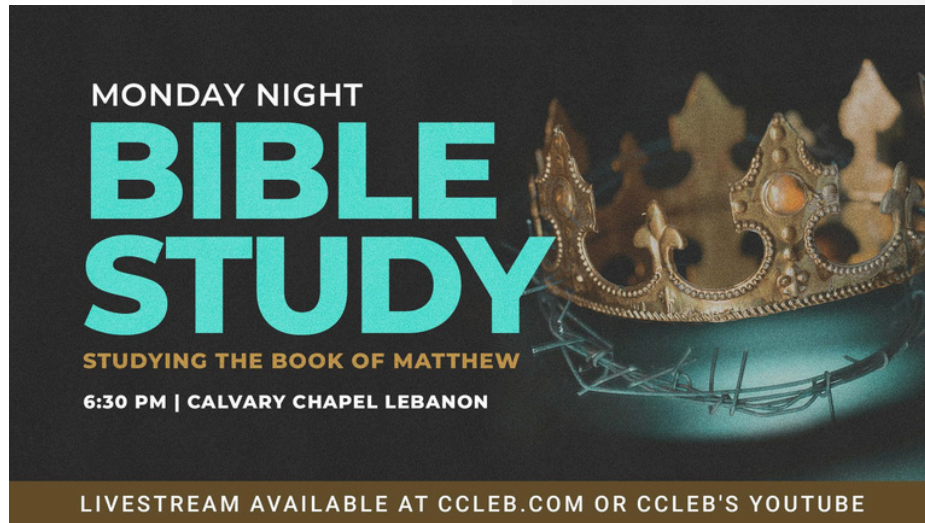


# CCLEB BIBLE STUDY

## NOTES

MONDAY MARCH 23  
MATTHEW INTRO

MATT KORFF



Well, after more than 2 and a half years of Monday night Bible study being in the Minor Prophets, we finally finished. Now we are moving on to the Gospel of Matthew. But, one thing I have emphasized, as have several other teachers here at Calvary, and worldwide for that matter, context is key. Whenever we were entering into a short Minor Prophet book, I would usually read the whole book at the beginning, emphasizing the importance of context. A few weeks ago, I illustrated that in **John 13** and **14**, how the break in the chapter does a disservice.

But in this case, it does us a disservice to Read the last few verses of Malachi, then the first few of Matthew without saying, "A few things have happened here."

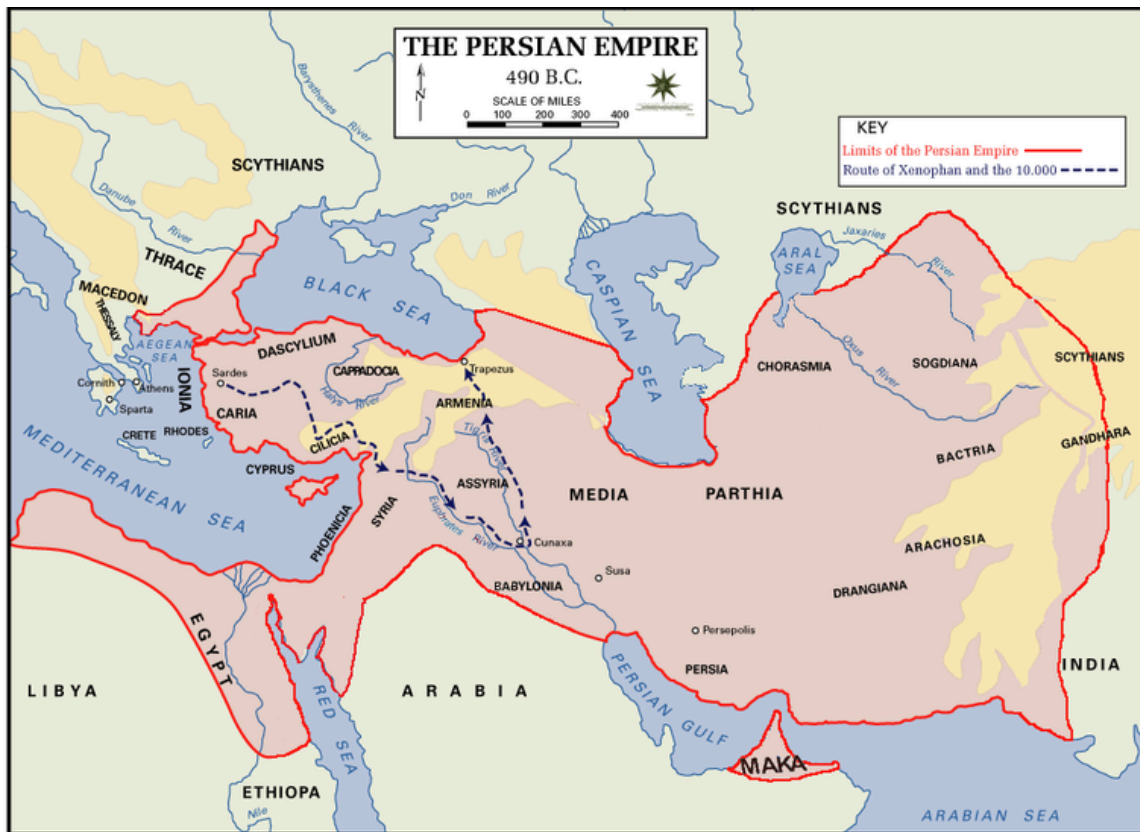
So we need to take some time to talk about the time between the Testaments. A little more than 400 years had passed between Malachi and Matthew. Think about what America was 400 years ago. 400 years ago, we were not the United States. 400 years ago this year, a Dutch colonist named Peter Minuit purchased a foresty island from the Lenape Indians that we now call Manhattan. A few things have changed since then.

If the Minor Prophets showed us a desire for the Messiah to come, the time between the testaments is the bottle neck of that desire. In **Galatians 4:4-5**, Paul says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." The fullness of time. In Greek, "pleroma tou chronou." Pleroma is the word used in Colossians to describe the fact that in Christ, the fullness of the Deity dwelt bodily. That is, filled to the brim, there was no lacking. So, think time was 9 months pregnant in 1BC, when Christ came forth. So what was it about this time that made it the fullness of time? Let's just look at some of the political and social landscape leading up to, and remaining on the scene when Christ enters the world.

I have read a whole lot of source material for this, Dead Sea Scrolls, Polybius (150ishBC) and Livy (59BC-17AD) who were Roman and Greek historians, Josephus, and Maccabees.

Let's start with the political landscape.

## Persia



The Old Testament leaves us off with Persia being the dominant power. Persia was a much more humane government than either Assyria or Babylon, and even began to send the people Babylon had taken captive back home, including the Jews. According to archaeological finds, King Cyrus wanted to appease as many gods as he could, so sent people back home for the purpose of praying to their gods for him.

After some time of Persian power, they went to war with Greece, lost the battle of Marathon in 490BC, regrouped, then, the 300 Spartans gave the Persian army a good resistance but were ultimately defeated in 480. After this, the Persians found the Athenian coast empty and sacked the city, and a year later the Greeks beat the Persians, who retreated.

## Greece



A little over 100 years later, Philip II of Macedon ruled, sought to unite the Greek peoples, then his son, Alexander the Great went East to conquer the Persians, eliminating the external threats to Greek peace. He sent messengers before him telling the people to submit, and that if the people resisted, he would burn their whole city to the ground.

He famously came to the city of Tyre, who had all fled to their island fortress that outlasted the Babylonian conquest, and when they refused to submit, he had his army use dirt and rubble from the destroyed city to build a causeway through the water, which stands to this day, and defeated the Tyrinians (who will come up later in our historical analysis). He then took the conquest to the extent of the Persian empire, the Western side of India, then returned home.

A very important term for understanding the New Testament is Hellenization. Hellenism is the Greek word for Greece. So, Hellenization is the Grecifying of the world. Maybe you have wondered why the world spoke Greek, when the Romans spoke Latin, and it is because Alexander, and those after him before the Romans, brought Greek culture into the world through conquest.

Some years back, I went to Kenya and was surprised that they all spoke English. You had to go out into the boonies to find someone who didn't speak English. That is because Kenya was a British colony. So, as Britain expanded, so did the English language, and today, 1.5 billion people around the world can speak the English language. Chinese is a close second, but that is because they have 1 billion people living in their country. India, which surpassed China for the most populated country in the world is 3rd with about 7 Billion people speaking Hindi. But, because of the British conquest, English is the most common because of its global influence.

An interesting aspect of the Hellenization of the world is that the Jews saw the need to translate their Scriptures and other works into the Greek language. This is where the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, comes into being. This would have been around 250BC. The Septuagint is very helpful for Bible translation, and is mostly what the New Testament writers quoted from. Lumped together with the Scriptures were the extra books that the Catholics use called the Apocrypha. The reason they were lumped together is because they were translating their Hebrew works into Greek, and those were Hebrew works, but never considered Scripture. In 90AD, at the council of Jamnia, when the Jews were recognizing Scriptures for the Hebrew Bible, they did not include the Apocrypha, because it was never considered Scripture.

Now, point of clarification, that was not when they decided those books were Scripture, but when they collected them into a single unit (book), because the Temple was gone, where the scrolls were kept. The Apocrypha was more considered Jewish tradition and historical (in the case of Maccabees), but not Scripture. In fact, there are 2 places in the book of Maccabees that says there were no prophets in those days. No prophets, no words from God, no Scripture. We will get to the Maccabees soon.

But as for Hellenism, the reason the Romans, which spoke Latin, did not Latinize the world was because they inherited land already conquered by the Greeks (for the most part). But Hellenism is the source of internal conflict with the Jews, as is spelled out by their literature from the times between the Testaments. The Dead Sea Scrolls speak about it, the Apocrypha speaks about it, and Josephus speaks about it. More on that with the Maccabean revolt.

So, Alexander the Great died shortly after returning to Greece after his conquests, perhaps being poisoned, after being king for 13 years. The year is now 323BC.

## Greek Division



After the death of Alexander the great, his generals went to war and divided his kingdom into 4. The two which concern us are the Ptolemies of Egypt, and the Seleucids of Asia.

For the next 100 or so years, the Ptolemies and Seleucids fight back and forth for territory, and, where is their battle line? During this time, Israel is fraught with wars being fought on its land, and ruled by the Ptolemies for a time, then the Seleucids, until finally the Seleucids gain control until they are kicked out of the land by a Jewish resistance known as the Maccabean revolt around 160BC, but before we mention much more of that, we need to introduce another major power that was entering the scene, one that we will be familiar to us as we pick up in the New Testament.

## Rome



Well where do we start? Rome had been a small territory of Latins on the Peninsula of Italy since around 750ishBC. They were only a small sliver of the Island on the west side, not even the whole west side. They often fought land skirmishes with their neighbors, such as the Etruscans, Umbrians, Samnites, and others. Around 250BC, there was another empire on the Southern and Western edge of the Mediterranean **Carthage**.



Carthage began to expand their empire northward, and landed on Sicily. Carthage was a dominant Naval force. Well, the way the skirmishes had been going on Italy, Rome was beginning to show itself as the most powerful of the Italians, so those in Sicily asked for the help of the Romans to get rid of the Carthaginians, and they did, with the promised of ruling their land.

So, Rome went down to expel the Carthaginians. Well, the Romans were able to repel the Carthaginians by land, but, as I mentioned, the Carthaginians were masters at sea, and the Romans didn't even know how to build a boat. One fateful day, however, a Carthaginian boat ran ashore, the Romans confiscated it, and ended up making them better than the Carthaginians. Over the next 20 years, Rome beat the Carthaginians and enforced heavy tribute.

But, that was not the end of the Carthaginians. Around 220BC, enter, who I would argue, the greatest general for tactics in the ancient world: Hannibal the Great. Hannibal gave Rome a run for their money. Starting out in Spain, he marched his army, including war elephants over the Swiss Alps, and into Rome. He fought Barbarian tribes and took Rome by surprise. At first, he marched southward on the Eastern flank of Italy, devastating cities and villages, and finally Rome mustered an army together to counter him, except, the wise general was not willing to fall into that trap. He simply followed him to keep eyes on him, let him devastate the land, but did not attack. Hannibal remained in Italy for 13 years.

At one point, when he actually was surrounded, he took a bunch of oxen that he had confiscated from his mini-conquest, put torches on them, around 200 oxen, and sent them up a pass at night. This caused the Romans to go after the oxen, giving Hannibal and his army safe passage, and he got away. The major question about Hannibal, is why, after devastating the Roman army with 8 generals, he did not march on Rome. His right hand man encouraged him to go straight to Rome, and he would have taken it, but something caused him to winter where he was, and it was all down hill from there for Hannibal.

Rome regrouped, sent an army to Spain led by one: Scipio, who overtook Spain and marched on Carthage. Carthage recalled Hannibal from Italy, and Hannibal went unarmed to Scipio, Livy says that they just stared at each other for a moment, being the two greatest generals of their time, and finally Hannibal asked for terms of peace. Scipio laid them out, Hannibal was not ok with it and said they would go to war. Scipio then defeated Carthage, and Hannibal fled to Asia, where the Seleucid empire was, led by Antiochus the Great. And so, Rome inherited the empire of Carthage, Spain and northern Africa.

Now, the name for the Carthaginian wars was the Punic (Punic is the Latin way of saying Phoenicia) wars. Phoenicia is Tyre and Sidon of Lebanon. When Babylon came in to conquer Lebanon, the vast majority of Phoenicians went to Carthage, which was one of their settlements along the Mediterranean set up through trade. Lebanon was known for its 60 foot cedars, which allowed them to make fantastic ships, hints the Naval force they had. They had an empire along Northern Africa up until Egypt. They traded this particular muscle that made a purple dye, purple is a color of royalty.

More than that, Phoenicia was home to Canaanites. Probably some of those who left Israel during Joshua’s conquest of the promised land. Hannibal and the Carthaginians would have been from the family of King Ahab’s wife Jezebel. These were the Baal and Molech worshippers of the Old Testament. In fact, Hannibal would probably more likely been pronounced Hanni-Baal, and the name means “Favored by Baal.” Could you imagine what it would have been like for the Israelites if the Canaanites, who they slaughtered in the book of Joshua, and was cursed by Noah, ruled the world?

Next on Rome’s list was Macedon (Greece). Philip of Macedon had sided with Hannibal when he was marching through Rome. This caused tension between Rome and Philip, and they went to war with them as well. Rome won the war and confiscated Greece. After that, Antiochus the Great, who had Hannibal in his care, tried to take some of the territory back that Philip of Macedon had taken, and Rome put a stop to it by going to war with him. In the end, Rome won, and took half of Turkey, and left the rest to the Seleucid empire. The time is now about 180BC. During this time, Hannibal was cornered in a house, drank poison, and killed himself.



**Antiochus Epiphanes**

The next major event for our Intertestamental history is the Jewish Maccabean revolt fought against Antiochus Epiphanes 4, who was the great great great great grandson of Antiochus the Great. Antiochus Epiphanes just came back from Africa with his tail tucked between his legs, because he thought Rome was distracted by another revolt in Greece, so Antiochus was going to try to take over Egypt. Well, Rome was not distracted, came down there, and the Roman general Popilius drew a circle around Antiochus and told him that he had to make a decision about leaving Egypt alone before he left that circle, or he would be killed. Antiochus obliged and left Africa for good.

On his way back, he began demanding the Hellenization of the Jews. He ransacked the Temple, sacrificed pigs on the altar, and required that circumcision be outlawed. During this time, the Jewish people were so adamant about following the law that they simply let the Seleucids slaughter them on the Sabbath, and let their babies be killed after circumcising them. Expect the Jews who were Hellenized **Acts 6:1-6**

After a while, finally a prominent Jewish figure Mattathias rose up with his sons, they fought against the Seleucids in guerilla warfare, and pushed them out. They then rededicated the Temple, having had only 1 day supply of oil for the lamp, but they needed 8 days worth for the dedication ceremony, and miraculously the oil did not run out. The Hebrew word for dedication, which also became the holiday by the same name is Hanukkah. After about 25 years of fighting, the Jews eventually won their independence around 140BC.

### **Hasmoneans**

This started a dynasty of priestly kings called the Hasmonean dynasty. This caused consternation among the Jews, as priests were never meant to be king, but the king was supposed to be a son of David. About 75 years later, civil war for control of Judah broke out between two Hasmonean brothers, and so the great Roman general came down to squelch the war, and this brought Roman occupation, and the end of Jewish freedom.

When Pompey came to Jerusalem, he besieged the city, entered the Temple, and was so impressed with the religious fervor of the Jews, that he entered the Temple, admired it, and left it untouched. Defiled, by him entering it, but untouched. The fervor of the Jews was seen in that they only defended themselves on the Sabbath, no offensive fighting, and when Pompey and his men entered the Temple, the priests continued their work, even as they slaughtered them.

What you find through Jewish literature between the testaments, is that they believe they had lost the Temple in the days of the Babylonians because they did not follow the law. So, to their minds, if they quit following the law in any way, they would lose the Temple again. This is why they were so ticked off at Jesus for breaking the Sabbath and eating with sinners and tax collectors. But Jesus never broke the Sabbath, He broke the traditions of the elders put in place to make religion so rigid so they wouldn't lose the Temple again. The big take away here, as we read the Gospels, is that Jesus is a trouble maker Who is going to cause God to be mad and destroy the Temple again. The people most affected by that would be the priests, aka Chief Priests, aka Sadducees.

But as Rome took over Israel, there was an Idumean man (that is Edomite, that is son of Esau) who was a friend of Mark Antony named Herod, who was given the right to be King of Israel. Oh boy. Not only was he not a son of David, but he wasn't even Israelite. Not only that, but he was from Jacob's brother Esau, who lost his firstborn right over a bowl of stew. Herod was a terrible king, killing some of his sons and subject. He took office in 37BC.

After the death of Julius Caesar, the first actual emperor of Rome (whether his subjects would call him that or not), his great-nephew Augustus defeated Mark Antony and became the first official emperor of Rome. He sent messengers throughout the empire to proclaim the Euangellion, the Gospel of his reign, and that need call him lord. This is now 27BC, and takes us up to the day of our Lord Jesus, just 27ish years later.

So, what does all of this mean for Jesus coming into the world?

- Israel is war-torn
- Israel had kings that were not sons of David, and the current king wasn't even Israeli
- Israel had been under 6 totally different regimes
- Tribute/taxes
- The people of Israel were divided
- The people were afraid to lose the Temple

What benefit to the Gospel?

- Pax Romana (peace of Rome)
- The world almost conquered by Canaanites
- The known world had one language
- People were familiar with a Gospel presentation with Augustus