



Part 17: The Fullness of Time

(a.k.a. "Between the Testaments")



Opening Quote ▾

"Christ is like the myths because they are a portrait of him. The similarity is not accidental. The myths are derived through human imagination from the facts of nature, and the facts of nature from her Creator; the death and rebirth pattern is in her because it was first in Him. On the other hand, elements of nature religion are strikingly absent from the teaching of Jesus and from the Judaic preparation which led up to it. Where the real God is present the shadows of that God do not appear. The Hebrews throughout their history were being constantly headed off from the worship of nature gods, not because they were in all respects unlike the God of nature, but because at best they were merely like, and it was the destiny of that nation to be turned away from likeness to the thing itself.

The mention of that nation turns our attention to one of those features which is repulsive to the modern mind: the idea of a 'chosen people.' We prefer to think that all nations and individuals start level in the search for God, or that all religions are equally true. The Bible makes no concessions to this point of view. It does not tell of a human search for God, but of something done by God for, and to, man. And the way it is done is selective, undemocratic. One man, Abraham, is picked out. He is separated, miserably enough, from his natural surroundings, sent into a strange country, and made the ancestor of a nation where there is further selection; some die in the desert, some remain behind in Babylon. There is further selection still. The process grows narrower and narrower, sharpens at last into one small bright point like the head of a spear. It is a Jewish girl at her prayers. All humanity, concerning its redemption, has narrowed to that." C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 153

Word ALIVE



Three Wise Men from the east...



Background Note ▾

PURPOSE: To discuss the little piece of history between the Testaments, and to briefly touch some of the other main religions and philosophies of the world as they relate to Christianity. The deuterocanonical books of the Greek canon not found in the Hebrew canon shed some light on the piece of Jewish history during the Maccabean revolution into the Hasmonean Dynasty. These books also record for us the origins of Hannukah, the festival of lights, and reveal to us some of the most striking biblical testimonies of man's free will, the intercession of saints, prayers for the dead, and the expectation of bodily resurrection. But even after this piece of history, after several centuries of prophetic silence, there was one more century of history before Christ which provides the backdrop for his birth and ministry in Palestine.

the BIG PICTURE		⌚ : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		⌚ : key covenants in our Father's plan	
12 Periods ▾	Plot ▾	Other books related to period ▾		stories in each period ▾	
BC	🌐 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	👤 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	👤 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	👤 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	👤 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	👤 THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2nd temple, 2nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings	
163 63	👤 THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	👤 JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	👤 APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 17: The Fullness of Time



The Hasmonean Dynasty was essentially a political state, so the concern for the Jewish religion gave rise to three new **factions**: the **Essenes**, a simple religious community which kept itself isolated from society in preparation for the Messiah, the **Pharisees**, scribes which took upon themselves the job of interpreting the scriptures in the absence of a prophet, and the **Sadducees**, priests who considered themselves the rightful interpreters of Scripture. The Jews clung to the Law, trying to follow it to the letter, understandably weary of losing the promised land again because of unfaithfulness to God's covenant. They would avoid contact with **Gentiles** (non-Jews), Samaritans, and sinners who didn't follow the Law according to their traditions. The Sadducees only accepted the first five books (the Torah), were more influenced by Helenism, but without sharing the Pharisees' view of resurrection (revealed by the Prophets). The Essenes for their part took great care in rewriting much of the Old Testament into scrolls. Though they dwelled in the Dead Sea area, they had reason to suddenly hide the scrolls in the caves of Qumran. That reason was the **Roman Empire!**

The Hasmoneans were gradually swept aside by the Roman family of Antipater. Palestine found itself ruled by Pompey, Julius Caesar, Cassius, Mark Antony, and Octavian (Augustus). Eventually one of Antipater's sons, Herod the Great, took control of Palestine as a puppet king of Emperor Augustus. Herod was bent on killing his rivals, including any alleged "Messiah". After Herod's death, Palestine was ruled on and off by Roman procurators. These officials were unsuccessful in dealing with the Palestinian Jews, and a new nationalistic group grew from the dying Hasmonean dynasty. These **Zealots** were anxious for a king to lead them to a military victory. Inspired by the memory of the Maccabees, they often resorted to terrorist tactics against the empire.

And so, between the Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots, what was once the promised land was now an unstable, religious and political mess. The "fullness of time" had been reached. But before meeting the man whose birth determined the transition from BC to AD, let us take a glance at the rest of the religious world a thousand years before Christ.

Homer's Greek epic of *the Iliad* tells the story of Hector, a defeated king, and *the Odyssey* of a woman of sorrows named Penelope. Greek philosophy wondered how could there be victory in defeat and nobility in suffering. An answer would be given when a defeated man who hung on a cross would become conqueror, with his Mater Dolorosa at the foot of the cross.

Five hundred years before Christ, Aeschylus wrote *Prometheus Bound*, in which Prometheus is bound to a rock for having stolen fire from heaven. Birds eat his

insides, symbolic of anxiety and fear, a yearning for deliverance, culminating in the speech of the god Hermes to Prometheus: "Look not for any end to this curse until some God appears to accept upon his head the pangs of thy own sins vicarious." In another writing Alcibiades asks Socrates, "What shall I ask of the gods?" Socrates answers, "Wait for a wise man who is to come, who will tell us how we are to conduct ourselves before God and man."

Moving East, we find the same craving for a wisdom not of this earth to relieve man from his inner suffering. The avatars of the Hindus, like Krishna, were incarnations (or at least manifestations) of deity revisiting man, even if not really historical. Brahma, the All, the One, is often depicted repairing the damage caused by the serpent god Kaliga.

Confucius in his *Morals* writes that a "Holy One must come from heaven who will know all things and have power over heaven and earth."

Buddha, in the 5th Century BC, said, "I will die, but Buddha will live, for Buddha is Truth. The Kingdom of truth will increase. Another Buddha will arise and reveal to you the same self-eternal truth I taught. His name will be Maitreya, 'He whose name is Love.'"

Back to Rome, we find the same yearning. With the defeat of Carthage, Rome ruled supreme. There was no more distinction between Babylonian, Greek, or Persian. All were Romans under the Pax Romana. But Rome had grown tired of its many gods, and now it was not a matter of nations waiting for a king, but mankind awaiting its King. The philosophy of self-sufficiency had proved insufficient, man craved inner purification, and mystery religions like Mithraism formed around gods and "mediators" which, even though never touted as real, historical personages, still showed among its adherents an expectation of truth to be found in mystery as well as in philosophy. Virgil poetically addressed the promise of a new Jupiter (the supreme God in the Pantheon) with the words: "Begin little child, to recognize your mother with a smile."

After Christ, Seutonius would write in his *Life of Augustus*, "Nature has been in labor to bring forth a personage who would be King of the Romans." The Senate had been disturbed by similar expectations (not to mention Herod), and extreme measures were taken, as in the past, to eliminate the threat. The historian Tacitus confirmed in his history that "Mankind was generally persuaded that the ancient prophecies of the East would prevail, and that it would not be long until Judea brought forth one who would rule the universe."

The yearnings of Homer, Socrates, Plato, Buddha, Confucius, Aeschylus, and Virgil were about to cross paths with Jewish prophecy, as three wise men from the East, perhaps Persia, followed a star...



Defending the Faith: Christianity & Other Religions

"Aren't Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity, only different on the outside? Don't they really all teach the same thing – don't kill, don't steal, be honest, be good to one another....?"

The common ethic across the world's main religions certainly indicates a real morality knowable by all. But even on the outside religions are similar, with their sacred writings, creeds, rituals, vestments, holy places, etc. The real difference lies *beneath* these externals.

Before the Jews, religion saw many gods as part of the world (paganism) or the world as part of God (pantheism). **Hinduism**, which teaches that all religions are equal paths to enlightenment, actually combines paganism and pantheism with monotheism, seeing its many gods as manifestations (even incarnations) of the one God (Brahman). But while Hinduism sees God in both good and evil, the God of the Jews has a divine will, discriminating good from evil. Individuality in Hinduism is also considered an illusion, where we are not really distinct from God or from each other, which implies that there is no such thing as sin in the Jewish sense – a broken relationship with God *who is not us*. At the center of your being is not an individual ego but Atman, universal Self which, in the end, is identical to Brahman, the All. Since there is no sin, salvation is not needed, only enlightenment, when you realize the final maha vakya (main tenet) of Hinduism: "I am Brahman." This identity with God is in Jewish terms the original sin, an equating of a creature to the Creator.

Buddhism does not speak of God, or Brahman, like the Hinduism from which it emerged. While Hinduism teaches that individuality is an illusion, Buddhism goes further and teaches that there is no self, no soul (anatta). Everything, in fact, is an illusion (except Buddhism?). Nevertheless, Buddha may very well be the only *historical* man other than Jesus who was thought to be divine. But while Buddha would insist: I am a man, not a god, Christ called himself both "Son of Man" and "Son of God". While Buddha said, "Look not to me, look to my dharma (doctrine)," Christ said, "Come unto *me*." Buddha said, "Be lamps unto yourselves," but Christ said: "*I* am the light of the world." Buddhism is more agnostic than atheistic, for it is simply silent about God. But like Hinduism's denial

of the individual (and what gets reincarnated if there are no individual souls?), it is Buddhism's denial of self that separates it dramatically from Christianity. Selflessness to a Buddhist is not for the welfare of the recipient, but for the liberation of the illusioned self, an illusion resulting from selfish desire, the cause of all suffering. And how do you get rid of suffering? Get rid of selfish desire. How do you get rid of selfish desire? Renounce self and desire. This is enlightenment, Nirvana. Christ taught desire – *selfless* desire. Buddha rightly condemned desiring anything *less* than ourselves (money, sex, power, etc), but Christ taught and lived the desire of being possessed by Someone more than ourselves: the One who made our real selves.

This desire we inherited from **Judaism**. Jesus came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. In fact, from his point of view, Christianity is more Jewish than modern Judaism! Judaism knew the Truth and the Life, but he was the Way. While God revealed himself in history and in the Scriptures, Jesus said that Scripture was actually a portrait of himself. The Jews saw the picture, but not the one who was portrayed (John 5:39-40). Christianity and Judaism are both closer and farther apart than any two other religions. Christ is the stumbling stone.

And what makes **Islam** so successful? Simplicity. The Koran as revealed to Mohammed reinterprets the New Testament as the New reinterprets the Old. Having a common ancestry from Abraham, the fighting today in the Holy Land is nothing more than sibling rivalry! 'Islam' means both 'peace' (Hebrew 'shalom') and 'submission'; it is the peace that comes from submission to the will of God (Allah). Christ taught the same, except that "no one comes to the Father but by me," (Jn 14:6) and "Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn 8:58). This is either blasphemy, lunacy, or the very fulfillment of the prophecies. To Moslems, as with Jews, Christ is the stumbling block, claiming to be infinitely more than a prophet.



Expressing the Faith: Ecumenical Day

Crazy Bread reunites Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, and the Dalai Lama to discuss a common theme: Love.

*Jesus and Mohammed in the street
Went to Moses' Deli where they meet
They ran into the Buddha and the Dalai Lama
Then they all began to talk about the trauma
In their followers' hearts, tearing churches apart
There must be some other way: an ecumenical day!*

*Now we gotta think of something good
The followers aren't doing what they should
We can reach a common definition of sin:*

*They gotta love each other if they wanna come in
A brand new message of love coming down from above
There's just no other way: an ecumenical day!*

*Everybody's got their point of view
But it's not just what you say, it's what you do
They've come up with a common definition of sin
We gotta love each other if we wanna come in
I don't wanna go home to find myself all alone
Love will show us the way: an ecumenical day!*

↗ **Next time: "Christmas Eve"** ↖