

The Maccabees

The Land Between

Israel is sometimes called “The Land Between” because it is in-between Africa and Mesopotamia. Throughout all of history traders and armies have passed through the land. These visitors not only influenced Jewish culture, but made the land itself a coveted region. After the death of Alexander, much blood was shed for power in the kingdom. Part of this included the contention for who would rule over Judea. We will not only learn about foreign rulers who desired control of the land, but about how the Jewish people responded, and fought for their own independence. As we continue to study the intertestamental period, you must keep in mind that these events reshaped the Jewish culture in which the New Testament is set. Your understanding of this background will greatly enhance your reading of Scripture.

The Ptolemies and Seleucids

As mentioned in the previous lesson, three distinct kingdoms were established out of Alexander’s kingdom by 275 BC. (You ought to keep the map from the fourth page handy as you read). Before the complete development of those kingdoms, Judea had been under the rule of the Ptolemaic kingdom by 320 BC. While under Egyptian rule, there were many battles that took place in the land between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. While still under the first king, Ptolemy I, many Jews had moved to Alexandria, which is the center of Egyptian Judaica. From what we know took place in Judea during this time, there was a heavy influence of Hellenistic culture outside of Jerusalem. Also, the Oniad (descendants of Zadok [2 Samuel 15:24-29]) and Tobiad (descendants of Tobiah [Nehemiah 1:9-10]) families both contended for the priesthood, the importance of which is seen later.

Before Seleucus had gained complete power over Mesopotamia, Antigonos temporarily gained Judea from 315 BC until 301 BC when he was killed in battle in Phrygia (Asia Minor). As part of an agreement, Judea and Syria were supposed to be given to Ptolemy, but since he was not involved in that battle, it was decided that the two kingdoms would be given to Seleucus. However, Ptolemy did not give up the chance to snatch it, which he did. Though Seleucus lost Judea for a time, it was during this period that his kingdom expanded to include the greatest part of Alexander’s empire.

The Septuagint

Under Ptolomy II, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, which is called the Septuagint (LXX). According to legend, seventy-two scholars met in Alexandria to complete the translation, which only took seventy-two days. Additionally, the works of the translators were highly consistent with each other. Because of this event’s high improbability, we can be confident that the Septuagint took a longer period of time to complete. This is important to be aware of, because the LXX was used by the writers of the New Testament, and became the standard edition for the early Christian church.



A synagogue in Alexandria

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It would exceed our purpose to explain each ruler and event of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms. For that reason, we are going to fast-forward about one hundred years to Antiochus III the Great, who defeated Ptolemy V Epiphanes in 198 BC. The Battle of Panion (a.k.a. Paneas/Panias), took place near the source of the Jordan River. In the New Testament, this location had been renamed Caesarea Philippi. Although Antiochus had gained the land of the Jews in this battle, he fought the Romans six years later in the Battle of Magnesia (190 BC). When he lost, he was forced to pay the Romans, and submit twenty hostages, which included his son (Antiochus IV Epiphanes). After he died, his other son Seleucus IV Philopator became king in 187 BC, but was killed by his chief official in 175 BC. When this happened, Antiochus raced to the throne in the same year. Among all the rulers after the time of Alexander, Antiochus IV Epiphanes would be the most hostile to the Jews, and function as the chief catalyst for the Maccabean revolt.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes

As you read about life under this ruler, you must realistically understand what kind of wicked man he was. He was extremely violent in his treatment of Jews, which you must grasp in order to understand what drove the Maccabean revolt.

Early in his reign, Antiochus rushed to Egypt in attempt to overthrow Memphis. However, before he could do so, he followed the Romans' command to leave Egypt. Even though the Seleucid kingdom was massive, he still owed Rome money that was ordered from his father, Antiochus III, when he lost in the Battle of Magnesia. Antiochus' desire to annex Egypt was motivated by the money he owed to Rome. Additionally, he imposed high taxes on the Jews. Since the Romans would not let him into Egypt, he wanted to Hellenize Judea in order to assimilate the Jews, and make it easier to bring both of these regions under his power.

The Jews were also honored by kings of Asia when they honored them in war. Seleucus Nicator [the first Seleucid king] granted them citizenship in the cities he founded and in Antioch, his capital. They have equal privileges with the Greeks there until this day. When Antiochus the Great ruled Asia, however, the Jews underwent many hardships because of his war with the Ptolemies. After he annexed Judea, the people of Jerusalem supported Antiochus, and he rewarded them by ordering his governors to assist them in completing the temple. Antiochus finally made a treaty of friendship with Ptolemy [V Epiphanes], giving him his daughter in marriage, along with Coele-Syria, Samaria, Judea, and Phoenicia as a dowry.

The Jewish Antiquities, XII.iii.i
From: Josephus: *The Essential Writings*, 202.

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks. In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to the Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

1 Maccabees 1:10-15

The Tobiads, who brazenly advocated Hellenism, continued to vie for the priesthood against the Oniads. By this time, Jason, the brother of Onias III, stole the office of high priest by bribing

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Antiochus. However, his office was also lost to Menelaus, a Tobiad, who also had bribed Antiochus. Because no Oniad (Zadokite) priest would return to the office, the succeeding priests made the Hellenization of Judea much easier.

You might have heard of “Hasidic Jews.” The group from which this tradition stems finds its origins during this time. The Hasidim (meaning “Pious Ones”) were highly opposed to Hellenism, the priesthood of Jason, as well as Menelaus’ priesthood. Under Jason’s priesthood, Greek customs, including a gymnasium, were established. Under Menelaus, the promotion of Hellenism advanced. After Antiochus had returned from defeating Ptolemy VI in Egypt (169 BC), he and Menelaus evacuated the temple of its treasures.

Efforts were made in continuing to gain Egypt. In 168 BC, he returned from Roman defeat in Egypt, and found Jason making efforts to regain the priesthood. This, in addition to ongoing Jewish-Hellenist contention, sent Antiochus into a hot-headed rage. The core strength in the opposition to Hellenism was Jewish religion. Knowing this, Antiochus’ general, Apollonius, led a great slaughter on the Sabbath. Jerusalem was burned, and many were put into slavery. Homes and walls were destroyed, and a Seleucid fortress was built called the Acra (or Akra). Antiochus made every effort to vanquish every trace of Jewish religion: temple practice was forbidden, the Scripture was burned, and all Jewish rites and religious days were forbidden. Not content with this, Antiochus established a new altar in the temple which was dedicated to Zeus. Antiochus’ title, “Epiphanes” means “Zeus manifest” or “God manifest.” His name has often been modified to read “Antiochus Empimanes,” meaning, “mad man.” Zeus was also identified with the Syrian god Ba’al Shamen (“lord of heaven”). The Jews also mocked this name with a pun that would mean “abomination of desolation” in reference to the pagan practices in the temple. In his pagan madness, he sacrificed a swine on the altar, and forced Jews to eat swine. Those who refused to conform to Antiochus’ degenerate reforms were tortured and killed. This took place from 167-164 BC.

He polluted the altar by offering swine on it, knowing that this was against the Law of Moses. He compelled the Jews to give up their worship of God and to stop circumcising their children. Those who persisted were mutilated, strangled, or crucified, with their children hung from their necks. When the Samaritans saw the Jews suffering these cruelties, they sent a letter to Antiochus denying any Jewish relationship. They also asked that their “temple without a name” on Mt. Gerizim be known as that of Zeus Hellenios.

The Jewish Antiquities, XII.v.iv
From: *Josephus: The Essential Writings*, 209-210.

They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace...

1 Maccabees 2:32-35



The modern City of David viewed from the south

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An elderly priest named Mattathias from the family of Hasmon rejected the pagan practices and rebelled against the oppression. After killing a Seleucid official and a conforming Jew, he and his followers fled to the wilderness. Mattathias' sons and descendants, known as the Maccabees, regained Judea for Jews. However, within only a few generations, Hellenism was again promoted not long before the Romans gained control of Judea.

Judas Maccabeus

After Mattathias died, leadership was given to his son, Judas. Maccabee means “hammer-head” which was the nickname given to him for his successful revolt against the Seleucid powers. Not only did Judas' military skill achieve much for the religious freedom of the Jews, but confusion in the Seleucid empire eventually made it possible for the Jews to gain much political success. The first opposition was Apollonius (governor of Samaria), who had previously slaughtered Jerusalem. Both Josephus and *Maccabees* record that Apollonius' army was significantly larger than Judas', however Judas killed Apollonius himself and used his sword in battle for the rest of his life (1 Maccabees 3:10-12). After this, Seron, the governor of Coele-Syria, came against Judas but was overthrown by Judas' undersized army. These two victories put fear in the hearts of the Gentiles, and serve as an illustration Judas Maccabeus as a serious threat. Antiochus Epiphanes had become aware of these defeats. To add to his irritation, he was nearly out of money, and could not afford to pay his own soldiers to deal with the Jews. He decided to place Lysias, one of his regents, over half of his forces and ordered him to obliterate Judea and Jerusalem. Ptolemy (not of the Egyptian Ptolemies), Gogias, and Nicanor were the men assigned to this task. Josephus records that Gogias and his six-thousand-strong had planned to attack at night, which Judas heard about and as a result traveled through the night. By morning, Judas encountered the sleeping army and killed 3,000 soldiers, which caused the remaining to flee. Josephus continued to explain that Lysias himself invaded Judea with 60,000, and was confronted by Judas' 10,000, which had only killed 5,000 of Lysias' men. It was after this event that the Jews regained their religious freedom. The temple was rededicated three years to the month that Antiochus had defiled it (164 BC). According to legend, the temple lamp stand was miraculously lit with an insufficient amount of oil for the full eight days. This is why the menorah continues to be a symbol of the Feast of Dedication (also called Hanukkah). In addition to this great victory, Antiochus had died, regretting his treatment of the Jews. However, the problem of the Seleucids, Hellenism, and Menelaus' priesthood continued. In the following year the formal restriction on religious practices were removed after Judas attempted to overthrow the Acra. Antiochus IV's son (Antiochus V, aka Eupator) was only eight years old, so Lysias was responsible for governing. He had invaded

Without a hope of regaining the priesthood in Jerusalem, Onias IV fled to Egypt and built a temple there. Some think that a temple was built in Araq el-Emir (in modern day Jordan) around this same time by a Tobiad.



A palace, and possibly a temple in Araq el-Emir (above). An inscription reading “Tobiah” in the same location (below).



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Jerusalem, but was anxious about the security of the throne, forcing him to make a settlement with Judas, which included the removal and execution of Menelaus the high priest. One of Judas' brothers, Eleazar, was killed under an elephant during this conflict. Alcimus was the replacement for Menelaus, and although he was of Aaronic descent, he was not from the Zadok/Oniad line. Now that religious freedom had been gained, Judas wanted to continue in his conquest to gain political freedom in Judea and the surrounding regions. Some, mainly the Hasidim, were satisfied with the accomplishment for religious freedom. However, the efforts to achieve this were not without their challenges. The Hasidim eventually rejoined Judas when the new Seleucid king, Demetrius I, came to power. Demetrius was the son of Seleucus I, and Antiochus IV's nephew. He had fled from Rome and managed to have Lysias and Antiochus V killed. When he sent Alcimus to Jerusalem, the Hasidim attempted to befriend him, based on a promise he had made. However, he betrayed the Hasidim by killing sixty of them. Knowing the re-established force of Judas would be an extra challenge to overcome, an army was sent under Nicanor to overthrow the Jews. The battle in 161 BC proved that Judas was indeed a Maccabeus. Nicanor was killed and the strength of Judas' men caused the Seleucid army to flee along with Alcimus. In an effort to make gain permanent independence from the Seleucids, Judas established a treaty with Rome, who had warned Demetrius. However, an army was already being sent into Judea, partially led by Alcimus and Demetrius' general, Bacchides. The invasion overwhelmed Judas and his remaining followers in 160 BC. Now that Judas was dead, his brother Jonathan filled his place. In the following events, we will learn how each of the Maccabean figures accommodated the sustenance of Hellenism in Judea that led to the Roman conquest of the land.

Jonathan

After the death of Judas, Bacchides tortured and killed many of Judas' friends and built up forces in and around the Acra. As he prepared to find Jonathan, his brother John headed toward the Nabateans (modern day Jordan) to hide supplies. However, they were overcome at Medeba. In 159 BC Alcimus attempted to remove the temple curtain separating the most holy place. However, before it was completed, he had a stroke. The writer of Maccabees tells us that he went deaf and became paralyzed before he died, which the Hasidim saw as divine judgment (1 Maccabees 9:54-56). After this, Bacchides returned to Antioch, which had been the capital of the Seleucids since the time of Antiochus IV. Judea lived in peace for two years until the next invasion of Bacchides. When he did attack, he lost to Jonathan, and a peace treaty was settled at that time. From that point, Jonathan ruled from Michmash. In 152 BC, Jonathan moved into Jerusalem, and began to overtake the Seleucid strongholds. However, up in Antioch, Demetrius' throne was being challenged by Alexander Balas, who claimed to be Antiochus Epiphanes' son. By making offers to Jonathan, including the seat of the



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high priest, the overall strength of the kingdom was being weakened. Demetrius tried to outbid Balas, but Jonathan refused. Balas eventually killed Demetrius in battle, which heightened Jonathan's security over Judea as high priest and official servant of the Seleucid kingdom. Although his Hasmonean family was of a priestly line, they did not belong to the Zadokite line. The Hasmonean family occupied the priesthood until the Roman invasion. Demetrius' son eventually seized the throne from Balas. However, Jonathan took advantage of the naïve king's governorship, and became more powerful in Judea. Again, Jonathan strength improved when one of Balas' general's, Trypho (aka Tryphon) set Balas' son on the throne (Antiochus VI). As Jonathan's power continued to strengthen, Trypho became more worried about the increasing independence of the Jews, and especially their ties to Rome. By deceiving Jonathan, Trypho captured him, and slaughtered one thousand of his men. While Jonathan's brother Simon had been in power in Jerusalem, Jonathan was killed and Trypho returned to Antioch in 143 BC.

The remaining leaders of the Hasmonean House (Maccabean Period) will be surveyed more quickly. As we do so, our primary interests will be the Hellenization of the Jews, the development of Jewish political identity, and how these things led to Rome taking power over Judea.

Simon

Simon was the last of Mattathias' sons. It was under his throne that the Jews completely broke free from Seleucid political rule. One of the things he is most well known for is the destruction of the Acra after forty years of reminding the Jews of the Seleucid rule. Similar to his brother Jonathan, he took advantage of trouble in the empire, as Demetrius was facing difficulty keeping his throne. The result of this was that the Jews were freed from paying the tribute to the Seleucid Empire. The accomplishments of Simon removed the political influence not only of the Seleucids, but of those who made continual efforts to impose Hellenistic policies from within. However, this did not free Jewish culture from the influence of Hellenism. The force of Alexander's empire was not just experienced in battle, but more fully in his Hellenistic goals. This continued to have an impact within the small region of Judea for many generations, which including having an impact on Simon. Many of his policies, and political customs were indistinguishable from surrounding kingdoms including his practice of the high priestly office. When he was made high priest, he was dressed in purple and gold, which was the custom of Seleucid rulers (1 Maccabees 14:43). Strangely enough, we find this information along-side a highly Jewish concept. The writer of 1 Maccabees tells us that on this occasion, "Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise, and that he should be governor over them and that he should take charge of the sanctuary..." (14:41-42). There is no doubt that this kind of language would trigger Deuteronomy 18:18-19 in the Jewish mind. In this text, Moses described a future prophet who will arise from among the Jews. As we find in the New Testament, the Jews expected a Messiah with a highly political campaign. We can understand Simon's accomplishments and function as high priest as a heavy influence on the Jewish mind in this time. However, when Jesus did come, he was not anything like Simon. Although the text of Maccabees distorts the vision given in Deuteronomy, Christ did fulfill the role of prophet, priest and king (Acts 2:29-35; Hebrews 4:14-16). As we think about all of the changes taking place prior to the New Testament, consider how the Jewish mind was being formed which contrasted to the message and mission of Jesus.

John Hyrcanus

Unlike his brothers, Simon was killed by his son in law (134 BC), not the Seleucids. This left his son John Hyrcanus in power, which included the high priesthood. His throne was challenged by

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Ptolemy son of Abubus, who was the one who killed Simon. However, John did maintain his rule in addition to responding to another Seleucid invasion. The only substantial reason for Judea not falling back into the power of the Seleucids was due to the fact that they were either distracted by other affairs, or unable to manage their own kingdom. Further protection was provided by the Romans. Ties to the Romans took place under Simon as well. With a political grasp on the land, he was able to expand Judea's borders into the north and south. This included forcing the Idumeans (Edomites) to submit to Jewish law, and the destruction of the Samaritan temple in 108 BC. Although John was responsible for expanding the land more than any previous Hasmonean, he was also the first to appear more like a Hellenistic ruler than a Jewish one. While he was first loyal to the Pharisees, he later became committed to the Saducees. The Pharisees sought to maintain traditional Judaism, while the Saducees were advocates of Hellenism. Although Simon came near to having coins minted, John was the first Jewish ruler to do so. This included images of Greek symbols on the coin itself. This obviously created continued strife among the Jews, which developed more fully under subsequent leaders.

Aristobolus I

When John died he left his kingdom to his wife, but his favored son Judas had imprisoned her, leaving her to starve to death. Judas is better known by his Greek name, "Aristobolus" and only sat on the throne for one year (104-103 BC). He was the first ruler to not only refer to himself as king but as Philhellene, which means "lover of all things Greek." His political expansions included the Galilean region, which is why ethnic Gentiles later practiced Jewish customs, as were imposed on them under Aristobolus.

Alexander Jannaeus

While Alexander's political progress might appear impressive, with callous ruling, he oppressed the Jewish people. His name alone bears his identity as a militant Hellenist. The name Alexander is obvious, and Jannaeus is the Greek form of his Hebrew name, Jonathan. He was released from prison along with his other brothers by Aristobolus' widow, Salome Alexandra, who married him. There was no point in his career that he was which escalated the tension, was when he was opposed his practice at the Feast of had risen to the point of war. The Pharisees but this accomplished nothing. In 94 BC an official war began, in which Alexander killed thousands of Jews, crucifying at least eight hundred of them. Thousands more fled from Judea, which is why he was able to easily expand politically. Six years later, the war ended when the Seleucids helped the Pharisees against Alexander. Imagine that! The Seleucids teamed up with those of the Hasidic tradition in opposition to a Maccabee!

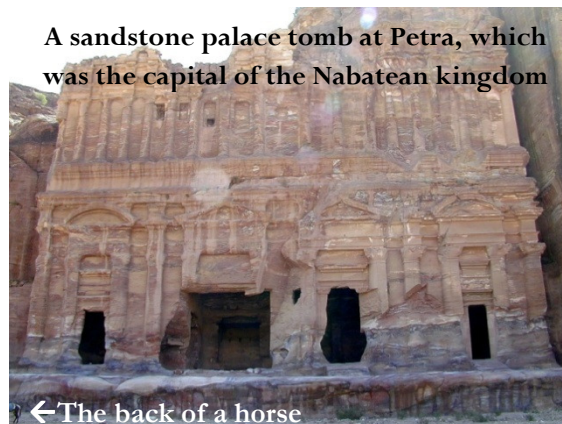


at peace with the Jews. One event assaulted with citrons by those who Tabernacles. The conflict with the Jews had requested the help of the Seleucids,

Salome Alexandra through Antipater

When Alexander Jannaeus died in 76 BC, his wife Salome assumed the role of figurehead over Judea. However, due to the success of the Pharisees, their power dominated her. The politically charged high priesthood of the Maccabees has already been highlighted. Now keep in mind how politically involved the Pharisees were. While we often think of them as religious conservatives in the New

A sandstone palace tomb at Petra, which was the capital of the Nabatean kingdom



←The back of a horse

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Testament, we can now more clearly understand some of the demands they made of Jesus. While Salome was on the throne, her son Hyrcanus II was the high priest, and his brother Aristobolus II, was the commander of the army. Civil war surfaced again, and Salome Alexandra died at that time. Aristobolus seized the priesthood from his brother, who quietly stayed at home. However, in 65 BC, with the help of Antipater, Hyrcanus overthrew Aristobolus. Antipater, the governor of Idumea, persuaded Hyrcanus to oppose his brother with the help of the Nabateans. The Nabateans lived in modern day Jordan. Meanwhile, the Roman general Pompey was overthrowing the Seleucid kingdom. As he approached Judea, Aristobolus gained favor and succeeded. However, Pompey eventually overthrew Aristobolus on the Sabbath in 63 BC, which is when the Romans claimed Jerusalem. In the next lesson, you will read about how the Romans rose to power, and served as the final stage of shaping what we call the New Testament world.

The Theology of Maccabees

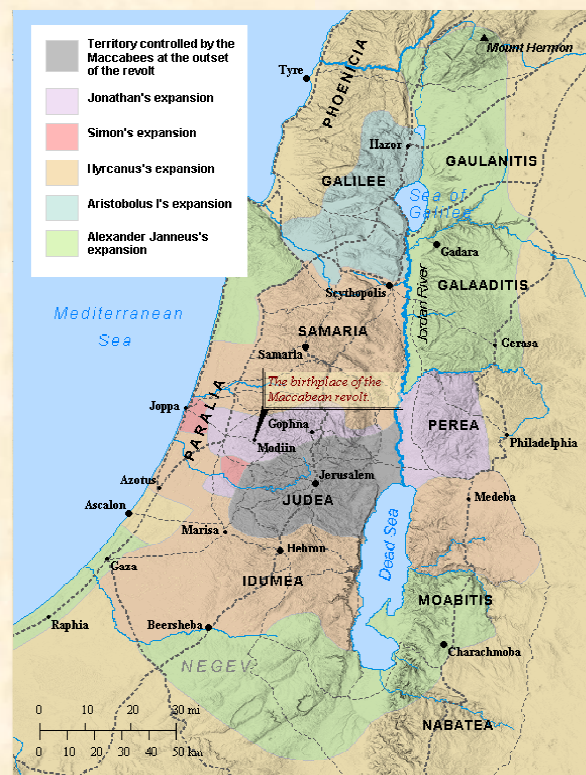
Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel... David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions. *1 Maccabees 2:51-60*

According to the text of 1 Maccabees, the above words were those of Judas Maccabeus. A casual reading of the book makes it clear that Judas was speaking these things as a charge to overthrow the oppressing rulers who perverted Jewish religion. Each of the figures that are mentioned had a specific function in the history of the Old Testament. Judas Maccabeus looked at those figures as examples which served his nationalistic desires. Whether or not Judas was right or wrong in his actions, we ought to consider how the New Testament views those figures as examples for Christians.

What is the ultimate substance of Abraham's faith, as explained in Romans 4?

What is the throne of David's eternal kingdom according to Acts 2:25-35?

How is the identity and function of Elijah related to his appearance with Christ in Mark 9:4? How is his appearance related to him having been taken up?



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Greek	Pronunciation	English	Part of Speech
gar	<i>gar</i>	for	<i>preposition</i>
ginomai	<i>ginomai</i>	I become, am	<i>verb</i>
de	<i>de</i>	but, and	<i>conjunction</i>
dia	<i>dia</i>	through	<i>preposition</i>
egw	<i>ego</i>	I	<i>pronoun</i>