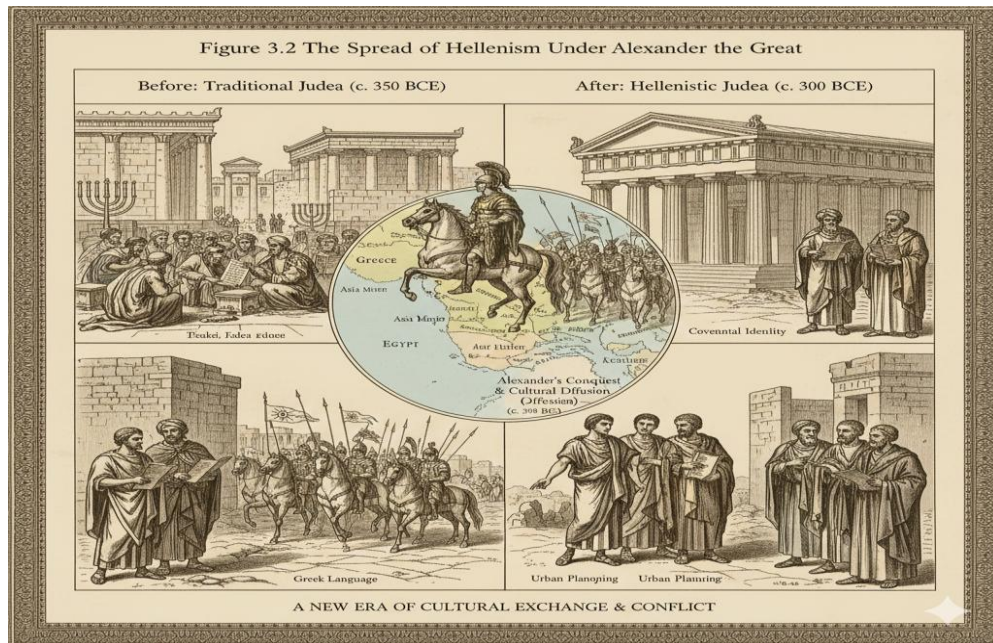


Figure 3.2 The spread of Hellenism under Alexander the Great

3.2.2 Greek philosophy and Jewish wisdom traditions

Greek philosophy refers to the intellectual traditions of thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. These schools of thought emphasised reason, ethics, and the search for truth. Jewish wisdom traditions, found in books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, interacted with Greek philosophy, leading to new expressions of faith that combined rational reflection with covenantal belief.

Fill in the blank: Jewish wisdom traditions interacted with Greek _____, leading to new expressions of faith.

Box 3.2 Greek Philosophy and Jewish Wisdom Traditions



Box 3.2 Greek philosophy and Jewish wisdom traditions



3.2.3 The Septuagint and early Christianity

The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures produced in Alexandria. It made Jewish scripture accessible to Greek-speaking communities and later became the version most often quoted in the New Testament. The Septuagint demonstrates how Hellenistic culture shaped the transmission of Jewish tradition and provided a bridge for Christianity to engage with the wider Greco-Roman world.

Fill in the blank: The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into _____.



Plate 3.2 Jewish scholars producing the Septuagint

3.3 Roman Political and Social Structures

The Roman Empire provided the political and social framework within which both Judaism and Christianity developed during the first century CE. Roman governance, law, and infrastructure shaped daily life in Judea and beyond, while Roman religious policies created both opportunities and tensions for Jewish communities. Understanding these structures helps us appreciate the challenges faced by early Christians as they navigated life under Roman rule.

3.3.1 Roman governance in Judea

Roman governance refers to the system of provincial administration established by Rome to control conquered territories. In Judea, Roman governors such as Pontius Pilate oversaw taxation, military presence, and legal matters. While Roman rule brought order and infrastructure, it also created resentment among Jews who valued independence and religious freedom.

Fill in the blank: Roman governors such as _____ Pilate oversaw taxation and legal matters in Judea.



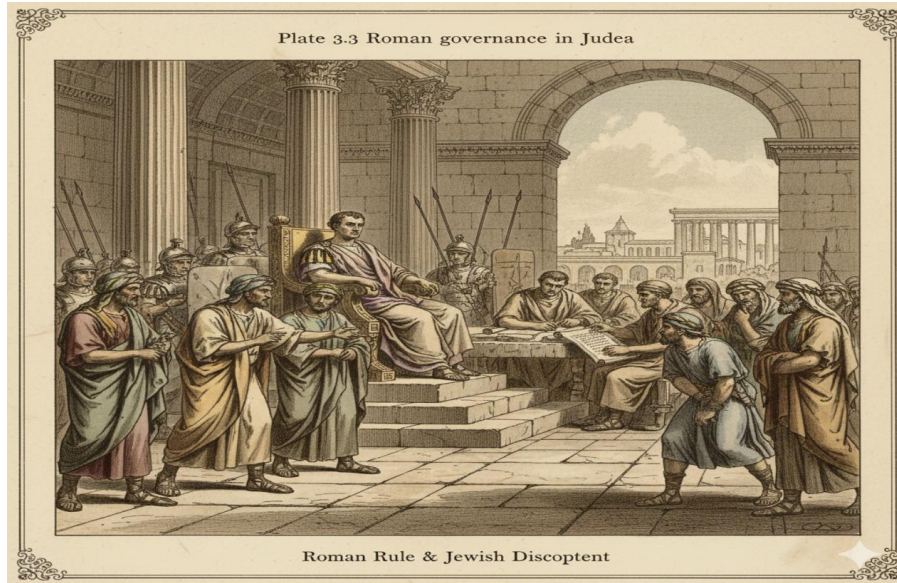


Plate 3.3 Roman governance in Judea.

3.3.2 Roman law, citizenship, and infrastructure

Roman law was a codified system of rules that applied across the empire, ensuring consistency in governance. Roman citizenship granted privileges such as legal protection and freedom of movement, which some Jews and later Christians obtained. Roman infrastructure, including roads, aqueducts, and trade networks, facilitated communication and the spread of ideas, contributing to the rapid expansion of Christianity.

Fill in the blank: Roman citizenship granted privileges such as legal protection and freedom of _____.



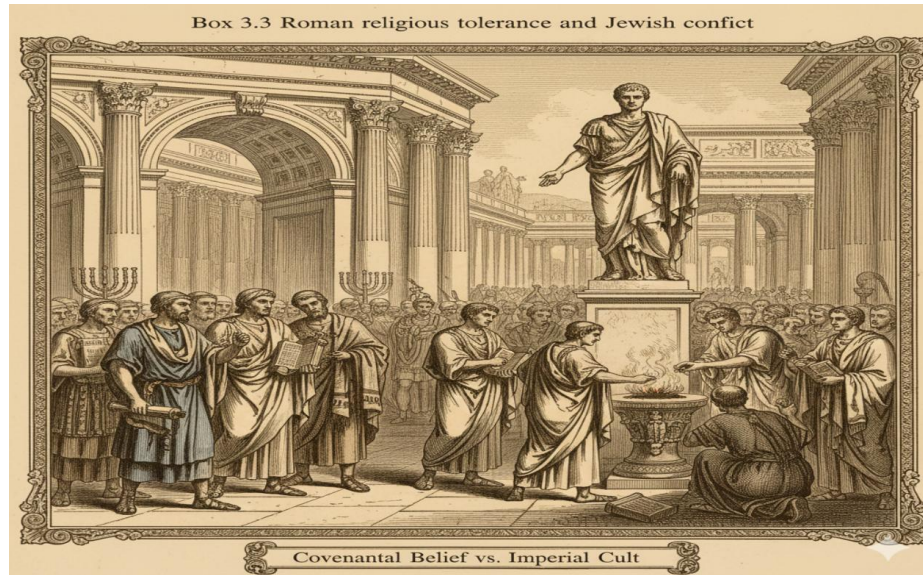
Figure 3.3 Roman infrastructure supporting communication and trade.

3.3.3 Roman religious tolerance and conflict with Jewish practices



The Romans generally practised religious tolerance, allowing conquered peoples to continue their traditions as long as they did not threaten imperial stability. However, conflicts arose when Roman practices clashed with Jewish beliefs, particularly regarding emperor worship and pagan rituals. These tensions contributed to revolts and shaped the environment in which Christianity emerged as a distinct faith.

Fill in the blank: Roman religious tolerance often clashed with Jewish beliefs about worship of the _____.



3.4 Cultural Interactions and Identity Formation

Jewish and Christian communities lived within a multicultural world shaped by Persian, Greek, and Roman influences. These interactions created both opportunities for dialogue and tensions over identity. By examining how Jews and Christians responded to foreign cultures, we gain insight into the processes of adaptation, resistance, and transformation that defined their religious life.

3.4.1 Jewish responses to foreign cultural influences

Jewish communities often faced the challenge of balancing covenantal traditions with external cultural pressures. Some groups adopted aspects of foreign culture, such as language or administrative practices, while others resisted strongly to preserve religious distinctiveness. This tension between adaptation and resistance shaped Jewish identity during the Second Temple period.

Fill in the blank: Jewish communities balanced covenantal traditions with external _____ pressures.





Box 3.4 Jewish responses to cultural influences

3.4.2 Shaping of early Christian identity

Early Christians inherited Jewish traditions but also engaged with Greco-Roman culture. The use of Greek language, philosophical ideas, and Roman infrastructure helped Christianity spread rapidly. At the same time, Christians distinguished themselves through practices such as baptism, communal worship, and rejection of emperor worship, which marked their identity as a distinct movement.

Fill in the blank: Early Christians distinguished themselves by rejecting _____ worship.

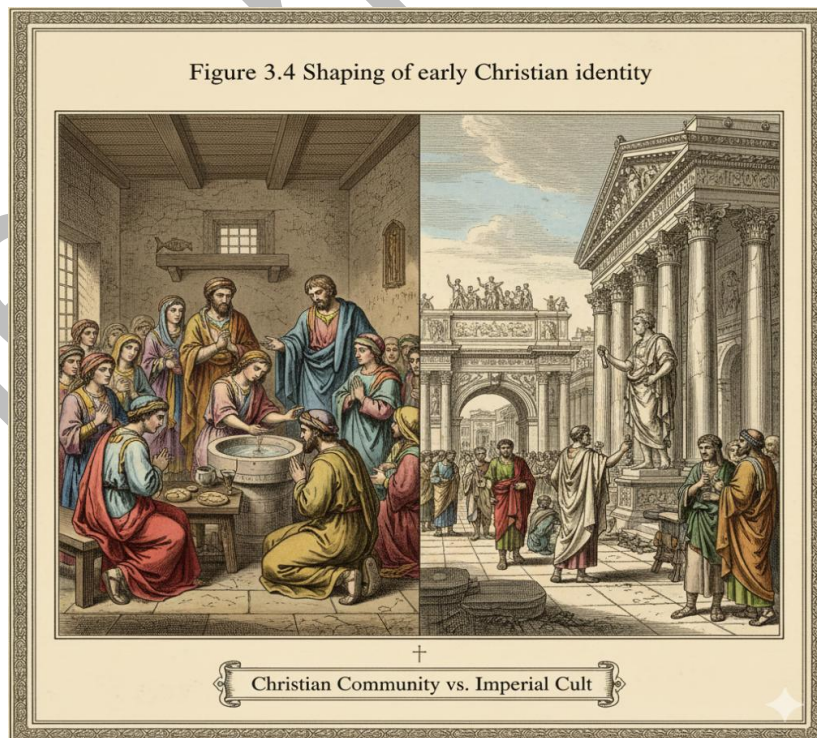


Figure 3.4 Shaping of early Christian identity

3.4.3 Continuity and contrast with Greco-Roman culture

Christianity both engaged with and contrasted Greco-Roman culture. On one hand, it adopted Greek language and Roman organizational models, which facilitated its growth. On the other hand, it challenged prevailing cultural norms by emphasizing humility, service, and universal salvation. This balance of continuity and contrast enabled Christianity to thrive while maintaining its distinctiveness.

Fill in the blank: Christianity challenged Greco-Roman cultural norms by emphasizing humility, service, and universal _____.

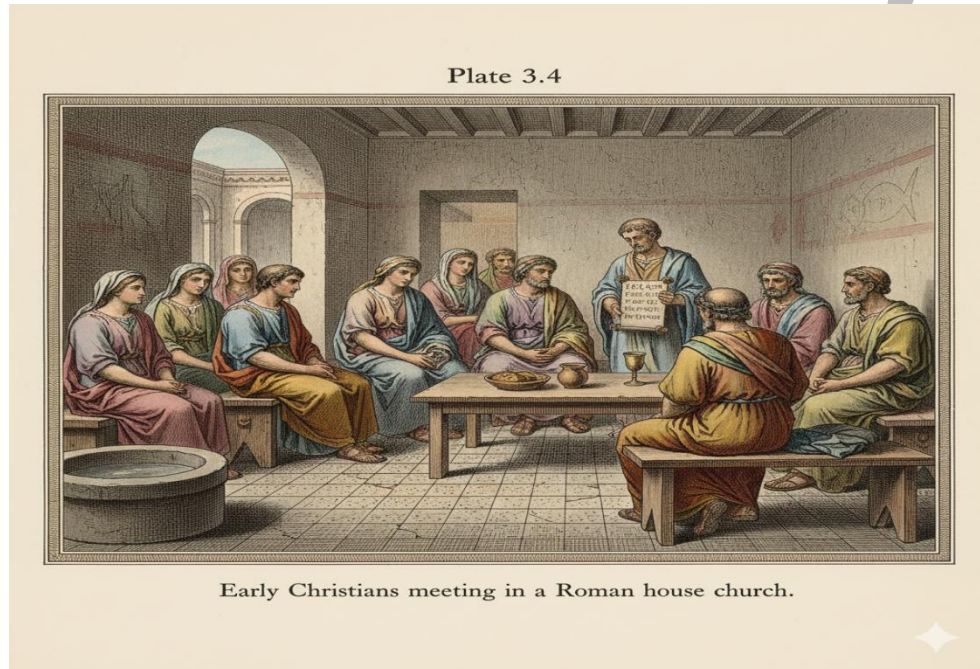


Plate 3.4 Early Christians meeting in a Roman house church

3.5 Legacy of Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences

The legacies of Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations continued to shape Christianity long after their direct political control ended. Their contributions to theology, governance, and cultural expansion provided the structures and ideas through which Christianity grew into a global faith. By tracing these legacies, we can see how early Christianity was both rooted in Jewish tradition and enriched by wider cultural currents.

3.5.1 Lasting contributions to Christian theology and practice

Persian religious ideas, such as beliefs about angels, resurrection, and final judgement, influenced Jewish thought and were carried into Christian theology. Greek philosophy contributed frameworks for discussing ethics, truth, and the nature of God, while Roman practices shaped Christian organisation and worship. Together, these influences provided Christianity with intellectual depth and practical structures.

Fill in the blank: Persian religious ideas such as beliefs about angels and _____ influenced Christian theology.



Box 3.5 Contributions of Persian, and Roman thought to Christianity



Box 3.5 Contributions of Persian, Greek, and Roman thought to Christianity.

3.5.2 Political and cultural frameworks inherited by the early Church

The early Church inherited political frameworks from Rome, such as administrative organisation and legal structures, which helped it function across diverse regions. It also drew on cultural frameworks, including Greek language and literature, which enabled communication and theological reflection. These inheritances allowed Christianity to establish itself as a structured and adaptable movement.

Fill in the blank: The early Church inherited administrative organisation and legal structures from _____.

Box 3.5 Contributions of Persian, and Roman thought to Christianity



Figure 3.5 Political and cultural frameworks inherited by the early Church.

3.5.3 Universalization of Christianity within the Greco-Roman world

The universalization of Christianity refers to its expansion beyond Jewish communities into the wider Greco-Roman world. Greek language made the message accessible, Roman roads facilitated travel, and cultural openness allowed Christianity to spread across diverse populations. This universal scope became a defining feature of Christianity, distinguishing it from other Jewish sects.

Fill in the blank: Roman roads facilitated travel and helped the _____ of Christianity across the empire.



Plate 3.5 is ready: an artistic illustration of early

Series Summary

This Series has examined the wider cultural and political influences that shaped the environment in which early Christianity developed. Its purpose has been to highlight how Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations provided ideas, structures, and practices that interacted with Jewish traditions and contributed to the growth of Christianity. By situating Christianity within this broader historical context, you have been able to see how external forces enriched and challenged its identity.

We began with the Persian Empire, noting its role in the Jewish return from exile and the influence of Zoroastrian concepts. Then we explored the spread of Hellenism under Alexander the Great, the interaction of Greek philosophy with Jewish wisdom, and the importance of the Septuagint. Following that, we considered Roman governance, law, citizenship, and infrastructure, as well as tensions over religious practices. We continued with cultural interactions, focusing on how Jews and Christians negotiated identity in a multicultural world. Finally, we assessed the lasting legacy of these civilisations in shaping Christian theology, organisation, and universal expansion. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to analyse Persian influence, explain Greek contributions, evaluate Roman structures, assess cultural identity formation, and describe the enduring legacy of these civilisations for Christianity.

Glossary of Terms



Alexander the Great: The Macedonian ruler who conquered much of the ancient world in the fourth century BCE, spreading Greek language and culture, known as Hellenism.

Citizenship (Roman): A legal status in the Roman Empire that granted individuals rights such as protection under Roman law and freedom of movement across the empire.

Governance (Roman): The system of provincial administration established by Rome to control conquered territories, often overseen by governors such as Pontius Pilate.

Hellenism: The spread of Greek culture, language, and philosophy across the Mediterranean and Near East following the conquests of Alexander the Great.

Infrastructure (Roman): Physical structures such as roads, aqueducts, and trade networks built by the Romans, which facilitated communication, travel, and the spread of ideas.

Judgement (Final): A belief influenced by Persian and Zoroastrian thought, referring to the ultimate divine evaluation of human actions at the end of time.

Septuagint: A Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures produced in Alexandria, widely used among Greek-speaking Jews and later quoted in the New Testament.

Tolerance (Roman religious): The Roman policy of allowing conquered peoples to practice their own religions, provided they did not threaten imperial stability.

Universalization of Christianity: The expansion of Christianity beyond Jewish communities into the wider Greco-Roman world, aided by Greek language and Roman infrastructure.

Zoroastrianism The dominant religion of ancient Persia, founded by the prophet Zoroaster, which emphasized the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the role of angels and demons, and the expectation of a final judgement.

Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions

1. Which Persian religious tradition emphasized the cosmic struggle between good and evil? (SLO 3.1)

- A. Judaism
- B. Zoroastrianism
- C. Stoicism
- D. Epicureanism

2. The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into which language? (SLO 3.2)

- A. Latin
- B. Greek
- C. Aramaic
- D. Hebrew

3. Roman citizenship granted privileges such as legal protection and freedom of what? (SLO 3.3)

- A. Worship
- B. Movement
- C. Trade
- D. Tax exemption

4. Which Macedonian ruler spread Greek culture across the eastern Mediterranean? (SLO 3.2)

- A. Julius Caesar



- B. Alexander the Great
- C. Cyrus the Great
- D. Augustus

5. Roman governors such as _____ Pilate oversaw taxation and legal matters in Judea. (SLO 3.3)

Short-Answer Questions

- 6. Describe one way Persian influence shaped Jewish thought during the post-exilic period. (SLO 3.1)
- 7. Explain how Greek philosophy interacted with Jewish wisdom traditions. (SLO 3.2)
- 8. Analyse the role of Roman infrastructure in the spread of Christianity. (SLO 3.3)
- 9. Assess how early Christians distinguished themselves from Greco-Roman culture. (SLO 3.4)
- 10. Identify one lasting legacy of Roman governance that influenced the early Church. (SLO 3.5)

Long-Answer Questions

- 11. Discuss the impact of Persian religious concepts such as angels, resurrection, and final judgement on Jewish and Christian theology. (SLO 3.1)
- 12. Evaluate the significance of the Septuagint for early Christianity, particularly in its use within the New Testament. (SLO 3.2)
- 13. Compare and contrast Roman governance, law, and religious tolerance, highlighting their effects on Jewish society and the Christian movement. (SLO 3.3)
- 14. Analyse how Jewish and Christian identities were negotiated within a multicultural Greco-Roman world. (SLO 3.4)
- 15. Assess the enduring contributions of Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations to the universalisation of Christianity. (SLO 3.5)

Long-Answer Questions

- 11. Discuss the impact of Persian religious concepts such as angels, resurrection, and final judgement on Jewish and Christian theology. (Linked to SLO 3.1)
- 12. Evaluate the significance of the Septuagint for early Christianity, particularly in its use within the New Testament. (Linked to SLO 3.2)
- 13. Compare and contrast Roman governance, law, and religious tolerance, highlighting their effects on Jewish society and the Christian movement. (Linked to SLO 3.3)
- 14. Analyse how Jewish and Christian identities were negotiated within a multicultural Greco-Roman world. (Linked to SLO 3.4)
- 15. Assess the enduring contributions of Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations to the universalisation of Christianity. (Linked to SLO 3.5)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions (Multiple Choice)

- 1. b) Zoroastrianism
- 2. b) Greek
- 3. b) Movement
- 4. b) Alexander the Great
- 5. b) Pontius



Short-Answer Questions

6. Persian influence introduced concepts such as angelology and eschatology, which shaped Jewish theology.
7. Greek philosophy provided rational frameworks that interacted with Jewish wisdom traditions, enriching ethical reflection.
8. Roman roads and trade routes enabled missionaries to travel widely, facilitating the rapid spread of Christianity.
9. Early Christians rejected emperor worship and emphasised humility, service, and baptism, distinguishing themselves from Greco-Roman norms.
10. Roman administrative organisation provided models for Church governance and structure.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Basic response: Persian religious concepts influenced Jewish beliefs about angels, resurrection, and final judgement, which were later integrated into Christian theology.

Value-added response: These ideas provided a framework for Christian eschatology, shaping doctrines of eternal life and divine justice.

2. Basic response: The Septuagint made Jewish scriptures accessible to Greek-speaking communities and was widely quoted in the New Testament.

Value-added response: It also facilitated theological dialogue with the wider Greco-Roman world, bridging Jewish tradition and Christian proclamation.

3. Basic response: Roman governance imposed taxation and military control, Roman law provided consistency, and religious tolerance allowed limited freedom.

Value-added response: These structures created tensions with Jewish practices but also provided stability that enabled Christianity to grow.

4. Basic response: Jews and Christians negotiated identity by balancing tradition with adaptation to foreign cultures.

Value-added response: This negotiation fostered resilience, enabling Christianity to thrive while maintaining distinctiveness in a multicultural world.

5. Basic response: Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations contributed theological ideas, language, and infrastructure to Christianity.

Value-added response: Their combined legacies universalised Christianity, transforming it into a global faith with enduring cultural and organisational foundations.

. Answers to Pilot Questions Series 3

Part 1: Persian Influence on Jewish and Christian Thought

- Babylonian exile
- Good
- Local governance structures

Part 2: Greek Influence and Hellenistic Culture

- Hellenism
- Philosophy
- Greek

Part 3: Roman Political and Social Structures

- Pontius
- Movement
- Worship of the emperor



Part 4: Cultural Interactions and Identity Formation

- Cultural pressures
- Emperor worship
- Universal salvation

Part 5: Legacy of Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences

- Resurrection
- Rome
- Spread

References and Attributions [Series 3]

This section lists references and attributions for Series 3: Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences on Early Christianity. It includes suggested open educational resources (OERs), external sources, and AI-generated illustration prompts. Entries are presented in APA style for clarity and consistency.

General References

- Boyce, M. (2001). *Zoroastrians: Their religious beliefs and practices*. London: Routledge.
- Ferguson, E. (2003). *Backgrounds of early Christianity* (3rd ed.). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Goodman, M. (2019). *Rome and Jerusalem: The clash of ancient civilisations*. London: Penguin.
- Hengel, M. (1974). *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*. London: SCM Press.
- Wright, N. T. (2012). *Paul and the faithfulness of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Tables, Boxes)

Part 1 Persian Influence on Jewish and Christian Thought

- **Figure 3.1** The Persian Empire and Jewish return from exile

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Persian Empire map Jewish return Babylon OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a labelled map of the Persian Empire highlighting Babylon and Jerusalem, with arrows showing Jewish return.”

- **Box 3.1** Parallels between Zoroastrian and Jewish thought

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Zoroastrian Jewish parallels angels resurrection OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a table comparing Zoroastrian concepts with Jewish parallels such as angels, resurrection, and judgement.”

- **Plate 3.1** Persian officials administering provinces

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Persian officials provincial governance illustration OER”.

AI prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of Persian officials overseeing provincial governance with scrolls and records.”

Part 2 Greek Influence and Hellenistic Culture

- **Figure 3.2** The spread of Hellenism under Alexander the Great

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Alexander the Great conquests Hellenism map OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a labelled map showing Alexander the Great’s conquests and the spread of Hellenistic culture.”



- *Box 3.2 Greek philosophy and Jewish wisdom traditions*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Greek philosophy Jewish wisdom traditions comparison OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a table comparing Greek philosophy themes with Jewish wisdom traditions.”

- *Plate 3.2 Jewish scholars producing the Septuagint*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Septuagint translation Jewish scholars illustration OER”.

AI prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of Jewish scholars translating Hebrew scriptures into Greek in Alexandria.”

Part 3 Roman Political and Social Structures

- *Plate 3.3 Roman governance in Judea*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Roman governor Pontius Pilate Judea illustration OER”.

AI prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of a Roman governor addressing Jewish leaders in Judea.”

- *Figure 3.3 Roman infrastructure supporting communication and trade*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Roman roads trade routes diagram OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a diagram showing Roman roads and trade routes across the empire.”

- *Box 3.3 Roman religious tolerance and Jewish conflict*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Roman religious tolerance Jewish conflict summary OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a table summarising Roman religious tolerance policies and conflicts with Jewish practices.”

Part 4 Cultural Interactions and Identity Formation

- *Box 3.4 Jewish responses to cultural influences*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Jewish adaptation resistance cultural influences summary OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a table summarising Jewish adaptation and resistance to foreign cultural influences.”

- *Figure 3.4 Shaping of early Christian identity*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “early Christian identity continuity distinctiveness diagram OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a diagram showing continuity with Jewish traditions and distinctiveness in early Christian identity.”

- *Plate 3.4 Early Christians meeting in a Roman house church*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “early Christian house church illustration OER”.

AI prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of early Christians gathering in a Roman house church.”

Part 5 Legacy of Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences

- *Box 3.5 Contributions of Persian, Greek, and Roman thought to Christianity*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Persian Greek Roman contributions Christianity summary OER”.

AI prompt: “Generate a table summarising Persian, Greek, and Roman contributions to Christian theology and practice.”

- *Figure 3.5 Political and cultural frameworks inherited by the early Church*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “Roman political cultural frameworks early Church diagram OER”.



AI prompt: “Generate a diagram showing Roman political and cultural frameworks adopted by the early Church.”

- *Plate 3.5 Early Christian missionaries on Roman roads*

Attribution: Suggested OER search string “early Christian missionaries Roman roads illustration OER”.

AI prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of early Christian missionaries travelling Roman roads to spread Christianity.”

Course Code: CRS 101

Course Title: Background to Christianity

Course Units: 3 Units

Series 4: Jewish Groups, Beliefs, and Apocalyptic Thought

Part 1: Jewish Religious Groups in the First Century

- 1.1 Pharisees and their emphasis on the Law
- 1.2 Sadducees and temple authority
- 1.3 Essenes and apocalyptic expectations
- 1.4 Zealots and political resistance

Part 2: Core Jewish Beliefs and Practices

- 2.1 Covenant and Torah observance
- 2.2 Temple worship and sacrifice
- 2.3 Synagogue life and community traditions
- 2.4 Leadership roles: priests, scribes, and teachers

Part 3: Apocalyptic Thought and Literature

- 3.1 Meaning of apocalypticism in Jewish tradition
- 3.2 Key texts: Daniel, 1 Enoch, and Dead Sea Scrolls
- 3.3 Themes of judgement, resurrection, and cosmic struggle
- 3.4 Influence on early Christian eschatology

Part 4: Impact on Early Christianity

- 4.1 Continuity of Jewish beliefs in Christian teaching
- 4.2 Divergence in messianic expectations
- 4.3 Apocalyptic hope in the New Testament
- 4.4 The shaping of Christian identity through Jewish thought



INTRODUCTION

In the last Series, we explored how Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations influenced the development of early Christianity. That study highlighted the external cultural and political forces that shaped Christian identity. In this Series, our attention turns inward, to the Jewish world itself, where diverse groups, beliefs, and apocalyptic expectations provided the immediate context in which Christianity first emerged. Understanding these dynamics is essential for grasping the continuity and divergence between Judaism and Christianity in the first century.

The aim of this Series is to familiarise you with the major Jewish sects, their core beliefs and practices, and the apocalyptic thought that characterised much of Jewish religious life. By the end, you should be able to explain how these elements influenced early Christian teaching and identity formation.

We shall commence this Series by examining Jewish religious groups in the first century, including the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. Next, we will explore core Jewish beliefs and practices, focusing on covenant, Torah observance, temple worship, and synagogue life. Following that, we will consider apocalyptic thought and literature, looking at texts such as Daniel, 1 Enoch, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the themes of judgement and resurrection. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the impact of these Jewish groups and beliefs on early Christianity, highlighting both continuity and divergence in messianic expectations and apocalyptic hope.

Series Learning Outcomes

Series 4: Jewish Groups, Beliefs, and Apocalyptic Thought

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- SLO 4.1 define the main Jewish religious groups of the first century, including the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots,
- SLO 4.2 explain the core Jewish beliefs and practices such as covenant, Torah observance, temple worship, and synagogue life,
- SLO 4.3 analyse the themes and significance of Jewish apocalyptic thought and literature, including texts like Daniel, 1 Enoch, and the Dead Sea Scrolls,
- SLO 4.4 evaluate the influence of Jewish apocalyptic expectations on early Christian eschatology, and
- SLO 4.5 assess the impact of Jewish groups and beliefs on the shaping of early Christian identity and teaching.

4.1 Jewish Religious Groups in the First Century

Jewish society in the first century was diverse, with several groups shaping religious life and political thought. Each group had its own interpretation of the Torah (the Jewish law and teaching), its own practices, and its own vision for the future of Israel. Understanding these groups is essential for appreciating the environment in which Christianity first emerged.

4.1.1 Pharisees and their emphasis on the Law

The Pharisees were a Jewish group known for their strict interpretation of the Torah. The term Pharisee refers to members of a movement that emphasised oral traditions alongside written law. They believed that holiness could be achieved by observing purity laws in everyday life, not just in the temple. Their influence was strong in synagogues and among ordinary people.

Fill in the blank: The Pharisees emphasised both written law and _____ traditions.



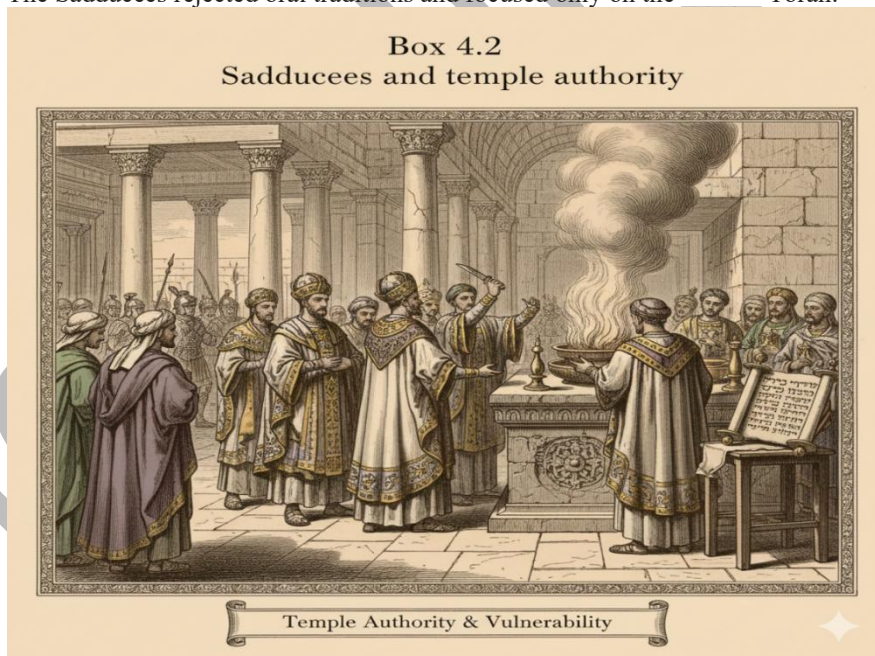


Box 4.1 Key features of Pharisaic teaching.

4.1.2 Sadducees and temple authority

The Sadducees were a priestly group closely associated with the temple in Jerusalem. The term Sadducee refers to members of the aristocratic class who controlled temple worship and sacrifices. They rejected oral traditions and focused only on the written Torah. Unlike the Pharisees, they did not believe in resurrection or angels. Their power was tied to the temple, making them vulnerable when it was destroyed in 70 CE.

Fill in the blank: The Sadducees rejected oral traditions and focused only on the _____ Torah.



Box 4.2 Sadducees and temple authority

4.1.3 Essenes and apocalyptic expectations

The Essenes were a Jewish sect that lived in communities apart from mainstream society. The term Essene refers to members of a group known for strict purity rules and apocalyptic beliefs. They expected God to intervene soon to defeat evil and establish righteousness. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered near Qumran, are often linked to Essene communities and reveal their focus on end-time battles and divine judgement.

Fill in the blank: The Dead Sea Scrolls are often linked to the _____ communities.





Plate 4.1 is ready: an artistic depiction of the Essene community near Qumran.

4.1.4 Zealots and political resistance

The Zealots were a revolutionary group committed to resisting Roman rule. The term Zealot refers to Jewish fighters who believed that violent resistance was necessary to defend God's law and Israel's independence. They were active during the Jewish revolts against Rome and played a role in the events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem. Their passion for freedom made them influential but also controversial.

Fill in the blank: The Zealots believed violent resistance was necessary to defend _____ law and Israel's independence.



Figure 4.2 Zealots and Jewish resistance.

4.2 Core Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Jewish life in the first century was shaped by deeply held beliefs and practices that gave meaning to everyday living. These centred on the covenant (a sacred agreement between God and Israel), the Torah (the law and teaching of God), and the institutions of worship such as the temple and synagogue. Together, they provided the framework for identity, community, and devotion.

4.2.1 Covenant and Torah observance



The covenant was the foundation of Jewish faith, representing the binding relationship between God and His people. The Torah was the written law that guided this relationship, covering moral, ritual, and social obligations. Observance of the Torah was seen as a way of remaining faithful to the covenant. Daily practices such as dietary laws, Sabbath rest, and purity regulations were expressions of this commitment.

Fill in the blank: Observance of the _____ was seen as a way of remaining faithful to the covenant.

Figure 4.2 Zealots and Jewish resistance



4.2.2 Temple worship and sacrifice

The temple in Jerusalem was the central place of worship for Jews. It was considered the dwelling place of God's presence. Sacrifice was a key practice, involving offerings of animals, grain, or incense to express devotion, thanksgiving, or atonement. Priests oversaw these rituals, ensuring they were performed according to the law. The destruction of the temple in 70 CE was a turning point, forcing Judaism to adapt its worship practices.

Figure 4.3
Structure of the Jerusalem Temple

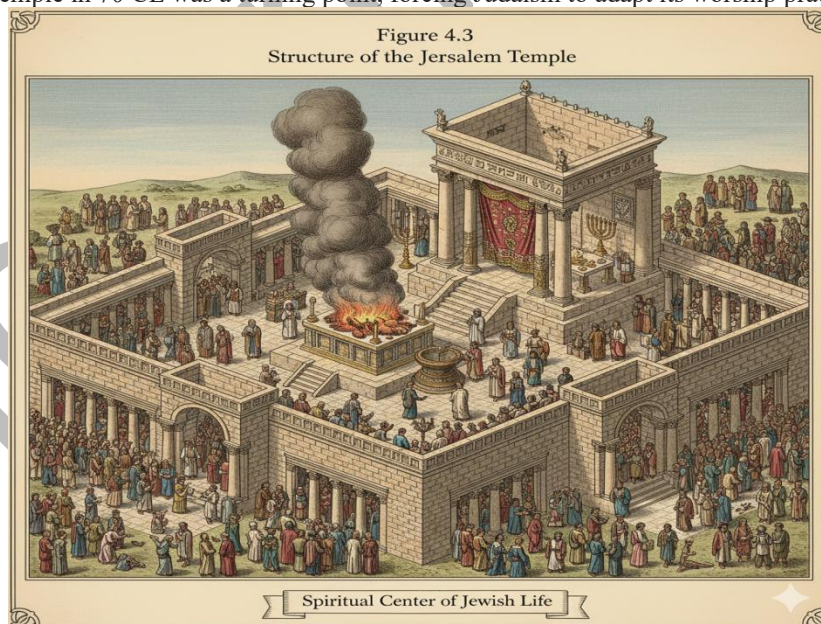


Figure 4.3: Structure of the Jerusalem Temple

4.2.3 Synagogue life and community traditions



The synagogue was a local centre for prayer, teaching, and community gatherings. The term synagogue refers to a place where Jews assembled to read the Torah, pray, and discuss matters of faith. Unlike the temple, synagogues were widespread and accessible, making them vital for sustaining Jewish life outside Jerusalem. They also became important spaces for teaching and debate, influencing the spread of ideas in the first century.

Fill in the blank: Unlike the temple, _____ were widespread and accessible, making them vital for sustaining Jewish life.



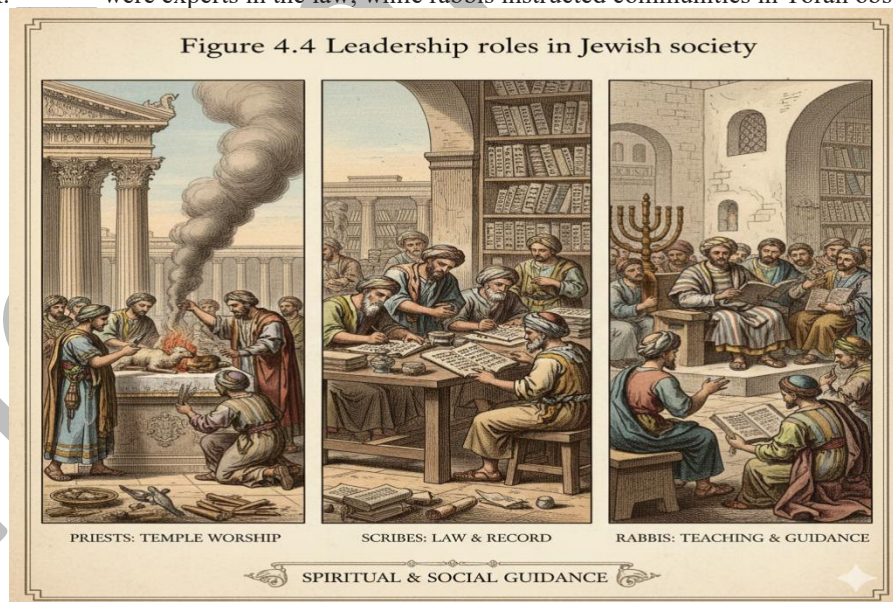
Plate 4.2 A first-century synagogue gathering

Plate 4.2 is ready: an artistic illustration of a first-century synagogue gathering.

4.2.4 Leadership roles: priests, scribes, and teachers

Jewish society relied on religious leaders to guide worship and teaching. Priests were responsible for temple sacrifices, scribes were experts in the law, and teachers (often called rabbis) instructed communities in Torah observance. These roles ensured continuity of tradition and provided authority in matters of faith. Leadership was both spiritual and social, shaping the way communities lived out their beliefs.

Fill in the blank: _____ were experts in the law, while rabbis instructed communities in Torah observance.



4.3 Apocalyptic Thought and Literature

Apocalyptic thought was a powerful current in Jewish religious life during the first century. The term apocalypticism refers to a worldview that anticipates God's dramatic intervention in history to defeat evil and establish righteousness. This expectation was expressed through symbolic visions, coded language, and vivid imagery in Jewish literature. Such ideas provided hope for oppressed communities and shaped the imagination of early Christians.



4.3.1 Meaning of apocalypticism in Jewish tradition

Apocalypticism emerged as a response to suffering and foreign domination. It offered assurance that history was under God's control and that justice would ultimately prevail. Central to this belief was the conviction that present struggles were temporary and would be replaced by divine victory.

Fill in the blank: Apocalypticism offered assurance that history was under _____ control and justice would prevail.

Feature	Description	Example/Context
Divine Intervention	Belief that God will decisively act in history to defeat evil and restore order.	Prophecies of God overthrowing oppressive empires and vindicating the righteous ¹ ²
Coded Language	Use of symbolic imagery and metaphors to conceal meaning from outsiders.	Beasts, horns, and cosmic signs in texts like Daniel and Revelation ²
Hope for Justice	Assurance that the oppressed will be vindicated and the wicked punished.	Vision of resurrection and final judgment ¹ ³
Dualism	Contrast between present evil age and future age of righteousness.	"This age" vs. "the age to come" ²
Revelation through Vision	Knowledge of hidden divine plans revealed to chosen individuals.	Angelic mediators delivering visions to prophets ²
Messianic Expectation	Anticipation of a savior figure who ushers in God's kingdom.	Belief in the coming of the Moshiah ³
Cosmic Catastrophe	Expectation of upheaval in nature and society before renewal.	Earthquakes, celestial signs, wars of nations ²

Box 4.3 Features of Jewish apocalypticism.

4.3.2 Key texts: Daniel, 1 Enoch, and Dead Sea Scrolls

The Book of Daniel is a biblical text that uses visions and symbols to describe God's triumph over oppressive empires. 1 Enoch is a collection of writings that expand on themes of angels, judgement, and cosmic battles. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered near Qumran, include apocalyptic writings that reveal the expectations of a Jewish sect awaiting God's intervention. Together, these texts illustrate the diversity and richness of apocalyptic literature.

Fill in the blank: The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered near _____ and include apocalyptic writings.

Figure 4.5 Key Jewish Apocalyptic Texts

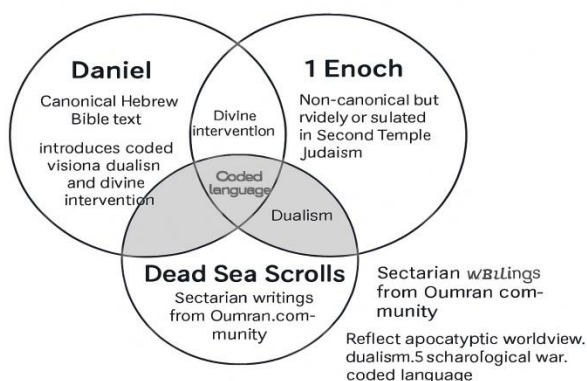


Figure 4.5 Key Jewish apocalyptic texts.

4.3.3 Themes of judgement, resurrection, and cosmic struggle

Apocalyptic literature often emphasised judgement, the belief that God would hold nations and individuals accountable. It also highlighted resurrection, the hope that the righteous dead would be raised to share in God's victory. Another recurring theme was cosmic struggle, portraying the battle between good and evil forces. These themes gave meaning to suffering and inspired perseverance among believers.

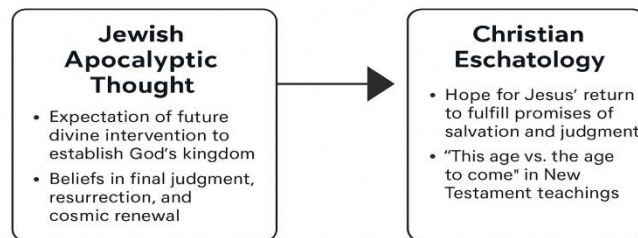




4.3.4 Influence on early Christian eschatology

Early Christians inherited apocalyptic expectations from Judaism. The term eschatology refers to beliefs about the end times and final destiny of humanity. Christian writings such as the Book of Revelation drew heavily on Jewish apocalyptic imagery, portraying visions of divine judgement, resurrection, and the ultimate triumph of Christ. These ideas shaped Christian hope and identity, especially in times of persecution.

Figure 4.6 Jewish Apocalyptic Thought and Christian Eschatology



4.4 Impact on Early Christianity

The beliefs and practices of Judaism provided the immediate background for the rise of Christianity. Early Christians inherited many traditions from Judaism but also reinterpreted them in light of their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This mixture of continuity and divergence shaped Christian identity and gave rise to distinctive teachings that spread across the Roman world.

4.4.1 Continuity of Jewish beliefs in Christian teaching

Early Christianity retained core Jewish beliefs such as monotheism, reverence for the Torah (the law and teaching of God), and the importance of prayer. The ethical teachings of Jesus often echoed Jewish wisdom traditions, emphasising love of God and neighbour. Christian worship also drew from synagogue practices, including the reading of scripture and communal prayer.



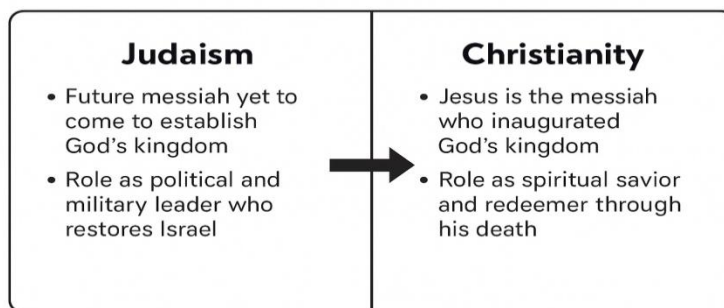
Belief/Practice	Judaism	Christianity
Monotheism	Belief in one God (YHWH), central to all teachings	Belief in one God, often expressed through Trinitarian theology
Scripture Reading	Torah and Tanakh studied regularly in synagogue and home	Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) foundational; New Testament added later
Prayer	Daily prayers, including Shema and Amidah	Prayer central to worship; includes Lord's Prayer and Psalms
Ethical Conduct	Emphasis on justice, charity, and moral living	Teachings of Jesus reinforce ethical living and love of neighbor
Sabbath Observance	Shabbat observed from Friday evening to Saturday evening	Sunday worship rooted in Sabbath tradition, though timing differs
Messianic Hope	Expectation of a future messiah to restore Israel	Belief that Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills Jewish prophecy
Reverence for the Torah	Torah seen as divine instruction and guide for life	Jesus and apostles affirm Torah's authority; reinterpretation in Christian context

4.4.2 Divergence in messianic expectations

The term Messiah refers to the anointed one expected to deliver Israel. Jewish groups often anticipated a political or military leader who would restore independence. Christians, however, proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah who fulfilled these hopes in a spiritual and universal way. This divergence created tension between Jewish communities and the emerging Christian movement.

Fill in the blank: Christians proclaimed _____ as the Messiah who fulfilled Jewish hopes in a spiritual way.

Figure 4.7 Divergence in Messianic Expectations



4.4.3 Apocalyptic hope in the New Testament

Christian writings such as the Book of Revelation carried forward Jewish apocalyptic themes. The term apocalyptic hope refers to the expectation of God's final victory over evil and the establishment of a new creation. Early Christians believed that Jesus' resurrection was the first step in this process, and they awaited his return to complete it. This hope sustained communities facing persecution and hardship.



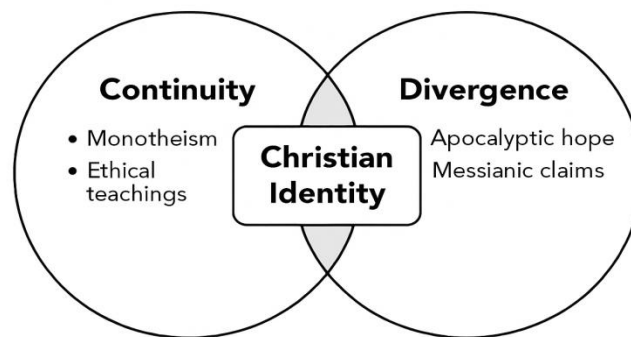


4.4.4 The shaping of Christian identity through Jewish thought

Christian identity was shaped by both continuity with Jewish traditions and divergence from them. The emphasis on covenant, scripture, and worship practices gave Christianity deep roots in Judaism. At the same time, belief in Jesus as Messiah and the reinterpretation of apocalyptic hope created a distinct identity. This balance enabled Christianity to grow beyond its Jewish origins and become a universal faith.

Fill in the blank: Christian identity was shaped by both continuity with Jewish traditions and _____ from them.

Figure 4.8 Shaping of Christian Identity



Series Summary

This Series has explored the diverse Jewish groups, beliefs, and apocalyptic thought that shaped the religious landscape of the first century and provided the immediate context for the rise of Christianity. Its purpose was to help you understand how Judaism influenced early Christian identity, both through continuity and divergence, and why these themes remain central to interpreting the New Testament.

We began by examining the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots, before moving on to core Jewish beliefs such as covenant, Torah observance, temple worship, and synagogue life. Subsequently, we considered apocalyptic thought and literature, including Daniel, 1 Enoch, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, highlighting themes of judgement, resurrection, and cosmic struggle. Finally, we assessed the impact of these traditions on early Christianity, focusing on messianic expectations, apocalyptic hope, and the shaping of Christian identity. In line with the Series Learning



Outcomes, you should now be able to define the major Jewish groups, explain their beliefs and practices, analyse apocalyptic themes, evaluate their influence on Christian eschatology, and assess how these elements contributed to the development of early Christian teaching and identity.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Apocalypticism: worldview that anticipates God's dramatic intervention in history to defeat evil and establish righteousness, often expressed through visions, symbols, and coded language.

Apocalyptic hope: The expectation that God will bring final victory over evil and create a new world, a theme carried into early Christian writings such as the Book of Revelation.

Covenant: A sacred agreement between God and Israel, forming the foundation of Jewish faith and identity.

Dead Sea Scrolls: Ancient Jewish writings discovered near Qumran, many of which reflect apocalyptic beliefs and strict community rules.

Eschatology: Beliefs about the end times and the final destiny of humanity, including themes of judgement and resurrection.

Essene: A Jewish sect known for strict purity rules and apocalyptic expectations, often associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Messiah: The anointed one expected to deliver Israel. In Judaism, often seen as a political or military leader, while Christians proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah in a spiritual and universal sense.

Pharisee: A Jewish group that emphasised both the written Torah and oral traditions, focusing on purity laws and synagogue teaching.

Priest: A religious leader responsible for overseeing temple sacrifices and rituals in Jewish society.

Resurrection: The belief that the righteous dead would be raised to share in God's victory, a central theme in apocalyptic literature and early Christian teaching.

Sadducee: A Jewish group linked to the temple and aristocracy, rejecting oral traditions and denying beliefs such as resurrection and angels.

Scribe: An expert in the Jewish law who interpreted and taught the Torah to the community.

Synagogue: A local centre for Jewish prayer, teaching, and community gatherings, distinct from the temple in Jerusalem.

Torah: The Jewish law and teaching, covering moral, ritual, and social obligations, and guiding faithfulness to the covenant.

Zealot: A Jewish revolutionary group that believed violent resistance was necessary to defend God's law and Israel's independence.

CONCEPT CHECK QUESTIONS

Objective (Multiple Choice) Questions

Define the term covenant in Jewish faith. (Linked to SLO 4.2)

- A) A sacred agreement between God and Israel
- B) A collection of apocalyptic writings
- C) A synagogue gathering for prayer
- D) A priestly ritual performed in the temple

Which Jewish sect is most closely associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls? (Linked to SLO 4.3)

- A) Pharisees
- B) Sadducees
- C) Essenes
- D) Zealots

Identify the Jewish group that emphasised oral traditions alongside the written Torah. (Linked to SLO 4.1)

- A) Sadducees
- B) Pharisees
- C) Zealots
- D) Essenes

Which Jewish sect rejected oral traditions and denied resurrection? (Linked to SLO 4.1)

- A) Pharisees



- B) Sadducees
- C) Essenes
- D) Zealots

Name the New Testament book that reflects Jewish apocalyptic themes. (Linked to SLO 4.4)

- A) Acts
- B) Revelation
- C) Romans
- D) Galatians

Short-Answer Questions

6. Explain how synagogue life contributed to sustaining Jewish identity in the first century. (Linked to SLO 4.2)
7. Describe the main differences between Pharisees and Sadducees in their beliefs and practices. (Linked to SLO 4.1)
8. Analyse the role of apocalyptic literature in offering hope to oppressed Jewish communities. (Linked to SLO 4.3)
9. Summarise the divergence between Jewish and Christian messianic expectations. (Linked to SLO 4.4)
10. Outline the leadership roles of priests, scribes, and teachers in Jewish society. (Linked to SLO 4.2)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Evaluate the influence of Jewish apocalyptic thought on early Christian eschatology, using examples from Daniel, 1 Enoch, and Revelation. (Linked to SLO 4.3 & 4.4)
12. Assess the impact of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE on Jewish worship and its implications for Christianity. (Linked to SLO 4.2 & 4.4)
13. Discuss how the beliefs and practices of Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots created the environment in which Christianity emerged. (Linked to SLO 4.1 & 4.5)
14. Analyse the divergence in messianic expectations between Jewish groups and Christians, and explain how this shaped early Christian identity. (Linked to SLO 4.4 & 4.5)
15. Examine how continuity in Jewish traditions such as monotheism and scripture reading contributed to the distinctiveness of Christian worship and belief. (Linked to SLO 4.2 & 4.5)

Answers to Concept Check Questions

Objective (Multiple Choice) Questions

- A) A sacred agreement between God and Israel
- C) Essenes
- B) Pharisees
- B) Sadducees
- B) Revelation

Short-Answer Questions

6. Synagogues provided accessible centres for prayer, teaching, and community gatherings, sustaining Jewish life outside Jerusalem.
7. Pharisees emphasised oral traditions and resurrection, while Sadducees rejected oral traditions and denied resurrection.
8. Apocalyptic literature assured communities that God controlled history and would bring justice, offering hope during oppression.
9. Jews expected a political or military Messiah, while Christians proclaimed Jesus as a spiritual and universal Messiah.
10. Priests oversaw temple sacrifices, scribes interpreted the law, and teachers (rabbis) instructed communities in Torah observance.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response: Jewish apocalyptic thought shaped Christian eschatology by emphasising divine judgement, resurrection, and cosmic struggle, themes evident in Revelation.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may connect this to wider Greco-Roman influences on Christian eschatology, noting how apocalyptic imagery resonated with persecuted communities across the empire.

Basic response: The destruction of the temple ended sacrificial worship, shifting focus to synagogues and scripture, which influenced Christianity's non-temple-based worship.



Value-added response: Outstanding learners may highlight how this event accelerated the separation between Judaism and Christianity, with Christians interpreting Jesus as the new temple presence.

Basic response: These groups created a diverse environment: Pharisees shaped synagogue life, Sadducees controlled temple worship, Essenes promoted apocalyptic expectations, and Zealots resisted Roman rule.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may evaluate how these dynamics influenced Christian responses to authority, scripture, and eschatology, situating Christianity within broader Jewish debates.

Basic response: Jews expected a political or military Messiah, while Christians proclaimed Jesus as a spiritual and universal Messiah.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may explore how this divergence contributed to tensions between Jewish and Christian communities, and how it shaped Christian missionary activity.

Basic response: Continuity in monotheism, scripture reading, and worship practices gave Christianity deep roots in Judaism.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may assess how these continuities allowed Christianity to appeal to Gentiles while maintaining legitimacy among Jewish converts, fostering its growth as a universal faith.

Answers to Pilot Questions

Part 1: Jewish Religious Groups in the First Century

- Oral traditions
- Written Torah
- Qumran communities
- God's law

Part 2: Core Jewish Beliefs and Practices

- Torah
- Temple
- Synagogues
- Scribes

Part 3: Apocalyptic Thought and Literature

- God's
- Qumran
- Cosmic
- Judaism

Part 4: Impact on Early Christianity

- Monotheism
- Jesus
- Resurrection
- Divergence

References and Attributions [Series 4]

Textual Sources

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Wright, N. T. (1992). *The New Testament and the People of God*. London: SPCK.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Tables, and Boxes)

Box 4.1 Key features of Pharisaic teaching

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising the main features of Pharisaic teaching in the first century."

Suggested OER search string: "Pharisees oral law purity synagogue OER."

Figure 4.1 Comparison of Pharisees and Sadducees

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram comparing Pharisees and Sadducees in terms of beliefs and practices."

Suggested OER search string: "Pharisees Sadducees comparison diagram OER."

Plate 4.1 Essene community near Qumran



AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of Essenes living in a desert community near Qumran."

Suggested OER search string: "Essene community Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls illustration OER."

Figure 4.2 Zealots and Jewish resistance

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the role of Zealots in Jewish revolts against Rome."

Suggested OER search string: "Zealots Jewish resistance Rome diagram OER."

Box 4.2 Key aspects of Torah observance

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising key aspects of Torah observance in Jewish life."

Suggested OER search string: "Torah observance dietary laws Sabbath purity OER."

Figure 4.3 Structure of the Jerusalem temple

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a labelled diagram of the Jerusalem temple showing areas for sacrifice."

Suggested OER search string: "Jerusalem temple structure diagram OER."

Plate 4.2 A first-century synagogue gathering

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of a first-century synagogue with people gathered for prayer and teaching."

Suggested OER search string: "first century synagogue illustration OER."

Figure 4.4 Leadership roles in Jewish society

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the roles of priests, scribes, and teachers in Jewish society."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish priests scribes rabbis roles diagram OER."

Box 4.3 Features of Jewish apocalypticism

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising the main features of Jewish apocalypticism."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish apocalypticism features divine intervention OER."

Figure 4.5 Key Jewish apocalyptic texts

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the relationship between Daniel, 1 Enoch, and Dead Sea Scrolls."

Suggested OER search string: "Daniel 1 Enoch Dead Sea Scrolls apocalyptic texts diagram OER."

Plate 4.3 Cosmic struggle in apocalyptic imagery

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of cosmic struggle between good and evil in apocalyptic imagery."

Suggested OER search string: "apocalyptic literature cosmic struggle illustration OER."

Figure 4.6 Jewish apocalyptic thought and Christian eschatology

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing continuity between Jewish apocalyptic thought and Christian eschatology."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish apocalyptic thought Christian eschatology diagram OER."

Box 4.4 Continuity between Judaism and Christianity

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising continuity between Judaism and Christianity in beliefs and practices."

Suggested OER search string: "Judaism Christianity continuity shared beliefs OER."

Figure 4.7 Divergence in messianic expectations

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the contrast between Jewish and Christian messianic expectations."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish Christian messianic expectations diagram OER."

Plate 4.4 Early Christians and apocalyptic hope

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of early Christians reading apocalyptic texts together."

Suggested OER search string: "early Christians apocalyptic hope Revelation illustration OER."

Figure 4.8 Shaping of Christian identity

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing how continuity and divergence shaped Christian identity."

Suggested OER search string: "Christian identity continuity divergence Judaism diagram OER."



Course Code: CRS 101
Course Title: Background to Christianity
Course Units: 3 Units

Series 5: Messianic Expectations Before and During the Birth of Jesus Christ

- Part 1: Jewish Messianic Hopes Before Jesus
 - 5.1.1 Prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures
 - 5.1.2 Political and social expectations of deliverance
 - 5.1.3 Apocalyptic visions of a coming saviour
- Part 2: Messianic Movements and Figures
 - 5.2.1 Popular claimants and revolutionary leaders
 - 5.2.2 The role of Zealots and resistance movements
 - 5.2.3 Rabbinic interpretations of messianic hope
- Part 3: The Birth of Jesus and Messianic Fulfilment
 - 5.3.1 Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth
 - 5.3.2 The role of prophecy in Matthew and Luke
 - 5.3.3 Reactions of Jewish groups to Jesus' messianic claim
- Part 4: Early Christian Understanding of the Messiah
 - 5.4.1 Jesus as fulfilment of Jewish prophecy
 - 5.4.2 Redefining messiahship: suffering servant and universal saviour
 - 5.4.3 Impact on early Christian identity and mission

INTRODUCTION

In the last Series, we explored Jewish groups, beliefs, and apocalyptic thought, gaining insight into the religious and cultural environment that shaped the world of the New Testament. Building on that foundation, we now turn to one of the most significant themes in Jewish and Christian history: messianic expectations. These hopes and beliefs were central to Jewish identity in the first century and provided the backdrop against which the birth of Jesus was understood.

The aim of this Series is to help you grasp the nature of Jewish messianic expectations before and during the birth of Jesus Christ, and to show how these expectations influenced both the reception of Jesus and the development of early Christian teaching.

We shall commence this Series by examining Jewish messianic hopes before Jesus, focusing on prophecies, political aspirations, and apocalyptic visions. Next, we will consider messianic movements and figures, including popular claimants and revolutionary leaders. Following that, we will study the birth of Jesus and its presentation in the Gospels, highlighting the role of prophecy and the reactions of Jewish groups. Finally, we will conclude with an exploration of how early Christians redefined messiahship, presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy and the universal saviour, and how this shaped Christian identity and mission.

Series Learning Outcomes

Series 5: Messianic Expectations Before and During the Birth of Jesus Christ

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- SLO 5.1 define key Jewish prophecies and hopes that shaped messianic expectations before the birth of Jesus,
- SLO 5.2 explain the role of political, social, and apocalyptic visions in forming Jewish messianic hopes,
- SLO 5.3 analyse the significance of messianic movements and figures in first-century Judaism,
- SLO 5.4 describe the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth and their use of prophecy,
- SLO 5.5 evaluate the reactions of Jewish groups to Jesus' messianic claim, and
- SLO 5.6 assess how early Christians redefined messiahship and applied it to their identity and mission.

5.1 Jewish Messianic Hopes Before Jesus

Jewish messianic hopes in the centuries before Jesus were shaped by scripture, political struggles, and apocalyptic visions. These expectations reflected the longing for God's intervention to restore Israel and bring justice. Understanding these hopes helps us see why the birth of Jesus was interpreted in such profound ways.



5.1.1 Prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures

The Hebrew Scriptures (the Jewish Bible, also known as the Old Testament in Christianity) contain prophecies that were understood as pointing to a future deliverer. The term Messiah means “anointed one” and referred to a king or leader chosen by God. Texts such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah spoke of a ruler who would bring peace, justice, and restore Israel’s fortunes. These prophecies gave hope during times of exile and oppression.

Fill in the blank: The term Messiah means “_____ one” and referred to a king or leader chosen by God.

Prophet	Scripture Reference	Prophecy Summary	Messianic Theme
Isaiah	Isaiah 7:14	A virgin will conceive and bear a son called Immanuel	Divine birth and presence
	Isaiah 9:6–7	A child will be born who will rule with justice and peace	Eternal kingship and divine authority
	Isaiah 11:1–10	A shoot from Jesse will bring wisdom, justice, and peace to all nations	Davidic lineage and universal peace
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 23:5–6	A righteous Branch from David will reign wisely and bring salvation	Messianic king and savior
	Jeremiah 31:31–34	A new covenant will be made, written on hearts, bringing forgiveness	Spiritual renewal and covenantal promise
Micah	Micah 5:2	A ruler will come from Bethlehem, whose origins are from ancient times	Humble birth and eternal nature
	Micah 4:1–4	Future peace and justice will reign from Zion, with nations seeking God’s ways	Eschatological peace and divine teaching

Box 5.1 Selected messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures.

5.1.2 Political and social expectations of deliverance

Jewish messianic hopes were not only spiritual but also political. Under foreign rule, many Jews longed for a deliverer who would restore independence and justice. The term deliverance refers to rescue from oppression and restoration of freedom. These hopes were especially strong during periods of Roman occupation, when heavy taxation and military presence created hardship. The Messiah was often imagined as a warrior king like David, who would defeat enemies and establish God’s kingdom.

Fill in the blank: Under Roman rule, many Jews longed for a deliverer who would restore _____ and justice.

Figure 5.1 Political and Social Roots of Messianic Hope



5.1.3 Apocalyptic visions of a coming saviour

The apocalyptic worldview anticipated God’s dramatic intervention to defeat evil and establish righteousness. The term apocalypse means “revelation” and refers to visions of the end of history. Texts such as Daniel and 1 Enoch



described cosmic battles, divine judgement, and the coming of a saviour figure. These visions gave hope that God's plan would triumph even when circumstances seemed hopeless.

Fill in the blank: The term apocalypse means “ ” and refers to visions of the end of history.



5.2 Messianic Movements and Figures

Messianic movements in the first century reflected the deep longing of Jewish communities for deliverance and restoration. These movements often centred on charismatic figures who claimed or were believed to embody messianic hopes. Understanding these figures and groups helps us see the diversity of expectations that surrounded the birth of Jesus.

5.2.1 Popular claimants and revolutionary leaders

Throughout Jewish history, individuals arose who were seen as potential messianic deliverers. Some claimed divine authority, while others were recognised by their followers as leaders chosen by God. The term claimant refers to someone who presents themselves, or is presented by others, as fulfilling messianic expectations. Revolutionary leaders often sought to overthrow foreign rule, promising freedom and justice. These figures inspired hope but also provoked conflict with Roman authorities.

Fill in the blank: A claimant is someone who presents themselves, or is presented by others, as fulfilling _____ expectations.





Plate 5.2 Popular claimants and revolutionary leaders.

5.2.2 The role of Zealots and resistance movements

The Zealots were a Jewish group committed to resisting Roman rule through armed struggle. The term Zealot comes from their zealous devotion to God's law and their belief that violent resistance was necessary to defend Israel's independence. Resistance movements often drew on messianic hopes, portraying their struggle as part of God's plan to restore His kingdom. These groups played a significant role in shaping the political climate of the first century. Fill in the blank: The Zealots believed that violent _____ was necessary to defend Israel's independence.

5.2.3 Rabbinic interpretations of messianic hope

Rabbinic teachers offered interpretations of messianic prophecies that emphasised spiritual renewal and faithfulness to the Torah (the Jewish law and teaching). Rather than focusing solely on political deliverance, they highlighted the importance of covenant loyalty and moral transformation. These interpretations helped communities maintain hope without necessarily engaging in violent resistance.

Fill in the blank: Rabbinic teachers emphasised spiritual renewal and faithfulness to the _____ rather than only political deliverance.



Theme	Rabbinic Perspective	Scriptural/Traditional Basis
Messianic Prophecy	Messiah will be a human descendant of David, not divine; will restore Israel and peace	Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 23, Talmud Sanhedrin 98a
Covenant Renewal	Messianic age will reaffirm the eternal covenant with Israel, not replace it	Jeremiah 31:31–34 interpreted as deepening Torah fidelity
Torah Observance	Torah remains binding in messianic age; observance will be universal and joyful	Midrash Tehillim 146:7, Rambam's Mishneh Torah
Role of Messiah	Political and spiritual leader who rebuilds Temple, gathers exiles, and judges righteously	Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith
Timing and Signs	Messiah will come when Israel merits it or in a time of great need; signs are debated	Talmud Sanhedrin 97b, Midrashic sources

Box 5.2 Rabbinic interpretations of messianic hope.

5.3 The Birth of Jesus and Messianic Fulfilment

The birth of Jesus is presented in the Gospels as the fulfilment of long-standing Jewish messianic hopes. These accounts highlight prophecy, divine intervention, and the significance of Jesus' identity. By studying them, we can see how early Christians understood Jesus as the Messiah promised in scripture.

5.3.1 Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth

The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament that narrate the life and ministry of Jesus. Matthew and Luke provide detailed accounts of his birth, emphasising divine action and fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew highlights Jesus' genealogy, linking him to David and Abraham, while Luke focuses on the humble circumstances of his birth and the role of shepherds. These accounts show that Jesus' arrival was not random but part of God's plan.

Fill in the blank: Matthew highlights Jesus' genealogy, linking him to _____ and Abraham.





Plate 5.3 Gospel Accounts of Jesus' Birth

5.3.2 The role of prophecy in Matthew and Luke

Prophecy played a central role in presenting Jesus as the Messiah. A prophecy is a divine message or prediction, often recorded in scripture, that reveals God's plan. Matthew cites passages from Isaiah to show that Jesus' birth fulfilled promises of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son called Emmanuel. Luke emphasises the angelic announcements to Mary and the shepherds, portraying Jesus as the saviour for all people. These references reassured early Christians that Jesus was the fulfilment of Jewish hopes.

Fill in the blank: Matthew cites passages from _____ to show that Jesus' birth fulfilled promises of Emmanuel.

Isaiah Prophecy	Reference	Fulfilment in Matthew	Fulfilment in Luke
Virgin birth of Emmanuel	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22–23 — Jesus' birth fulfills "Emmanuel"	Luke 1:26–35 — Angel announces virgin birth to Mary
Child brings peace and rule	Isaiah 9:6–7	Matthew 2:1–6 — Jesus born as king in Bethlehem	Luke 2:11 — "A Savior... Christ the Lord"
Light to Galilee	Isaiah 9:1–2	Matthew 4:13–16 — Jesus begins ministry in Galilee	Luke 4:14–15 — Jesus teaches in Galilean synagogues
Spirit-filled servant	Isaiah 11:1–2	Matthew 3:16 — Spirit descends at Jesus' baptism	Luke 3:22 — Spirit descends; Luke 4:18 quotes Isaiah
Good news to the poor	Isaiah 61:1–2	Implied in Matthew 5 — Beatitudes	Luke 4:18–21 — Jesus reads Isaiah in synagogue

Box 5.3 Key prophecies cited in Matthew and Luke.



5.3.3 Reactions of Jewish groups to Jesus' messianic claim

Not all Jewish groups accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The Pharisees emphasised strict Torah observance and were cautious about new claims. The Sadducees, closely linked to temple authority, rejected ideas such as resurrection and were sceptical of Jesus' teachings. Meanwhile, ordinary people often responded with hope, seeing Jesus as a potential deliverer. These varied reactions highlight the diversity of Jewish thought and the challenges Jesus faced in being recognised as the Messiah.

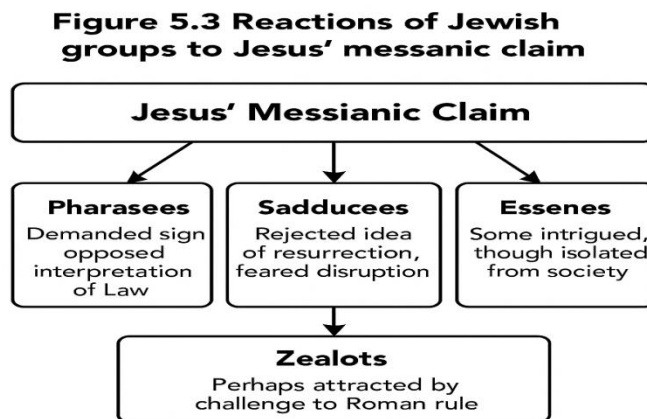


Figure 5.3 Reactions of Jewish Groups to Jesus' Messianic Claim

5.4 Early Christian Understanding of the Messiah

Early Christians interpreted Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the fulfilment of Jewish messianic hopes. Their understanding of the Messiah was distinctive, combining continuity with Jewish prophecy and a radical redefinition of messiahship. This perspective shaped Christian identity and mission in profound ways.

5.4.1 Jesus as fulfilment of Jewish prophecy

Early Christians emphasised that Jesus fulfilled the promises of the prophets. A prophet is a messenger of God who communicates divine will, often through visions or predictions. Passages from Isaiah, Micah, and the Psalms were cited to show that Jesus' birth, ministry, and suffering were part of God's plan. This gave legitimacy to Christian claims and reassured believers that their faith was rooted in scripture.

Fill in the blank: Early Christians emphasised that Jesus fulfilled the promises of the _____.

Source	Reference	Prophecy	Fulfilment
Isaiah	7:14	Virgin birth of Immanuel	Jesus' birth to Mary (Matt. 1:22–23)
Micah	5:2	Ruler from Bethlehem	Jesus' birthplace (Matt. 2:1–6)
Psalms	22	Suffering and mockery of the righteous	Jesus' crucifixion (Matt. 27:46; John 19:24)

5.4.2

Redefining messiahship: suffering servant and universal saviour

The Christian message redefined the role of the Messiah. Instead of a warrior king, Jesus was portrayed as the suffering servant, a figure from Isaiah who bore the sins of others. This concept emphasised humility, sacrifice, and redemption. At the same time, Jesus was presented as the universal saviour, meaning his mission extended beyond Israel to all nations. This redefinition distinguished Christianity from other Jewish messianic movements.



Fill in the blank: Instead of a warrior king, Jesus was portrayed as the _____ servant.

Jewish Expectation	Christian Portrayal
Descendant of David	Fulfillment of Isaiah's suffering servant
Political deliverer from Rome	Spiritual redeemer for all nations
Restorer of Israel's sovereignty	Establishes a kingdom "not of this world"
Warrior king with military power	Humble servant who dies and rises again
Messianic age of peace and justice	Salvation through cross and resurrection

5.4.3

Impact on early Christian identity and mission

The redefined understanding of Jesus as Messiah shaped the identity of early Christians. They saw themselves as a community called to live out his teachings and spread the message of salvation. The term mission refers to the purposeful activity of sharing faith and expanding the community of believers. This mission was not limited to Jews but extended to Gentiles, reflecting the universal scope of Jesus' role. The combination of prophecy fulfillment and redefined messiahship gave Christianity its distinctiveness.



Plate 5.4 Early Christian mission shaped by messianic understanding.

Series Summary

This Series has examined the diverse messianic expectations that shaped Jewish thought before and during the birth of Jesus Christ, highlighting their significance for understanding the New Testament and early Christian identity. Its purpose was to show how Jewish hopes for deliverance, prophecy, and apocalyptic visions provided the backdrop against which Jesus was proclaimed as Messiah.

We began by exploring Jewish messianic hopes in the Hebrew Scriptures, political aspirations, and apocalyptic visions. Then we considered messianic movements and figures, including claimants, Zealots, and rabbinic interpretations. Following that, we studied the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth, the role of prophecy in Matthew and Luke, and the varied reactions of Jewish groups. Finally, we examined how early Christians redefined messiahship,



presenting Jesus as the suffering servant and universal saviour, and how this shaped their mission. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to define key prophecies, explain political and apocalyptic hopes, analyse messianic movements, describe Gospel accounts, evaluate Jewish responses, and assess how early Christians reinterpreted messiahship to form their identity and mission.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Apocalypse: A revelation or vision that unveils God's plan for the end of history, often involving judgement and cosmic struggle.

Claimant: An individual who presents themselves, or is recognised by others, as fulfilling messianic expectations.

Deliverance: Rescue from oppression and restoration of freedom, often linked to hopes for a messianic leader.

Gospels: The first four books of the New Testament that narrate the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus.

Messiah: Literally "anointed one"; a king or leader chosen by God, expected to bring deliverance and establish righteousness.

Mission: The purposeful activity of sharing faith and expanding the community of believers, central to early Christianity.

Pharisees: A Jewish group that emphasised strict Torah observance and oral traditions, often cautious about new messianic claims.

Prophecy: A divine message or prediction recorded in scripture that reveals God's plan for the future.

Sadducees: A Jewish group closely linked to temple authority, rejecting oral traditions and denying beliefs such as resurrection.

Suffering servant: A figure described in Isaiah who bears the sins of others, interpreted by Christians as pointing to Jesus.

Torah: The Jewish law and teaching, covering moral, ritual, and social obligations, and guiding covenant faithfulness.

Universal saviour: A title given to Jesus in early Christianity, emphasising that his mission extended beyond Israel to all nations.

Zealots: A Jewish revolutionary group that believed violent resistance was necessary to defend God's law and Israel's independence.

Objective (Multiple Choice) Questions

The term Messiah literally means: (Linked to SLO 5.1)

- Deliverer
- Anointed one
- Prophet
- King of kings

Which Jewish sect was most closely associated with violent resistance against Rome? (Linked to SLO 5.3)

- Pharisees
- Sadducees
- Zealots
- Essenes

Which Gospel highlights Jesus' genealogy linking him to David and Abraham? (Linked to SLO 5.4)

- Luke
- Matthew
- Mark
- John

The suffering servant motif comes from which prophetic book? (Linked to SLO 5.6)



Jeremiah
Isaiah

Micah
Psalms

Early Christians described Jesus as the universal saviour, meaning: (Linked to SLO 5.6)
His mission was limited to Israel

His mission extended to all nations
He was only for Gentiles
He was only for Jews

Short-Answer Questions

6. Define the term apocalypse and explain its role in Jewish messianic hopes. (Linked to SLO 5.2)
7. Describe one way revolutionary leaders acted as messianic claimants in first-century Judaism. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
8. Explain how prophecy was used in Matthew's Gospel to present Jesus as Messiah. (Linked to SLO 5.4)
9. Summarise the reaction of the Sadducees to Jesus' messianic claim. (Linked to SLO 5.5)
10. Outline how rabbinic teachers interpreted messianic hope differently from revolutionary movements. (Linked to SLO 5.3)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyse the political and social factors that shaped Jewish messianic expectations before Jesus. (Linked to SLO 5.2)
12. Evaluate the significance of the Gospel birth narratives in shaping Christian claims about Jesus as Messiah. (Linked to SLO 5.4)
13. Discuss the diversity of Jewish responses to Jesus' messianic claim and its impact on early Christianity. (Linked to SLO 5.5)
14. Assess how early Christians redefined messiahship through the concepts of suffering servant and universal saviour. (Linked to SLO 5.6)
15. Examine how continuity with Jewish prophecy and divergence in messianic interpretation shaped Christian identity and mission. (Linked to SLO 5.6)

Answers to Concept Check Questions

Objective (Multiple Choice) Questions

- B) Anointed one
- C) Zealots
- B) Matthew
- B) Isaiah
- B) His mission extended to all nations

Short-Answer Questions

6. Apocalypse means revelation, often involving visions of the end of history. It gave hope that God would intervene to defeat evil and establish righteousness.
7. Revolutionary leaders claimed divine authority or were recognised as deliverers, promising freedom from Roman rule.
8. Matthew cited Isaiah's prophecy of Emmanuel to show Jesus' birth fulfilled scripture.
9. The Sadducees, linked to temple authority, rejected resurrection and were sceptical of Jesus' messianic claim.
10. Rabbinic teachers emphasised covenant loyalty and Torah observance, focusing on spiritual renewal rather than violent resistance.

Long-Answer Questions

Basic response: Political oppression under Rome, heavy taxation, and social hardship shaped hopes for a deliverer.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may connect these hopes to wider Greco-Roman political tensions and note how apocalyptic visions offered symbolic resistance.

Basic response: The Gospel birth narratives linked Jesus to prophecy and divine intervention, presenting him as Messiah.



Value-added response: Outstanding learners may highlight how these narratives also served to unify diverse Christian communities and counter rival messianic claims.

Basic response: Jewish groups responded differently: Pharisees were cautious, Sadducees sceptical, ordinary people hopeful.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may explore how these responses influenced the eventual separation between Judaism and Christianity.

Basic response: Early Christians redefined messiahship by portraying Jesus as the suffering servant and universal saviour.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may assess how this redefinition enabled Christianity to appeal to Gentiles and distinguish itself from Jewish nationalism.

Basic response: Continuity with prophecy gave legitimacy, while divergence in interpretation created a distinct Christian identity.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may evaluate how this balance of continuity and divergence allowed Christianity to grow as a universal faith while rooted in Jewish tradition.

Answers to Pilot Questions

Part 1: Jewish Messianic Hopes Before Jesus

- Anointed
- Independence
- Revelation

Part 2: Messianic Movements and Figures

- Messianic
- Resistance
- Torah

Part 3: The Birth of Jesus and Messianic Fulfilment

- David
- Isaiah
- Resurrection

Part 4: Early Christian Understanding of the Messiah

- Prophets
- Suffering
- Gentiles

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Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Tables, and Boxes)



Box 5.1 Selected messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising selected messianic prophecies from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah."

Suggested OER search string: "Hebrew Scriptures messianic prophecies Isaiah Jeremiah Micah OER."

Figure 5.1 Political and social roots of messianic hope

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing how political oppression under Rome shaped Jewish messianic expectations."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish messianic hopes Roman occupation diagram OER."

Plate 5.1 Apocalyptic visions of messianic hope

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of apocalyptic imagery showing cosmic struggle and divine victory."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish apocalyptic visions messianic hope illustration OER."

Plate 5.2 Popular claimants and revolutionary leaders

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of a first-century revolutionary leader addressing followers."

Suggested OER search string: "Jewish revolutionary leaders messianic claimants illustration OER."

Figure 5.2 Zealots and resistance movements

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the role of Zealots in resistance movements and their connection to messianic hopes."

Suggested OER search string: "Zealots Jewish resistance messianic hopes diagram OER."

Box 5.2 Rabbinic interpretations of messianic hope

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising rabbinic perspectives on messianic prophecy, covenant, and Torah observance."

Suggested OER search string: "Rabbinic interpretations messianic hope Torah covenant OER."

Plate 5.3 Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of the nativity scene with shepherds and wise men."

Suggested OER search string: "nativity scene Matthew Luke illustration OER."

Box 5.3 Key prophecies cited in Matthew and Luke

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising prophecies from Isaiah and their fulfilment in Matthew and Luke."

Suggested OER search string: "Isaiah prophecy Emmanuel Matthew Luke OER."

Figure 5.3 Reactions of Jewish groups to Jesus' messianic claim

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing different Jewish groups and their reactions to Jesus' messianic claim."

Suggested OER search string: "Pharisees Sadducees reactions to Jesus Messiah diagram OER."

Box 5.4 Key prophecies interpreted as fulfilled in Jesus

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a table summarising prophecies from Isaiah, Micah, and Psalms with their Christian interpretation."

Suggested OER search string: "prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Isaiah Micah Psalms OER."

Figure 5.4 Redefining messiahship in early Christianity

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Generate a diagram showing the contrast between Jewish expectations of a warrior king and Christian portrayal of Jesus as suffering servant and universal saviour."

Suggested OER search string: "Jesus suffering servant universal saviour diagram OER."

Plate 5.4 Early Christian mission shaped by messianic understanding

AI-generated suggestion using Copilot. Prompt: "Create an artistic illustration of early Christians preaching to both Jews and Gentiles."

Suggested OER search string: "early Christian mission Jews Gentiles illustration OER."



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