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# Between the Testaments



*A Study of the 400 Years of Biblical Silence  
and the Relevant Empires*

Gene Taylor

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# The Kingdom Years — A Short History

## I. The United Kingdom

During the lifetime of Samuel, the last judge of Israel, the Israelites rejected God's system of rule by judges and demanded a king in order to be like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:1-8). Saul was anointed by Samuel to be king. He reigned for forty years. He displeased God so God did not allow any of his descendants to rule.

David, a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), was anointed by Samuel as second king over Israel. He, being a good military leader, subdued all the nations which afflicted Israel and spread the borders of Israel expanding the territory over which he ruled. God promised him that his kingdom would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:11-16).

David was succeeded by Solomon, his son. He built the empire of Israel to its peak of earthly glory (1 Kings 4:20-25). He supervised an impressive building program. In addition to the royal palace, he built the temple in Jerusalem which his father, David, had been forbidden to build.

### Kings of the United Kingdom

|         |                |
|---------|----------------|
| Saul    | 1050-1010 B.C. |
| David   | 1010-970 B.C.  |
| Solomon | 970-930 B.C.   |

## II. The Divided Kingdom — Israel

Following Solomon's death, the nation was divided into two kingdoms. Israel, the northern kingdom, consisted of ten tribes. Jeroboam was its first king (931-910 B.C.). The southern kingdom, Judah, consisted of the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Rehoboam was its first king (931-913 B.C.).

Of the twenty kings who ruled over Israel, not a one was good. From its beginning, Israel practiced idolatrous worship.

Jeroboam, at the onset of his reign and the establishment of his kingdom, erected idols in Dan and Bethel so that the people would not go to Jerusalem to worship and be enticed to ally themselves with Rehoboam and the people of Judah. As time went on, Israel sank into terrible depths of idolatry and sin. God, though, did not give up on these people.

God sent prophets to turn the hearts of the people back to Him and His law. Such men as Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea sought to get the people to repent. Amos (755 B.C.), for example, condemned unjust social practices, extravagant but empty formal worship, and the political corruptions. Hosea's life typified God's love for His rebellious people who were involved in spiritual harlotry just as Gomer, Hosea's wife, played the harlot.

### Kings of Israel

|                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Jeroboam        | 930-909 B.C. |
| Nadab           | 909-908 B.C. |
| Baasha          | 908-886 B.C. |
| Elah            | 886-885 B.C. |
| Zimri           | 885 B.C.     |
| Tibni           | 885-880 B.C. |
| Omri            | 885-874 B.C. |
| Ahab            | 874-853 B.C. |
| Ahaziah         | 853-852 B.C. |
| Joram (Jehoram) | 852-841 B.C. |
| Jehu            | 841-814 B.C. |
| Jehoahaz        | 814-798 B.C. |
| Jehoash (Joash) | 798-782 B.C. |
| Jeroboam II     | 793-753 B.C. |
| Zachariah       | 753-752 B.C. |
| Shallum         | 752 B.C.     |
| Menahem         | 752-742 B.C. |
| Pekahiah        | 742-740 B.C. |
| Pekah           | 740-732 B.C. |
| Hoshea          | 732-722 B.C. |

Sadly, Israel did not heed God's warnings. She fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17). She went into a captivity from which she never returned.

### III. The Divided Kingdom - Judah

In contrast to the wickedness of Israel's kings, Judah had some good kings among those who ruled her. They made great efforts to destroy idolatry and restore the worship God had commanded.

When Assyria tried to take Judah, King Hezekiah (716-687 B.C.), a good king, appealed to the prophet Isaiah who prayed to God to spare His people. God slew 185,000 Assyrians in one night and Judah was spared (2 Kings 19:35-37). God continued to spare Judah for a few more years because of the influence of such good kings as Hezekiah and Josiah (641-609 B.C.).

During this time, though, Judah was becoming more corrupt thus storing up judgment for herself. Periodically the kings of Judah turned the people back to God but usually their righteousness was short-lived for their penitence was superficial. Josiah, for example, cast down all the idolatrous images but he could not take the idols from the hearts of the people.

As he had to Israel, God sent His prophets to Judah. Isaiah (740-690 B.C.) prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah (767-740 B.C.), Jotham (740-732 B.C.), Ahaz (732-716 B.C.), and Hezekiah. He spoke against the vices of Judah and warned her of God's wrath. He also painted a bright picture of her future glory awaiting her after her redemption. Micah, a contemporary of, Isaiah (735-700 B.C.), cried out against the social injustices of greed and oppression of the poor which had come about because of the great prosperity Judah enjoyed. Zephaniah (630-625 B.C.) saw the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, as a growing threat to Judah. Jeremiah (625-586 B.C.) spent 40 years trying to avert the Babylonian captivity. He warned the people they would be taken as slaves to Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 25:11). No one heeded his warning. Habakkuk (612-606 B.C.) cried to God because of the wickedness of Judah and the doom on the horizon in the form of the Babylonians. He prophesied that God's judgment was coming on Judah to purge her of her evil (Hab. 1:5-6).

### Kings of Judah

|                      |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Rehoboam             | 930-910 B.C. |
| Abijam               | 913-911 B.C. |
| Asa                  | 911-870 B.C. |
| Jehoshaphat          | 870-848 B.C. |
| Jehoram (Joram)      | 848-841 B.C. |
| Ahaziah              | 841 B.C.     |
| Athaliah             | 841-835 B.C. |
| Joash (Jehoash)      | 835-796 B.C. |
| Amaziah              | 796-767 B.C. |
| Uzziah (Azariah)     | 767-740 B.C. |
| Jotham               | 740-732 B.C. |
| Ahaz                 | 732-716 B.C. |
| Hezekiah             | 716-687 B.C. |
| Manasseh             | 687-643 B.C. |
| Amon                 | 643-641 B.C. |
| Josiah               | 641-609 B.C. |
| Jehoahaz             | 609 B.C.     |
| Jehoiakim            | 609-598 B.C. |
| Jehoiachin           | 598-597 B.C. |
| Zedekiah (Mattaniah) | 597-586 B.C. |

### IV. The Babylonian Captivity

Judah fell to the Babylonians in 606 B.C. Jerusalem was captured by King Nebuchadnezzar (604- 562 B.C.) in 597 B.C. It, along with the temple, was destroyed in 586 B.C. Many of the people were taken captive and transported to Babylon for a period of 70 years. Daniel (606-536 B.C.) and Ezekiel (593-573 B.C.) prophesied of God's protection during the captivity and restoration of the people to their land.



## **V. The Restoration of a Remnant**

True to God's promises, after 70 years of captivity, Cyrus (559-530 B.C.), the Medo-Persian king who had conquered the Babylonians, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. The first group returned from captivity under Joshua and Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-4). They began to rebuild the temple. The altar was restored and the foundations laid but then the work was stopped. The people went about their own business of rebuilding their own houses, etc. About 16 years after the work was stopped, God sent two prophets, Haggai (520 B.C.) and Zechariah (520-518 B.C.), to get the people to resume work on the temple. They did and the temple was completed in 516 B.C., some 70 years after the destruction of the previous temple (Ezra 5-6).

The second group of captives, under the leadership of Ezra, returned to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. In 444 B.C., Nehemiah, a Jew who was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (464-424 B.C.) of the Medo-Persian empire, came to Jerusalem and led the people to rebuild the walls of the city. A century after the return of the first exiles, the people became indifferent to the moral and ceremonial aspects of the law. Both worship and morality were in a state of decay. God sent His final prophet of that era, Malachi (432 B.C.), with what would be His final message for along time.

Malachi cried out against the corruptions of the nation and announced the coming of Elijah the prophet who would precede the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He said that this prophet would turn the hearts of the people back to God. More than 400 years passed before God sent that prophet, John the Baptist (Matt. 11:13-14; 17:11-13; Luke 1:17).

# The Assyrian Empire

Assyria was a kingdom between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers that dominated the ancient world from the ninth century to the seventh century B.C. After defeating the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., the Assyrians carried away thousands of Israelites and resettled them in other parts of the Assyrian Empire. This was a blow from which the nation of Israel never recovered.

## I. Early Assyria

- A. The early inhabitants of Assyria were ancient tribesmen (Gen. 10:22) who probably migrated from Babylonia.
- B. They grew powerful enough around 1300 B.C. to conquer Babylonia.
- C. For the next seven hundred years they were the leading power in the ancient world, with their leading rival nation, Babylon, constantly challenging them for this position.
- D. Tiglath-Pileser I (1120-1100 B.C.) built the Assyrian kingdom to the most extensive empire of the age.
  - 1. But under his successors, it declined in power and influence.
  - 2. This decline offered the united kingdom of Judah, under the leadership of David and Solomon, the opportunity to reach its greatest limits.
  - 3. If the Assyrians had been more powerful at that time, they probably would have interfered with the internal affairs of the Hebrew people, even at that early date.

## II. Rise to Power

- A. After the Assyrians had languished in weakness for an extended period, Ashurnasirpal (884-860 B.C.) restored much of the prestige of the empire.
- B. His son, Shalmaneser III, succeeded him, and reigned from about 860 to 825 B.C.
- C. Shalmaneser was the first Assyrian king to come into conflict with the northern kingdom of Israel.

## III. Israel's Coalition

- A. In an effort to halt the Assyrian expansion, a group of surrounding nations formed a coalition, of which Israel was a part.
- B. Ahab was king of Israel during this time (874-853 B.C.).
- C. The coalition eventually split up, allowing the Assyrians to continue their relentless conquest of surrounding territories.

## IV. Internal Struggles

- A. During the period from 833 to 745 B.C., Assyria was engaged in internal struggles as well as war with Syria.
- B. This allowed Israel to operate without threat from the Assyrian army.
  - 1. During this time, Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-753 B.C.), was able to raise the Northern Kingdom to the status of a major nation among the countries of the ancient Near East.

2. 2 Kings 14:25, speaking of Jeroboam II, says, “He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher.”

## V. Assyria - Israel

- A. The rise of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C. ) marked the beginning of a renewed period of Assyrian oppression for the nation of Israel.
  1. Also known in the Bible as Pul (2 Kin. 15:19), he set out to regain territories previously occupied by the Assyrians.
  2. He was resisted by a coalition led by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel.
    - a. These rulers tried to force Ahaz, king of Judah, to join them.
    - b. When Ahaz refused, Rezin and Pekah marched on Jerusalem, intent on destroying the city.
    - c. Against the counsel of the prophet Isaiah, Ahaz enlisted the aid of Tiglath-Pileser for protection.
    - d. This protection cost dearly because from that day forward, Israel was required to pay tribute to Assyria and also was forced to adopt some of the religious practices of the Assyrians (2 Kings 16).
- B. Tiglath-Pileser was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.).
  1. When Hoshea, king of Israel (732-722 B.C.), who had been placed on the throne by Tiglath-Pileser, refused to pay the required tribute, Shalmaneser attacked Samaria, the capital of Israel.
  2. After a long siege, Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., perhaps to Sargon II; and 27,000 inhabitants of Israel were deported to Assyrian territories.
    - a. This event marked the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.
    - b. Most of the deported Hebrews never returned to their homeland.

## VI. Assyria - Judah

- A. Israel’s sister nation, the southern kingdom of Judah, also felt the power of the Assyrian Empire.
- B. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib, king of Assyria (705-681 B.C.), planned an attack on Jerusalem.
  1. However, the Assyrian army was stricken by a plague administered by “the angel of the Lord” (2 Kin. 19:35).
  2. Thousands of Assyrian soldiers died in one night, and Sennacherib was forced to retreat from his invasion.
  3. Thus, Jerusalem was saved from Assyrian oppression by divine intervention.

### Rulers of the Assyrian Empire

|                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Ashur-Nasir-Pal II  | 883-859 B.C. |
| Shalmaneser III     | 858-824 B.C. |
| Shamshi-Adad V      | 823-811 B.C. |
| Adad-Nirari III     | 810-783 B.C. |
| Shalmaneser IV      | 782-773 B.C. |
| Ashur-Dan III       | 772-755 B.C. |
| Ashur-Nirari V      | 754-745 B.C. |
| Tiglath-Pileser III | 744-727 B.C. |
| Shalmaneser V       | 726-722 B.C. |
| Sargon II           | 721-705 B.C. |
| Sennacherib         | 704-681 B.C. |
| Esarhaddon          | 680-669 B.C. |
| Ashurbanipal        | 668-633 B.C. |

## **VII. Assyrian Religion**

- A. The religion of the Assyrians, much like that of the Babylonians, emphasized worship of nature.
- B. They believed every object of nature was possessed by a spirit.
- C. The chief god was Asshur.
- D. All other primary gods whom they worshiped were related to the objects of nature. These included:
  - 1. Anu, god of the heavens.
  - 2. Bel, god of the region inhabited by man, beasts, and birds.
  - 3. Ea, god of the waters.
  - 4. Sin, the moon-god; Shamash, the sun-god.
  - 5. Ramman, god of the storms.
- E. These gods were followed by five gods of the planets.
- F. In addition to these primary gods, lesser gods also were worshiped.
- G. In some cases, various cities had their own patron gods.
- H. The pagan worship of the Assyrians was soundly condemned by several prophets of the Old Testament. (Isa. 10:5; Ezek. 16:28; Hos. 8:9)

## **VII. The Nature of the Assyrians**

- A. The favorite pursuits of the Assyrian kings were war and hunting.
- B. Archaeologists have discovered that the Assyrians were merciless and savage people.
  - 1. The Assyrian army was ruthless and effective.
  - 2. The army's cruelty included burning cities, burning children, impaling victims on stakes, beheading, and chopping off hands.
  - 3. But, like Babylon, whom God used as an instrument of judgment against Judah, Assyria became God's channel of punishment and judgment against Israel because of their sin and idolatry.

## **VIII. Jonah and the Assyrians**

- A. Because of the cruelty and paganism of the Assyrians, the Hebrew people harbored deep-seated hostility against this nation.
- B. This attitude is revealed clearly in the book of Jonah.
  - 1. When God instructed Jonah to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, Jonah refused and went in the opposite direction.
  - 2. After he finally went to Nineveh, the prophet was disappointed with God because He spared the city.

# The Babylonian Empire

## I. Geographically

### A. Babylonia.

1. It was “a plain...which is bounded on the north by Assyria and Mesopotamia; on the east by Elam, separated by the mountains of Elam; on the south by the sea marshes, and the country Kaldu (Chaldea); and on the west by the Syrian desert.” (*I.S.B.E.*, Vol. I, p. 358)
2. It derived its name from the capital city of Babylon.
  - a. It was also called “Shinar.” (Gen. 10:10; 11:2; Isa. 11:11)
  - b. It was later called “the land of the Chaldeans.” (Jer. 24:4; Ezek. 12:13)
3. It was thought to be the “cradle of civilization.”
  - a. Watered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, it was the probable site of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:14) and of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11).
  - b. During the time in which the Babylonian empire flourished, it sustained a dense population.
4. This area was covered with a network of canals.
  - a. They had been skillfully planned and regulated.
  - b. They had brought prosperity due to their enhancing of the fertility of the soil.

### B. Babylon.

1. It was established by Nimrod not long after the flood. (Gen. 10:8-10)
2. It was located by the Euphrates River within easy reach of the Persian Gulf.
3. It was an important city throughout its history.
  - a. Many battles were fought for control of it.
  - b. It was destroyed and rebuilt a number of times.
4. During the time of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C) it:
  - a. Was the chief city of the world.
  - b. Covered an area of about 200 square miles on both sides of the Euphrates River.
  - c. Had broad streets which had been laid out so that they intersected one another at right angles.
  - d. Had three imposing walls which surrounded it which were wide enough to allow chariots to pass on top of them.
  - e. Was “beautiful.” For example, Nebuchadnezzar’s “Hanging Gardens” which he built for his Median wife, Amytis, became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. (See Dan. 4:28-30)
5. In later history Babylon:
  - a. Declined but may still have existed in New Testament times if 1 Peter 5:13 is to be taken literally.
  - b. Came to symbolize in the book of Revelation the world and its wickedness.
    - 1) “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.” (Rev. 14:8; 18:2)
    - 2) The scarlet woman has written on her forehead, “Babylon the Great.” (Rev. 17:5)
  - c. Is now in total desolation thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 13:17-22.

## II. Historically

### A. The Ancient Babylonian Empire.

1. Since Babylonia is regarded as the cradle of the human race, it is, therefore, one of the most ancient of empires.
2. In about 2000 B.C., Babylon was the dominating power of the world. Hammurabi (ca. 1707-1622 B.C.) ruled a great empire from the Persian Gulf to the middle Euphrates and upper Tigris.
3. There followed a 1000 year period of struggle which saw no dominant power in the area. Babylon was variously controlled by the Hittites, Kassites, Elamites and Assyrians during this time.
4. This period was culminated by 300 years of Assyrian supremacy (885-607 B.C.).
  - a. Various Babylonian rulers tried to assert their independence without much success.
  - b. Merodach-baladan (2 Kings 20:12ff) tried to revolt from Assyria and made Babylon independent twice for brief periods (722-710 B.C.; 703-702 B.C.).
    - 1) He visited Hezekiah, king of Judah (716-687 B.C.) probably around 712 B.C.
    - 2) Sargon II of Assyria (721-705 B.C.) crushed this rebellion and his son Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) devastated Babylon in 689 B.C.
    - 3) Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.), son of Sennacherib, rebuilt Babylon and took Manasseh of Judah (687-643 B.C.) captive to Babylon. (2 Chron. 33:11)

### Rulers of the Babylonian Empire

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Nabopolassar   | 625-605 B.C. |
| Nebuchadnezzar | 604-562 B.C. |
| Evil-Merodoch  | 561-560 B.C. |
| Neriglissar    | 559-556 B.C. |
| Laborosoarchod | 556 B.C.     |
| Nabonidus      | 555-539 B.C. |
| Belshazzar     | 553-539 B.C. |

### B. The Neo-Babylonian Empire (606-536 B.C.).

1. Nabopolassar (625-605 B.C.), who was the viceroy of Babylon, rebelled against Assyria in 625 B.C.
  - a. He established the independence of Babylon.
  - b. Along with Cyaxares the Mede, he conquered and destroyed Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in 612 B.C.
  - c. He defeated the remnants of the Assyrian army at Haran in 610 B.C.
  - d. In 605 B.C., he and his son Nebuchadnezzar, defeated an alliance of the Egyptians and what was left of the Assyrians at Carchemish forever ending Assyrian domination.
2. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.) succeeded his father and was the empire's greatest king.
  - a. He was a great conqueror and great builder.
  - b. He captured all the territory that had once been held by the king of Egypt from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River (2 Kings 24:7).
  - c. He invaded Judah in 605 B.C. (Dan. 1:1), again in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:1) and for the third time in 586 B.C. when he destroyed Jerusalem.

- d. He besieged Tyre for 13 years (598-585 B.C.).
- e. After him, ineffective kings ruled and the empire was quickly brought to its demise.

### III. Religiously

- A. The gods of Babylon were basically the same as those of Assyria.
  - 1. Both nations were very superstitious.
  - 2. Marduk was their “creator” and Ea was the “Spirit of the Water.”
- B. The gods of the Babylonians were viewed as threats to them.
  - 1. They believed their gods always wanted to harm people.
  - 2. Ea was the only exception since the sea brought trade and helped to make them rich.
  - 3. Of the evil gods they said, “door cannot shut them out, nor bolt prevent them from entering; they glide like serpents beneath the door, and creep through the joints of hinges like a puff of wind.” (Dorothy Mills, *The Book of the Ancient World*, p. 105)
- C. They believed in witches and demons and put hideous images to the right and left of the doors of their houses to scare them away.
- D. They believed in the power of the stars.
  - 1. Astrology had its birth in ancient Babylon.
  - 2. They thought they could tell the future from the stars.
- E. They built temples called “ziggurats” to their gods.
  - 1. They had inherited the idea for them from the ancient Sumerians.
  - 2. These consisted of towers with a number of stages, each one a little smaller than the one below.
  - 3. The most famous one was in the city of Babylon.
    - a. It had seven stages each of which was a different color: black, orange, red, gold, pale yellow, deep blue and silver.
    - b. Each stage was dedicated to a different heavenly body: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury and the moon.
- F. Constant services were held at the temples.
  - 1. Many festivals were staged highlighted by the New Year Festival which lasted two weeks and included, among other things, a procession of gods to Marduk’s temple, the humiliation and restoration of the king who later “took the hand of Bel” to lead him in procession outside the city where a re-enactment of the assembly of the gods and the fixing of the fates for the ensuing year took place.
  - 2. The seventh day was kept as a day of rest.
- G. They believed in life after death.
  - 1. It was thought to be gloomy and dismal.
  - 2. They referred to the place they believed souls went to after death as “The Land of No Return.”
- H. Their religion seemed to have little influence on their conduct.

### IV. Socially

- A. They could be as cruel as most of the conquering people of their day.
  - 1. They utterly burned and destroyed Jerusalem and many other walled cities.
  - 2. The example of King Zedekiah of Judah (597-586 B.C.) (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jer. 39:1-7).
    - a. He was captured and taken before Nebuchadnezzar where, before his eyes, his sons and officials of his government were put to death.
    - b. His eyes were then put out and he was imprisoned.

- B. They did not glory in cruelty, though, the way the Assyrians had.
  - 1. They tended to leave all people they conquered exactly where they found them as long as they accepted Babylonian rule.
  - 2. A submissive city would be left standing with only tribute to pay.
  - 3. Judah was defeated, her cities destroyed and her people moved because she kept rebelling.
- C. Captive people were treated generously.
  - 1. The example of Daniel and his companions. They were:
    - a. Trained to serve in the king's palace.
    - b. Given honored positions of power in the kingdom.
  - 2. The Jews, while in captivity, were allowed to establish prosperous, comfortable colonies.
    - a. These were located along the River Chebar, an irrigation canal which stretched from Babylon to Erech (Erech: NW of Ur on Euphrates River).
    - b. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives telling them to build houses, plant gardens, allow their sons to marry and to prosper (Jer. 29).
    - c. Many Jews became rich during the period.

## **V. Politically**

- A. Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) was founder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.
- B. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.).
  - 1. The son of Nabopolassar, he was the empire's greatest king.
    - a. He captured vast territories and many peoples.
    - b. He built Babylon into the most glorious city on earth.
  - 2. He was the only king, to his time, that had ever destroyed the temple of God.
    - a. God would not allow him to think that he was greater than the "God of Israel."
    - b. Time and again he learned that "God rules in the kingdoms of men and sets up whomsoever He chooses." (Dan. 2:37-38, 47; 3:28-29; 4:17, 25-26, 32, 34-37)
- C. Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk - 2 Kings 25:27) (562-560 B.C.).
  - 1. He was the son of Nebuchadnezzar.
  - 2. He was assassinated by Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law, Neriglissar.
- D. Neriglissar (Nergal-Sharezer - Jer. 39:13) (560-556 B.C.).
- E. Labashi-Marduk (556 B.C.).
  - 1. He was the son of Neriglissar.
  - 2. He was deposed by a popular uprising.
- F. Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.).
  - 1. He was a general under Nebuchadnezzar.
  - 2. He also was probably one of Nebuchadnezzar's sons-in-law.
- G. Belshazzar (553-539 B.C.).
  - 1. The son of Nabonidus, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, he was appointed as coregent with his father.
  - 2. Both he and his father ruled until Babylon was taken by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C.



# The Medo-Persian Empire

## Introduction

1. Persia was an ancient world empire that flourished from 539-331 B.C.
2. The Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, setting the stage for the return of the Hebrew people to Jerusalem about 538-445 B.C., following their long period of captivity by the Babylonians.
3. The Old Testament contains many references to the nation of Persia and its representatives.
  - a. Ezra 9:9 refers to the “kings of Persia.”
  - b. Ezra 6:14 cites “Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.”
  - c. Daniel 8:20 speaks of the “kings of Media and Persia.”
  - d. Daniel 10:13 mentions the “prince of the kingdom of Persia.”
  - e. The Book of Esther refers to the “powers of Persia and Media” (1:3), the “seven princes of Persia and Media” (1:14), and the “ladies of Persia and Media” (1:18).
  - f. Daniel 5:28 prophesied that Belshazzar’s kingdom would be “given to the Medes and Persians.”

## I. Persia

- A. The Persians apparently sprang from a people from the hills of Russia known as Indo- Aryans. As early as 2000 B.C. they began to settle in Iran and along the Black Sea coast.
  1. Two of these Indo-European tribes settled on the Elamite border and to the east of the Zagros mountain range.
  2. The first references to them are made in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.).
  3. They are noted as the Parsua (Persians) and Madai (Medes).
- B. The first mention of a Persian chieftain refers to his role as an ally aligned against Sennacherib of Assyria.
  1. His son was called “King, Great King, King of the City of Anshan.”
  2. His grandson fathered Cyrus II, who was one of the most celebrated kings of history.
    - a. He is called by the prophet Isaiah “My shepherd.” (Is. 44:28)
    - b. In another passage he is referred to as “His [the Lord’s] Anointed” (Isa. 45:1), a term used in the Old Testament of the Messiah.

## II. Media

- A. Media was an ancient country of Asia situated west of Parthia, north of the Persian Gulf, east of Assyria and Armenia, and south of the Caspian Sea.
  1. The country is now included in parts of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.
  2. A mountainous country, Media contained some fertile sections; but much of it was cold, barren, and swampy.
  3. In the southern area lush plains were used as pasture land for the large herds of horses used in the Median cavalry.
- B. The history of the Medes is complex, because it involves many entangling alliances and the rise and fall of several nations.
  1. The Medes were an IndoEuropean people who invaded the rough mountain terrain south of the Caspian Sea.

2. In the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., Assyrian kings conducted campaigns against these people, forcing them to pay tribute.
  3. The mighty Tiglath-Pileser (745-727 B.C.) invaded Media and added part of it to the Assyrian Empire.
  4. By 700 B.C., the era of the prophet Isaiah, a prosperous realm had been established.
- C. Media is first mentioned in the Old Testament as the destination to which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, deported the Israelites from Samaria around 721 B.C. (2 Kin. 17:6; 18:11)
1. Medes are mentioned in Ezra in connection with Darius' search for the roll containing the famous decree of Cyrus that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. (Ezra 6:2)
  2. Laws of the Medes are mentioned in the Book of Esther (1:19) and in Daniel (6:8,15).
  3. The prophet Daniel prophesied that King Belshazzar's Babylonian kingdom would fall to "the Medes and Persians." (Dan. 5:28)
  4. Medes were also among the people from many different nations in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:9)
- D. About 710 B.C. Sargon II of Assyria defeated the Medes and forced them to pay a tribute consisting of the thoroughbred horses for which Media was famous.
1. The Medes, however, increased in strength and joined forces with Babylon.
  2. The Medes under Cyaxares and the Babylonians under Nabopolassar captured Asshur, the ancient capital of Assyria, in 614 B.C.
  3. In 612 B.C. this alliance overthrew Nineveh, the proud capital of Assyria, causing the crash of the Assyrian Empire. The seventh century Hebrew prophet Nahum expressed the great relief felt by neighboring nations at Nineveh's fall. (Nah. 2:3; 3:19)
  4. Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, married Cyaxares' daughter, strengthening the bond between the two countries.
- E. During the era of Nebuchadnezzar and the time of Jeremiah (about 605-552 B.C.), the Median kingdom reached the height of its power.
- F. Persia was dominated by Media until the time of Cyrus II who was founder of the Persian Empire. In 549 B.C.
1. Cyrus defeated Media.
  2. Under the Persians, Media remained the most important province of Persia.
    - a. As a consequence, the dual name, "Medes and Persians," remained for a long time. (Esth. 1:19; Dan. 5:28)
    - b. The expression, "The laws of the Medes and the Persians," depicted the unchangeable nature of Median law, which even the king was powerless to change. (Esth. 1:19)

### **III. The Medo-Persian Empire**

- A. Cyrus II, founder of the mighty Persian Empire, ascended the throne in Anshan in 559 B.C.
1. He conquered the Median King Astyages.
    - a. He then defeated Lydia (about 546 B.C.) and Babylon (about 539 B.C.), finally establishing the Persian Empire.
    - b. This last conquest is referred to in Daniel five.
  2. Cyrus' rule was a result of the sovereignty of God.
  3. In contrast to previous rulers, especially the Assyrians, Cyrus was humane and benevolent toward those whom he defeated.
  4. He was the Persian king who issued the decree restoring the Jews to their homeland, following their long period of captivity by the Babylonians. (2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4)

5. Cyrus was the founder of the system under which each province, or Persian satrapy, was governed by an official who answered to the great king.
  - a. He allowed a remarkable degree of freedom of religion and customs for the vassal states, including Palestine.
  - b. He developed roads, cities, postal systems, and legal codes, and treated the subject nations kindly and humanely.
6. Cyrus accomplished all of this because he was God's tool.
  - a. Just as Assyria, who conquered Israel, was God's rod of anger.
  - b. Thus the Bible refers to Cyrus in favorable terms. (Isa. 44:28 - 45:3)
- B. Cambyses II (530-522 B.C.), the son of Cyrus, reigned after his father.
  1. During his reign, Egypt was added to the list of nations conquered by Persia.
  2. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Cambyses accidentally wounded himself with his own sword in 522 B.C. Some believe he committed suicide.
- C. The next Persian king, Darius I (521-486 B.C.), was not a direct descendant of Cyrus but was of royal, Achaemenid blood.
  1. He defeated nine kings to claim all 23 Persian satrapies. This was recorded on the famous Behistun Inscription, which was written in the Akkadian, Elamite, and Old Persian languages.
  2. Darius I further unified the Persian Empire by using an efficient gold coinage, state highways, and a more efficient postal system.
  3. He was defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B. C.
  4. In the second year of his reign, he ordered the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem to be rebuilt after work on it had been discontinued for 14 years. (Ezra 4:24; 6:1) He also gave a generous subsidy that made it possible to complete the Temple.
  5. The extent of the Persian Empire under Darius is reflected in Esther 1:1 and 10:1. The vast territory was nearly 4,900 kilometers (3,000 miles) long and 800-2,400 kilometers (500 to 1,500 miles) wide.
- D. Xerxes ruled Persia from 486 to 465 B. C.
  1. He was the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther.
  2. Esther did not become queen until the seventh year of his reign, which would be about 478 B.C. This was two years after his devastating defeat at Salamis (480 B.C.), which ended Persia's last hope for conquering Greece.
- E. Next in line was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-424 B.C.).
  1. According to historians, he was a minor Persian king but he was of major importance because of his connection with the Hebrew people.
  2. Two of the three returns of the Jewish people from captivity in Babylon occurred during his reign.
    - a. The second return was apparently under Ezra. This was made possible because of the generosity of Artaxerxes.
    - b. The third return occurred in 445 B.C. (Neh. 1:1). The specific purpose of this return to Jerusalem was to rebuild the city walls.
- F. Among the kingdoms of the ancient world, Persia is remembered because it built many important cities.
  1. Persepolis was a showpiece of Persian power.
  2. Pasargadae was the ancestral capital rapidly supplanted in importance.

3. Ecbatana served as the capital of the Median Empire and became a resort area for the Persians.
  4. Susa (the Shushan of Esther) was the former capital of the Elamite Empire.
- G. The religion of the Persians centered around a reformation of the old Iranian religions developed by Zoroaster.
1. He believed in a dualism in which Ahura Mazda (or Ormazd) headed the gods of goodness (Amesha Spentas) and Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman) headed the gods of evil (daevas). Some of this is revealed in the Jewish apocryphal literature which developed from the fifth century B.C. to the time of Christ.
  2. Its adherents believed that spiritual reality was divided between Ahura Mazdah, the god of light and goodness, and Angra Mainja, the god of darkness and evil.
  3. Influenced by the moral teachings of his religion, Cyrus II of Persia was known for his humane attitude toward conquered peoples.
- H. The Medo-Persian empire ruled Asia until it was conquered by Alexander the Great (330 B.C.). After Alexander's death, Medo-Persia became part of Syria and later a part of the Persian Empire.

### **Rulers: Medo-Persian Empire**

|                      |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Cyrus II [The Great] | 559-530 B.C. |
| Cambyses II          | 529-522 B.C. |
| Darius I             | 521-486 B.C. |
| Xerxes               | 485-465 B.C. |
| Artaxerxes I         | 464-424 B.C. |
| Darius II            | 423-405 B.C. |
| Artaxerxes II        | 404-359 B.C. |
| Artaxerxes III       | 358-338 B.C. |
| Arses                | 337-336 B.C. |
| Darius III           | 335-331 B.C. |

# The Grecian Empire

## I. The Rise of the Greek Empire

- A. The beginnings of Greek history are veiled in myth.
  - 1. Greece is thought to have begun at about the time of the Biblical judges in the 12th century B.C.
  - 2. Included in this history were the Trojan War and Homer, c. 1000 B.C., the age of David (c. 1000-970 B.C.) and Solomon (970-931 B.C.).
- B. The beginning of the authentic Greek history is usually reckoned from the first Olympiad in 776 B.C.
  - 1. The formation of the Hellenic states took place between 776 and 500 B.C.
  - 2. The Persian wars were from 500 to 331 B.C. with famous battles taking place at Marathon (490 B.C.), Thermopylae and Salamis (480 B.C.).
- C. The formation of an empire was begun by Philip of Macedon, king of Macedonia (359-336 B.C.).
  - 1. He laid the foundation of the Greek empire by uniting the Greek city states under a single ruler.
  - 2. Though not a Greek, strictly speaking, he wanted to lead a united Greece against Persia.
  - 3. He trained his son, Alexander, to carry out his ambition.

## II. Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.)

- A. In 343 B.C., at the age of thirteen, Alexander was tutored under Aristotle.
- B. Philip appointed him regent of Greece when he was only sixteen years old.
- C. At age twenty, upon his father's death, he assumed command of the Greek army.
- D. In the spring of 334 B.C., he crossed the Hellespont River with 35,000 men and began the conquest of the Persian Empire.
  - 1. He defeated the Persians at the Granicus River in Asia Minor.
  - 2. He cut the "Gordian knot" at Gordium in the Temple of Zeus.
  - 3. He defeated the Persians at Issus at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea.
    - a. The conquered Persians numbered 600,000 including the wife and children of Darius III, their ruler.
    - b. Darius III ran away to Susa to raise another army.
  - 4. Alexander turned his attention south to Tyre on Phoenician coast.
- E. The capture of Tyre.
  - 1. Isaiah, in 740 B.C., had prophesied of the destruction of Tyre by the Chaldeans. (Isa. 23:13-15)
    - a. It came to pass just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
    - b. Nebuchadnezzar, as prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezek. 26:7-11,14), was its destroyer.
    - c. A new city of Tyre was built on an island offshore but Zechariah prophesied that this stronghold would be smitten "in the sea" and "devoured with fire." (Zech. 9:3,4)
  - 2. In fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, in 332 B.C. Alexander destroyed Tyre by building a causeway from the mainland to the island. (cf. Ezek. 27:32)
    - a. After a siege of seven months, 8,000 inhabitants were slain and 30,000 were sold into slavery.
    - b. The destruction of Tyre is considered the greatest military achievement of Alexander.

F. The capture of Jerusalem.

1. After the destruction of Tyre, Alexander entered the land of Israel.
2. Sanballat, the probable successor of the Sanballat who opposed Nehemiah (Neh. 4) a hundred years before, had a daughter Nicaso, who was married to a priest named Manasseh, brother of the High Priest, Jaddua. While Alexander was at Tyre:
  - a. Sanballat, along with 7,000 soldiers, went there to help him.
  - b. He wrote a letter to Jerusalem demanding that the High Priest send provisions for his army. The high priest refused.
3. After the victory at Tyre, Alexander hastened to Jerusalem.
  - a. He was met by Jaddua, the High Priest, at the head of a long procession of people dressed in white while the Priest was dressed in purple and scarlet with a mitre on his head. God had warned him in a dream the previous night to do this.
  - b. Alexander approached Jaddua alone and saluted him indicating that he had seen this very person, Jaddua, in a dream at Dios, in Macedonia, thus believing that his army was under Divine conduct.
  - c. Alexander refused to allow his soldiers to harm the Jews and accompanied them back to Jerusalem. He went up to the Temple and was shown the Book of Daniel “wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended.” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, 8,5)
4. Alexander allowed the Jews to continue in their laws and religion and to pay no tribute each seventh year. When the Samaritans saw his treatment of the Jews, they claimed to be Jews also.

G. Egypt and the East.

1. From Jerusalem, Alexander went to Egypt where he founded the city of Alexandria to help accomplish his goal of exporting the Greek culture into every country he conquered.
2. From Egypt he marched toward the Persian capital.
  - a. Upon the plain of Arbela, not far from the site of ancient Nineveh, his army soundly defeated the Persians.
  - b. Darius III, ruler of Persian Empire, fled but was murdered by one of his own generals, Bessus. Alexander avenged his death and gave him a grand funeral.
  - c. He then took Babylon, Susa and Persepolis capturing much gold and silver (Approximated at \$170 million—GT) in Susa and Persepolis.
  - d. He massacred many Persians and burned the palaces of their kings.
3. He marched eastward to Indus River conquering and building cities. His plans included conquests in Arabia, Carthage and Western Europe and the Hellenizing of the world, but these goals were never realized.
4. He returned to Babylon in 323 B.C.
  - a. He had plans to make it the capital of a new commercial empire but it was never to be inhabited (Isaiah 13:20-22; Jeremiah 51:26).
  - b. He died there of a fever at age thirty-two.

H. He thought the Greek or “Hellenistic” culture was the greatest the world had ever seen and he was determined to share it with all the people he conquered.

1. He established model Greek cities, such as Alexandria in Egypt, as he conquered a region.
2. The influence of Greek culture, arts and language was felt by the entire world.

### **III. The Empire After Alexander**

- A. Upon Alexander's death, his kingdom was divided among his four generals.
- B. The four generals and their territories.
  - 1. Ptolemy.
    - a. The Ptolemaic empire was centered in Egypt with Alexandria as its capital.
    - b. Its rulers, called Ptolemies, included Ptolemy I (323-285 B.C.), Ptolemy II (285-247 B.C.), Ptolemy III (247-222 B.C.), Ptolemy IV (222-205 B.C.), Ptolemy V (205-182 B.C.), Ptolemy VI (182-146 B.C.), Ptolemy VII (146-117 B.C.). Cleopatra was the last ruler, dying in 30 B.C.
  - 2. Seleucus.
    - a. The Seleucid empire was centered in Syria with Antioch as its capital.
    - b. Several rulers were named Seleucus while others were named Antiochus. Included were Seleucus Nicator (312-280 B.C.), Antiochus I (280-261 B.C.), Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.), Seleucus II (246-226 B.C.), Seleucus III (226-223 B.C.), Antiochus III (222-187 B.C.), Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.), Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.), Antiochus V (163-161 B.C.), Alexander Balas (161-146 B.C.), Antiochus VI (146-143 B.C.), Tryphon (143-139 B.C.), and Antiochus VII (139-130 B.C.)/
  - 3. Lysimachus. He ruled Thrace and Bythynia.
  - 4. Cassander. He ruled Macedonia.

# The Ptolemies

## I. Ptolemy I (305-283 B.C.)

- A. The son of a Macedonian named Lagus, he was surnamed Soter, deliverer, by the people of Rhodes for the military aid he had given them.
- B. While his fellow-generals who succeeded Alexander were fighting Antigonus in Asia Minor (301 B.C.), he added Coele-Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, Cyrene, and Cyprus to his domain in Egypt, Libya and Arabia.
  - 1. The Jews, after the death of Alexander, had been under the rule of the Seleucids but only for a short time.
  - 2. Ptolemy I was not the benevolent conqueror and ruler Alexander had been.
    - a. Learning the Jews observed the Sabbath, he chose that day to take Jerusalem.
    - b. Josephus, quoting Agatharchides' derisive report of the conquest of Jerusalem, wrote: "The people known as Jews, who inhabit the most strongly fortified of cities, called by the natives Jerusalem, have a custom of abstaining from work every seventh day; on those occasions they neither bear arms nor take any agricultural operations in hand, nor engage in any other forms of public service, but pray with outstretched hands in the temples until the evening. Consequently, because the inhabitants, instead of protecting their city, persevered in their folly, Ptolemy, son of Lagus, was allowed to enter with his army; the country was thus given over to a cruel master, and the defect of a practice enjoined by law was exposed. That experience has taught the whole world except that nation, the lesson not to resort to dreams and traditional fancies about the law, until its difficulties are such as to baffle human reason." (*Against Apion*, I, 22)
- C. He followed the custom of other rulers in naming cities for himself.
  - 1. He built Ptolemais on the Upper Nile, south of Abydos, to replace the old city of Thebes as his capital.
  - 2. He changed the name of the old city of Acco (Jud. 1:31), located 30 miles south of Tyre on the Syrian coast, to Ptolemais (Acts 21:7). That city is known today, and since medieval times, as Acre.
- D. He set about to make Alexandria a great city.
  - 1. He transported 100,000 Jews to it.
  - 2. He absorbed 3,000 Jews into his army laying the foundation for the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah in Isaiah 19:18-19.
    - a. An altar to be built in the midst of Egypt.
    - b. Five cities to speak the language of Canaan, one to be called "the city of destruction," evidently a reference to On, 5 miles northeast of Cairo, at that time a center for worship of the sun and called by the Greeks "Heliopolis" (sun city), for the Jews built a temple there (c. 182-147 B.C.).

## II. Ptolemy II - Philadelphus (283-246 B.C.)

- A. Successor and son to Ptolemy I, he sought to make Alexandria a world trade center.
  - 1. He was named Philadelphus because of his devotion to his wife, and sister, Arsinoe.
    - a. The practice of intermarriage with members of the royal family was a custom of the ancient Pharaohs which was adopted by the Greek rulers of Egypt.



- b. Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemy line, was an example of the contention and infamy this practice caused.
- B. He built a lighthouse at the entrance of Alexandria's harbor to guide ships to it.
  - 1. Named Pharos, after the island upon which it was built, it was the first of its kind.
  - 2. It was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
- C. In Alexandria, which became a world center of learning, he built a great library, for which Manetho compiled his history of Egypt, and a museum.
- D. Possibly the most important event of his reign was the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language, the Septuagint (c. 250 B.C.).
  - 1. Supposedly it was to provide a copy of the Jewish Scriptures for the Library at Alexandria but it is entirely possible that it was prompted by the desire of Greek-speaking Jews to want their children to be able to read the sacred writings.
  - 2. Its name supposedly comes from the fact that the work of translation was done by 72 elders from Jerusalem on the Island of Pharos in 72 days.
  - 3. The "Letter of Aristeas," a document supposedly written about 100 B.C. to Demetrius, Ptolemy's librarian, says that Ptolemy Philadelphus sent a request to obtain six elders from each tribe of Israel to do the translating (Obviously over-looking the fact that ten of the tribes were taken into Assyria in 722 B.C. and never returned—GT).

### III. The Latter Ptolemies

- A. Ptolemy Euergetes III (Benefactor, 246-221 B.C.).
  - 1. He was called Euergetes, benefactor, because in one of the wars which led him beyond the Euphrates River, he captured and placed again in their temples in Egypt some of the statues of Egyptian gods carried away by the Persian Cambyses, son of Cyrus, and Sargon II of Assyria.
  - 2. During his reign, the dominions of the Ptolemies reached their widest limits.
- B. Ptolemy IV - Philopater (221-203 B.C.).
- C. Ptolemy V - Epiphanes (203-184 B.C.).
  - 1. During his reign Palestine was retaken by Antiochus III, the sixth Seleucid ruler in Syria in one of the many wars of the 3rd century B.C. between the Ptolemies and the Seleucid.
  - 2. He was immortalized on the Rosetta Stone.
    - a. It was named for the town in the Nile delta near where it was found by Napoleon's men in 1799 when Napoleon invaded Egypt.
    - b. It became the key to reading ancient Egyptian inscriptions.
    - c. It is black granite roughly four feet by two and a half feet by 1 foot, inscribed in three languages: Hieroglyphic, Demotic, and Greek capitals.
    - d. Its inscription, made about 200 B.C., is a deification of Ptolemy V by Egyptian priests commending his policies, expressing gratitude for favors, and some matters of current events.
- D. Ptolemy Eupator (183 B.C.).
- E. Ptolemy Philometer (182-147 B.C.).
- F. Ptolemy Philopater (146 B.C.).
- G. Ptolemy Euergetes - Phiskon (146-117 B.C.).
- H. Though several other obscure names appear among the Ptolemies, Cleopatra was the last of the dynasty. She ruled from 51 to 30 B.C. when Egypt became part of the Roman Empire.

#### **IV. The Jews in Palestine Under the Ptolemies**

- A. The Jews seem to have been left to their own pursuits except for paying taxes to Egypt.
- B. Simon the Just was a High Priest of this period who is credited with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem which had been demolished by Ptolemy I and with building a great reservoir at Jerusalem.
- C. Josephus describes the plight of the Jews during the wars between the Ptolemies and Seleucids:  
“Now it happened that in the reign of Antiochus the Great, who ruled over all Asia, that the Jews, as well as the inhabitants of Celesyria, suffered greatly, and their land was sorely harassed; for while he was at war with Ptolemy Philopater, and with his son, who was called Epiphanes, it fell out that these nations were equally sufferers, both when he was beaten, and when he beat others: so that they were very like a ship in a storm, which is tossed by the waves on both sides; and just thus were they in their situation in the middle between Antiochus’ prosperity and its change to adversity” (*Antiquities*, XII, 3:3).

# The Seleucids

## I. A General History

- A. The Seleucids and Ptolemies fought frequently during the Ptolemaic rule of Palestine.
  - 1. The Ptolemies were defeated at the battle of Banias in 198 B.C.
  - 2. The Seleucids took control of Palestine.
- B. Seleucid rulers included:
  - 1. Antiochus III, “the Great” (223-187 B.C.).
  - 2. Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.).
  - 3. Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.).
- C. Antioch of Syria was the capital of the Seleucidae.
  - 1. It grew in population and influence.
  - 2. “By the time of Jesus, it had become the third largest city in the Roman Empire.” (Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, p. 10)
- C. The Jews under the Seleucids.
  - 1. “Among the Jews two factions developed, ‘the house of Onias’ (pro-Egyptian) and ‘the house of Tobias’ (pro-Syrian). The Syrian king Antiochus IV or Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.) replaced the Jewish high priest Onias III with Onias’ brother Jason, a Hellenizer, who planned to make Jerusalem a Greek city.” (Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 5)
  - 2. This period is described as one of Israel’s darkest.
    - a. “A systematic attempt was made to Hellenize the country by force. An edict demanded the fusion of all the nationalities of the Seleucid empire into one people. Greek deities were to be worshipped by all.  
“An elderly Athenian philosopher was sent to Jerusalem to supervise the enforcement of the order. He identified the God of Israel with Jupiter, and ordered a bearded image of the pagan deity, perhaps in the likeness of Antiochus, set up upon the Temple altar. The Jews popularly spoke of this as ‘the Abomination of Desolation.’  
“Greek soldiers and their paramours performed licentious heathen rites in the very Temple courts. Swine were sacrificed on the altar. The drunken orgy associated with the worship of Bacchus was made compulsory. Conversely, Jews were forbidden, under penalty of death, to practice circumcision, Sabbath observance, or the observance of the feasts of the Jewish year. Copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were ordered destroyed.” (Charles Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, p. 81)
    - b. “A gymnasium with an adjoining race track was built. There Jewish lads exercised nude in Greek fashion, to the outrage of pious Jews. The track races opened with invocations to pagan deities, and even the Jewish priests attended such events. Hellenization also included attendance at Greek theaters, adoption of Greek dress, surgery to remove the marks of circumcision, and exchange of Hebrew for Greek names.” (R.H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 5)

3. The Jews who opposed the Hellenization efforts were called *Hasidim*.
  - a. The name *Hasidim* means “the pious.”
  - b. They developed a resistance movement and attempted a defense of orthodox Judaism.
  - c. They were the forerunners of the Pharisees.

## **II. Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.)**

- A. Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Egypt in 170 B.C.
  1. Before doing so, he removed Jason as high priest and made Menelaus as high priest in his stead. Menelaus was a Hellenizing Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (priests were to be from the tribe of Levi) who offered a higher tribute.
  2. Word came to Jerusalem that Antiochus had been killed.
    - a. Jason hurried to Jerusalem and ousted Menelaus.
    - b. The report of Antiochus’ death was false.
- B. After a second invasion into Egypt (ca. 168 B.C.), Antiochus was pressured by the Romans to relinquish all claims to Egypt.
  1. He vented his frustration on the Jews. It was at this time a sow was offered on the Temple altar. Jews who resisted him were put to death.
  2. The Maccabean revolt was begun (see next lesson).
- C. The spirit of the Jews under the Seleucids, in particular under Antiochus Epiphanes: “Unknown to the Seleucidae, they had stimulated a spirit of nationalism among the Jews. Tired of oppression and years of Gentile dominion, they prayed and conspired to be free. This determination not only produced the Maccabean revolt but permeated Jewish thought into the New Testament era up to the time of Bar-Cochba (A.D. 135). Among the ortho-dox developed a longing for a military, political messiah who would smash the Gentile war machine. This is why so many were disenchanted with Jesus’ teaching and actions.” (Gromacki, 10)

# The Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty

## I. The Maccabean Revolt

- A. Antiochus Epiphanes continued to heap outrage upon the Jews even after the desecration of the Temple in 168 B.C.
- B. The revolt.
  - 1. At Modin, a village northwest of Jerusalem, the Syrians tried to force an old priest by the name of Mattathias to offer a pagan sacrifice.
    - a. He refused and another Jew volunteered to offer the sacrifice.
    - b. Mattathias killed the Jew and the Syrian officer.
    - c. Overnight Mattathias became a national hero.
    - d. Mattathias was of the family of Hasmon, or Asmoneus, thus came the Hasmoneans.
  - 2. Mattathias had five sons: John, Simon, Judas (surnamed Maccabaeus), Eleazar, and Jonathan.
  - 3. The family of Mattathias was joined by other zealots and carried on a guerilla warfare with the Syrians.
  - 4. Soon after the death of Mattathias, leadership fell to Judas the Maccabee (“the hammer”).
  - 5. The Maccabees, followers of Judas, made their way to Jerusalem in 165 B.C., entered the Temple, removed evidence of pagan worship, erected a new altar to God, and ground to dust the statue of Zeus-Antiochus.
    - a. They observed an eight day Feast of Dedication also called Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.
    - b. The feast began on the 25th of Kislev (December) exactly three years after the desecration by Antiochus.
    - c. This feast became an annual feast of the Jews. Jesus was in Jerusalem during this feast at least once (John 10:22).
  - 6. Judas died on the battlefield in another battle with the Syrians in 161 B.C.
- C. Successors to Judas.
  - 1. Jonathan held a place of leadership from 161 to 142 B.C. He was murdered by a Syrian general.
  - 2. Simon succeeded his brother from 142 to 135 B.C.
    - a. During his leadership, the Jews were granted immunity from taxes by the Syrians, and proclaimed their independence.
    - b. Simon was made High Priest.
      - 1) The High Priesthood was now hereditary in the Hasmonean line.
      - 2) “Here, then, we see the emergence of an independent Jewish state in which the civil head and the military leader were at the same time the High Priest.” (D.S. Russell, *Between the Testaments*, p. 31)
    - c. Simon was slain by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, and his son, John Hyrcanus, became High Priest.

## II. The Hasmonean Dynasty (135-63 B.C.)

- A. Division of Jewish history into Maccabean and Hasmonean periods is arbitrary. Some scholars make the distinction by limiting “Maccabean” to Judas and his two brothers.

B. The term “Hasmonean” describes the five descendants of the Maccabees.

1. John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.).

- a. He reached an accord with Syria by which the Hellenists became loyal citizens of the Jewish community.
  - 1) The ideals of the Hellenist party were perpetuated in the party of the Sadducees.
  - 2) The Hasidim were perpetuated in the party of the Pharisees. The parties are mentioned for the first time during the reign of John Hyrcanus.
- b. Independence was gained in 129 B.C. and was confirmed by the Roman Senate.
- c. “Hyrcanus forthwith began to extend his territory. In the south, for example, he seized Idumea, compelling the inhabitants to be circumcised; in the north he seized Samaritan territory, destroying the rival Temple (of the Samaritans) on Mount Gerizim.” (Russell, 32)
- d. “There is something ironical in the thought of a grandson of Mattathias forcing religious conformity on a people conquered by Jewish arms! Many historical parallels may be drawn. The oppressed frequently become the oppressors.” (Charles Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, p. 98)
- e. The Hasmoneans took over the High Priesthood and it became increasingly worldly and irreligious.

2. Aristobulus (104-102 B.C.).

- a. The eldest son of John Hyrcanus preferred his Greek name to his Hebrew name, Judah.
- b. He cast his three brothers in jail.
- c. He continued the territorial expansion begun by his father.
- d. He took to himself the title of “king.”

3. Alexander Jannaeus (102-76 B.C.).

- a. A son of John Hyrcanus, he continued the policy of territorial expansion. “The size of the Jewish state was comparable to that of the glorious days of David and Solomon.” (Pfeiffer, 99)
- b. The Hasmoneans sought to become a maritime power. Ships were sculpted on the family tomb near Modin and were depicted on coins.
- c. There was a rift between the Pharisees and the Hasmoneans.
  - 1) Open civil war erupted after Jannaeus was officiating in the Temple as King-Priest and poured out a water libation at his feet rather than upon the altar.
  - 2) The Pharisees asked the King of Syria to join them in a fight against Jannaeus. “The descendants of the Hasidim asked the descendants of Antiochus Epihanes to aid them against the descendants of the Maccabees.” (Pfeiffer, 100) Strange allies!
  - 3) Later the Pharisees deserted the Syrians and went to the aid of Jannaeus but he was not very impressed. When the war was over he gave a banquet for the Sadducean leaders and had 800 Pharisees crucified in the presence of the guests.

4. Alexandra (76-67 B.C.).

- a. She was wife of Alexander Jannaeus who had been appointed queen by her husband.

- b. She had her son, Hyrcanus II, appointed as High Priest.
  - c. Hyrcanus favored the Pharisees but her younger son, Aristobulus, wanted to be king. The Sadducees found in Aristobulus a champion.
- 5. Aristobulus II (66-63 B.C.).
  - a. After his mother's death, he defeated Hyrcanus and forced him to give up his office.
  - b. Aristobulus became both king and priest.
- C. The end of the Hasmoneans and the entrance of Rome.
  - "The story of the Hasmoneans draws to an end with the account of one Antipater, governor of Idumea, who encouraged Hyrcanus in exile to remove his brother from office. With the help of an Arabian ruler, Aretas III, he besieged Aristobulus in Jerusalem. It was at this point that Rome decided to interfere in Palestinian affairs. Pompey sent his general, Scaurus, to quell the rising and he, through bribery, supported Aristobulus. In the year 63 B.C. Pompey, in person, fearing the designs of Aristobulus, attacked Jerusalem and conquered it, entering in person into the Temple and the Holy of Holies. Aristobulus was carried captive to Rome. Hyrcanus was confirmed in the High Priesthood and was appointed ethnarch of Judaea which was now added to the province of Syria." (Russell, 34-35)

# The Roman Empire

## I. The Romans in Palestine

- A. Rome, according to tradition, was founded by two brothers, Romulus and Remus, in 753 B.C.
  - 1. Its founding took place during the last years of struggle before the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians.
  - 2. It began as an insignificant city-state but gradually grew into a world power.
- B. Rome first began moving out of Italy in 264 B.C.
  - 1. She had no single military genius such as Alexander or Cyrus.
  - 2. Her first major conflicts were with Carthage in northwestern Africa.
    - a. These were known as the Punic Wars.
    - b. In 200 B.C., Carthage was defeated.
- C. Rome gained control over the western Mediterranean in 146 B.C.
  - 1. Roman rule soon extended over Macedonia, Corinth and all Achaia.
  - 2. Rome defeated the king of Macedonia in 197 B.C.
  - 3. Antiochus III, the Seleucid ruler of Syria (222-187 B.C.), attacked the Roman army in Greece and was soundly defeated thus causing Rome to demand a very heavy tax from Syria.
    - a. Antiochus IV ("Epiphanes, 175-164 B.C.) inherited the Syrian throne in 175 B.C. but his kingdom was debt-ridden.
    - b. Asia Minor was falling under Roman control.
  - 4. "In 133 B.C., Attalus, king of Pergamum, bequeathed his territory to the Romans. The territory was annexed to another Roman province." (Charles Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, p. 104)
  - 5. By 64 B.C., the Roman general Pompey ended the Seleucid dominion in Syria.
- D. Pompey intervened in the civil dispute between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus.
  - 1. He took the side of Hyrcanus who was appointed high priest and ethnarch of Judea.
  - 2. Hyrcanus ruled Judea, Galilee, Idumea and Perea, paying annual tribute to Rome.
  - 3. "In 63 B.C., then, the Jews lost their independence when Pompey once again brought them 'under the yoke of the heathen.' From that time forward the spirit of Jewish nationalism sprang into revolt and continued right down to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state in A.D. 70." (D.S. Russell, *Between the Testaments*, p. 35)
  - 4. Aristobulus was taken prisoner to Rome.
- E. Antipater, the Idumean, paved the way for Herod.
  - 1. "An Idumean by birth, he was gifted with wealth, craftiness, and power." (Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times*, p. 47)
  - 2. The Idumeans were descendants of the ancient Edomites.
    - a. They had been pushed out of their territory southeast of the Dead Sea by the Nabatean Arabs.
    - b. They now lived in the area around Hebron.
    - c. John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.) had compelled them to be a part of Judea.
  - 3. In the strife between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, he persuaded Hyrcanus to ally himself with Aretas, king of the Nabateans, in order to regain his kingdom. His plan did not succeed because of Rome's intervention.



4. The influence of Antipater continued to grow.
  - a. He supported Pompey until his death in 47 B.C.
  - b. He then switched allegiance to Julius Caesar, Pompey's rival.
  - c. Caesar granted many favors to the Jews both in Palestine and in the Dispersion.
  - d. Antipater was made governor of Judea and Roman citizenship was conferred on him.
  - e. He was hated by the Jews because he was an Idumean.
5. He had two sons: Phasaël and Herod.
6. Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. and Antipater was poisoned by his enemies in 43 B.C.
7. Cassius now ruled over Syria and Palestine.
- F. Cassius and Brutus were defeated by Antony and Octavian at Philippi in 42 B.C.
  1. Antony assumed control of the eastern provinces.
  2. Antony made Herod and Phasaël tetrarchs of Judea under the ethnarch Hyrcanus II.
  3. Antigonus, son of Aristobulus, gained support of the Parthians to regain the throne.
    - a. Phasaël and Hyrcanus were taken prisoners.
    - b. Herod escaped and fled to Rome.
  4. Antony and Octavian declared Herod as king of Judea and with Roman help he defeated Antigonus and took possession of Galilee and Judea.
- G. The reign of Herod the Great began in 37 B.C. and lasted until his death in 4 B.C.
- H. Antony was defeated at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.
  1. Herod informed Octavian that he would serve him with the same loyalty he had shown Antony.
  2. Herod assisted Octavian in his invasion of Egypt. In return, he received the cities of Jericho, Gadara and Samaria and the territories of Gaza, Joppa and Caesarea.
- J. "Although Palestine remained nominally independent until his (Herod's) death, its real sovereignty lay in the hands of the Roman legate of Syria, and later in the command of the procurators. Throughout the period of the New Testament the shadow of Rome fell over the land, and under its oppression and protection Christianity was born and flourished." (Tenney, 50-51)

## **II. The Roman Procurators**

- A. Pontius Pilate, A.D. 26 to 36.
  1. Tiberius Caesar, who succeeded Augustus in 14 A.D., appointed Pontius Pilate as governor of Judea in 26 A.D.
    - a. He arrived and made his official residence in Caesarea Maritima, the Roman capital of Judea.
    - b. Pilate was the 5th procurator of Judea.
  2. According to history Pilate made an immediate impression upon the Jews when he moved his army headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem.
    - a. They marched into the city with their Roman standards, bearing the image of the "divine emperor" and set up their headquarters right in the corner of the Temple in a palace-fortress called "Antonia," which outraged the Jews.
    - b. Pilate quickly learned their zealous nature and political power within the province and, according to Josephus, ordered the standards to be returned to Caesarea. (Josephus Ant. 18.3.1-2; Wars 2.9.2-4)

3. Josephus (Ant, XVIII, iv, 1, 2) gives an account of what really happened to Pontius Pilate and his removal from office.
  - a. A religious fanatic arose in Samaria who promised the Samaritans that if they would assemble on Mt. Gerizim, he would show them the sacred vessels which Moses had hidden there.
  - b. A great multitude of people came to the “sacred mountain” of the Samaritans ready to ascend the mountain, but before they could they were attacked by Pilate’s cavalry, and many of them were slaughtered.
  - c. The Samaritans therefore sent an embassy to Vitellius, the legate of Syria, to accuse Pilate of murdering innocent people.
  - d. Vitellius, who wanted to maintain friendship with the Jews, removed Pilate from office and appointed Marcellus in his place.
  - e. Pilate was ordered to go to Rome and answer the charges made against him before the emperor.
  - f. Pilate set out for Rome, but, before he could reach it, Tiberius had died.
- B. M. Antonius Felix, A.D. 52 to 59.
  1. Roman procurator of Judaea, Samaria, Galilee, and Peraea, he was a freedman of Claudius I.
  2. He was judge of the apostle Paul.
  3. He married Drusilla, a Herodian princess.
  4. He was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and when recalled to Rome, he escaped being sentenced to death by Nero only through the intercession of his brother, Pallas.
  5. His oppressive rule caused deep resentment among the Jews and strengthened the anti-Roman party.
- C. Porcius Festus, A.D. 59 to 61.
  1. The successor of Felix as procurator of Judea. (Acts 24:27)
  2. A few weeks after he had entered on his office the case of Paul, then a prisoner at Caesarea, was reported to him.
  3. He was just in his administration of the province.
  4. The “next day,” after he had gone down to Caesarea, he heard Paul defend himself in the presence of Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice, and not finding in him anything worthy of death or of bonds, would have set him free had he not appealed unto Caesar. (Acts 25:11, 12) In consequence of this appeal Paul was sent to Rome.
  5. Festus, after being in office less than two years, died in Judea.
- D. Florus, A.D. 66 to 73.
  1. Gessius Florus was the Roman procurator of Judea from 66-73.
  2. Florus behaved like an executioner and a robber rather than a governor—he despoiled whole cities.
  3. When Gessius became procurator, injustice, oppression, and tyranny reached a climax and the people at large “threw caution to the winds,” being openly defiant.
  4. Florus boasted openly of his misdeeds.
  5. He plundered entire cities, and many communities were totally ruined.
  6. When Florus dared to appropriate 17 talents from the Temple treasury, the people’s patience was at an end.
    - a. A riot broke out, and baskets were passed around that the charitable might drop in coins for poor Florus who was in so much in need of funds.
    - b. With the confidence that God would in some way come to their rescue and vindicate their cause, they came out in the year 66 in open rebellion against Rome and the Jewish war had begun.

# The Herods and the Samaritans

## I. The Herods

- A. Herod the Great, son of Antipater, was born in 74 B.C.
  - 1. He was made governor of Judea by his father at age 25.
  - 2. He reigned as king of the Jews from 37 to 4 B.C.
  - 3. He was scheming, jealous and cruel.
  - 4. His greatest achievement was his building program.
- B. Herod's successors.
  - 1. His sons.
    - a. Archelaus, Ethnarch of Judea, 4 B.C. to A.D. 6. (Matthew 2:22)
    - b. Herod Philip (son of Cleopatra), Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, 4 B.C. to A.D. 34. (Luke 3:1)
    - c. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. (Matt. 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29; Luke 13:32; 23:7-12)
  - 2. His grandson: Herod Agrippa I, king of Judea, A.D. 37 to 44. (Acts 12)
  - 3. His great-grandchildren, born to Herod Agrippa I.
    - a. Bernice, consort of her brother Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13).
    - b. Herod Agrippa II, Tetrarch of Chalcis and of the northern territory, A.D. 48 to 70.
    - c. Drusilla who married Felix, procurator of Judea, A.D. 52 to 59.

## II. The Samaritans

- A. Their origin and brief history.
  - 1. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.
  - 2. Samaria was captured by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:3-6; 18:9-11)
    - a. Many of the Israelites were taken away by Assyria and put in Halan, and on the Habor, the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.
    - b. Foreigners from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim were brought by Assyria and placed in the cities of Samaria. These people intermarried with the remaining Israelites and became known as the Samaritans. (2 Kings 17:24,29).
    - c. J.L. Kelso suggests that more likely the Samaritans "were the descendants of the Israelites left in the land, for Samaritan theology shows no sign of the influence of paganism among the colonists sent by the Assyrians. If there was intermarriage, the children became true Israelites." (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. V, p. 245)
  - 3. When the Jews returned from captivity (536 B.C.) the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Their offer was refused by Zerubbabel and Joshua. (Ezra 4:3,10,17 - 520-516 B.C.)
  - 4. "In Maccabean times Jewish tradition represents the Samaritans as joining with the Seleucid oppressors." (A.A. McRae, "The Samaritan Pentateuch," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. V, p. 244)
  - 5. John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim in 128 B.C.
    - a. We do not know when the temple was built.
    - b. Note the statement of the Samaritan woman, "Our fathers worshiped (past tense—GT) in this mountain." (John 4:20)

- c. Archaeologists think this temple (ruins of which can be seen on Mt. Gerizim) was visible from Jacob's Well.
  - d. For further information on the Samaritan temple, see "An Archaeological Context for Understanding John 4:20," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 38, No. 2.
- 6. By New Testament times, the Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with one another (John 4:9).
- B. The Samaritan religion.
  - 1. The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch.
    - a. Manuscripts of the "Samaritan Pentateuch" differ from the Masoretic Hebrew text in several places.
    - b. Preference is given to Mt. Gerizim rather than Jerusalem.
  - 2. A small group of Samaritans still live in the city of Nablus (near ancient Shechem, between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal). The Samaritans still observe the passover annually on Mt. Gerizim.
- C. The Samaria Papyri.
  - 1. A collection of about 20 fragmentary Aramaic documents were discovered by the Ta'amireh Bedouin at Wadi Daliyeh (9 miles north of Jericho) in 1962-1964.
    - a. About 300 human skeletons were found in the same cave.
    - b. The papyri have added considerable information about the inter-testamental period..
  - 2. The papyri, mostly administrative, is dated between 375 and 335 B.C.
  - 3. Reference is made to Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.) and Darius III (335-300 B.C.). This places the documents just prior to Alexander's invasion in 332 B.C.
  - 4. There is also reference to "Sanballat, governor of Samaria." This is thought to be Sanballat III, and not Sanballat I of the book of Nehemiah (2:10,19; 3:33; 4:1; et.al.).
  - 5. Frank Moore Cross, who was the first to read the Samaria Papyri, suggests the historical setting: "Although the people of the city of Samaria initially ingratiated themselves with their foreign ruler Alexander the Great, they later burned alive Andromachus, Alexander's prefect in Syria. The act was not only a heinous crime, it was the first sign of revolt in Syria-Palestine. Alexander returned in all haste to Samaria and took vengeance on the murderers who were 'delivered up to him,' according to the ancient historian Curtius Rufus.

"Alexander destroyed the city of Samaria. Archaeologists have uncovered the late fourth century towers at Samaria which were built in Greek design rather than Palestinian. This suggests that Samaria was resettled by Greek Macedonians after its destruction; and indeed both Eusebius and Jerome tell us that this was the case. In addition, excavations at Shechem reveal that that city was rebuilt in the late fourth century after a long abandonment. This is probably to be explained by the fact that the Samaritans who fled Samaria rebuilt Shechem as their new capital." (Frank M. Cross, "The Historical Importance of the Samaria Papyri," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March 1978, p. 25)
- D. Miscellaneous information.
  - 1. Herod the Great built Samaria as one of his magnificent cities.
    - a. He dedicated a temple to the Emperor Augustus.
    - b. "One of his wives was a Samaritan, who was the mother of Herod Antipas." (Kelso, 246)

2. Archelaus proved a poor ruler, so Samaria fell under the control of the Roman procurators. Josephus states that Pilate's handling of a fanatical assembly on Mt. Gerizim led to his removal as procurator in A.D. 36 (*Antiquities*, XVIII. iv).
3. Travel in first century Palestine was affected by the Samaritan-Jew conflict (cf. Luke 9:52-56). Many Jews of Galilee traveled along the Jordan Valley or through Perea on their way to Jerusalem.
4. The Samaritans gave a favorable reception to the gospel (Acts 8:1-25).

# The Sects of the Jews

## I. Background

- A. The rise of the Jewish sects resulted from the clash between Hellenism and the Jewish religion and culture.
  - 1. Hellenism spread its influence by Alexander the Great and later by his generals.
  - 2. The Jews could not escape confronting it.
  - 3. Many of the Jews were willing to synthesize Greek culture with Judaism.
    - a. This was especially true in the large Jewish settlement in Alexandria and other Hellenistic centers.
    - b. These Jews felt that their loyalty to the faith was in no way hindered by adopting the Grecian way of life. These developed into the Sadducees.
- B. Other Jews saw in Hellenism elements dangerous to the purity of the Jewish faith.
  - 1. These looked upon Hellenism as the new temptation to unfaithfulness just as idolatry had been to their forefathers.
  - 2. Those who reacted against Hellenism were known as Hasidim, the party of “the pious.” From these came the Pharisees and later the Essenes.
- C. In the time of the Maccabean revolt, the lines were drawn tightly between Hellenizers and Hasidim.
  - 1. The Hasidim were only interested in religious liberty. They were unconcerned about politics.
  - 2. Because of their interest in merging the Greek way of life with the Jewish culture and religion, the Sadducees were in a position to exert political influence, and from then on were generally in control of the high priesthood, and the Sanhedrin.

## II. The Pharisees

- A. The Pharisees were the most numerous and influential of the five Jewish sects. They numbered about 6000 at the time of Herod the Great.
- B. They were first mentioned by name during the reign of John Hyrcanus (134 -104 B.C.).
  - 1. They represented the combination of the high priesthood with civil authority.
  - 2. The term “Pharisee” means “separated ones.” It likely referred to their separation from Hellenism.
  - 3. They “appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately.” (Josephus)
- C. “A scholarly class dedicated to the teaching of the twofold law (the written and the oral) and to the dissemination of their belief in the world to come and the resurrection of the dead. They are not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, they taught laws and doctrines not set down in those scriptures, and they promised salvation to the individual in a life beyond the grave, a concept not formulated in the Pentateuch. Yet these Pharisees were so successful in winning over the people to their innovational teachings that in the time of Jesus they are sitting in the chair of Moses, and legitimately so (cf. Matt. 23:1-2).” (E. Rivkin, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume, p. 657)
- D. Characteristics.
  - 1. They accepted the entire canon of the Old Testament (Law, prophets, and the writings).
  - 2. They attached great importance to oral law or tradition.

3. They believed in the existence of angels and spirits and the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul.
4. They practiced ritual prayer and fasting and tithed their property carefully.
5. They kept the Sabbath strictly. Some of their extreme positions included:
  - a. Some forbade spitting on the bare ground on the Sabbath lest this be considered plowing—thus Sabbath-breaking work.
  - b. A woman was not to look in a mirror on the Sabbath lest she see a gray hair and be tempted to pluck it.
  - c. Some questioned whether they could eat an egg laid on a festival day. It might be tainted even though the hen was unaware of the festival day.
6. Many of them became fanatical and took on a self-righteous air which Jesus condemned but not all of them were that way.
7. They devised legal loopholes for their convenience.
  - a. One could not carry his clothes out of a burning house on the Sabbath, but he could put on several layers of clothing and wear them out of the house.
  - b. Travel on the Sabbath was limited to three-fifths of a mile from the town where one lived. On Friday they could take food to a house three-fifths of a mile from home and go there on the Sabbath. This was considered his “home away from home” so he could go yet another three-fifths of a mile.

E. Influence.

1. They were in control of the synagogue instruction.
2. Of all the sects of the Jews, they alone survived and became the foundation of modern orthodox Judaism.

### III. The Sadducees

- A. Their name is derived from the sons of Zadok, high priest in the time of David and Solomon. It means “righteous ones.”
  1. Less numerous than the Pharisees, they were more a party of the common people.
  2. After the return from Babylonian exile, the high priesthood took on more and more of a political role.
  3. In the time of Jesus, they had much political power.
  4. They often compromised with cultures different from the Jews.
- B. They were a smaller group than the Pharisees but wielded more political power because they controlled the priesthood.
- C. Characteristics.
  1. They held to a literal interpretation of the Law (Torah) and held that it alone was canonical (they ruled out the “oral tradition” so important to the Pharisees).
  2. They denied the existence of angels or spirits and did not believe in the resurrection of the body or the immortality of the soul.
  3. Their religion was mostly bound up in the ritual of the temple.
  4. They were of the aristocratic class. In their religious views they were liberals.
  5. They were political opportunists.
- D. Their influence on the ministry of Christ and persecution of the early church.
  1. Their opposition to Christ was inspired by fear of trouble with Rome.
  2. Peter and John were brought before the council.
- E. With the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Sadducees were finished.

#### IV. The Essenes

- A. Little is known of their origin though the Dead Sea Scrolls have given much insight into the life in Essene communities.
  - 1. Josephus describes them in his *War of the Jews*.
  - 2. The name is generally thought to have come from the Greek word “*hosios*” meaning “holy.”
  - 3. It is likely they were an offshoot of the Pharisees since doctrinally they maintained about the same position.
  - 4. W.F. Albright (in 1946) and Murphy-O'Connor (in a recent article) suggest that the Essenes were Jews who returned from Babylon just prior to the time of the Maccabean high priest Jonathan (152-143 B.C.).
- B. Characteristics.
  - 1. They were an ascetic brotherhood.
  - 2. They abstained from marriage.
  - 3. They lived in seclusion in secluded communities and had all things in common.
  - 4. Their life was simple.
  - 5. They were restrained and sober and rejected all oaths.
  - 6. Like the Pharisees, they believed in the immortality of the soul either in a place of comfort or of torment.
  - 7. They were not mentioned in the gospels (since they withdrew from society).
- C. Both Philo and Josephus agree there were about 4,000 of them.

#### V. The Zealots

- A. Origin.
  - 1. They first appeared in Palestine during the early years of Roman rule under the leadership of one Judas, son of Ezekias.
  - 2. Some think they were originally Pharisees who became interested in political freedom.
  - 3. According to Josephus, the sect of the Zealots was formed in A.D. 6 when Judas the Galilean and Zadduk the Pharisee rebelled against Rome.
- B. Characteristics.
  - 1. They advocated the violent overthrow of Rome.
    - a. They refused to pay taxes to Rome.
    - b. They regarded acknowledgment of loyalty to Caesar as sin.
  - 2. Their nationalism was related to their faith.
  - 3. Many of them may have been Galileans since Gamaliel confused Peter and John with known Zealots.
  - 4. They were very aggressive and won the bulk of the people to their cause inciting the revolt which brought on the Roman invasion in 70 A.D..
- C. Simon, Zelotes, a disciple of Christ, had formerly been a Zealot, as “Zelotes” indicates. (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) Cananean (NKJV: “Cananite”) is the Aramaic word for Zealot. (cf. Mark 3:18)

#### VI. The Herodians

- A. They were a minority of influential Jews who were wholly politically minded.
- B. They are described as “The Sadducean aristocracy of priests - who supported the Herodian dynasty and, by implication, the Roman rule, which had put the Herods in power.” (R.H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 51)



## **VII. The Scribes**

- A. The Scribes were not a religious or political group but a “professional group.”
  - 1. The terms “lawyer,” “scribe,” and “teacher (of the law)” are used synonymously in the New Testament.
  - 2. They were also called “rabbis,” literally, “my great one” or “my master, teacher.”
- B. They originated with Ezra who read and interpreted the law to the returned captives. (Ezra 7:12; Neh. 8:8)
- C. Most of the scribes were identified with the Pharisees at the time of Christ.
  - 1. They were regarded as authoritative interpreters of the law. They also had to be experts in all the traditions of the elders.
  - 2. They would cite the law and then give the various interpretations of the fathers.

# Developments Among the Jews

## I. The Diaspora (cf. John 7:35. The Dispersion Among the Greeks)

- A. This term describes the scattering of the Jews outside of Palestine.
- B. Causes of the dispersion.
  - 1. The Israelites were taken by force into various lands.
    - a. Israel was taken by Assyria in 722 B.C.
    - b. Judah was taken to Babylon in 606, 597, and 586 B.C.
  - 2. Wars and famine at home made foreign residence more desirable.
    - a. Some of the Jews who had been scattered preferred to stay where they were when conditions improved. (cf. The Jews in the days of Esther)
    - b. In the days of Jeremiah there were communities of Jews in Egypt at Tahpanhes, Migdol, Memphis, and in the land of Pathros (Jer. 42:14; 43:7; 44:1).
    - c. There was a Jewish colony at Elephantine, an island in the upper Nile, in the 5th century B.C.
  - 3. "The Seleucid kings of Syria encouraged Jewish colonies in the cities of Asia Minor." (J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament - An Introduction to Its Literature and History*, p. 39)
  - 4. Advantages of commerce may have caused voluntary migration.
- C. "By New Testament times it was estimated that more Jews lived outside of Palestine (perhaps as many as three to five million) than lived in the homeland." (H.L. Drumwright, Jr., "Diaspora," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 119)
  - 1. "There is not a community in the entire world which does not have a portion of our people." (Josephus, *Bell*, ii. 16. 4)
  - 2. Many of the cities Paul visited throughout Asia and Europe had Jewish communities (e.g. Acts 13:14; 14:1; 16:3, 13; 17:1, 17; 18:2-4; 19:8; 28:17).

## II. The Synagogue

- A. The origin of the synagogue is difficult to determine, but it is generally held that it arose during the time of the Babylonian exile. It did not become common until the inter-testamental period.
  - 1. "With the destruction of the Temple (586 B.C.), sacrifices ceased. Prayer and the study of the sacred Scriptures, however, knew no geographical limitations. The Book of Ezekiel describes the elders of Israel gathering in the prophet's house (8:1; 20:1-3)." (Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, p. 59)
  - 2. The word "synagogue" is of Greek origin.
    - a. It simply refers to a gathering of the people or a congregation.
    - b. "The Hebrew word for such a gathering is *keneseth*, the name used for the parliament in the modern state of Israel." (Ibid.)
  - 3. After the rebuilding of the Temple (520-516 B.C.), the synagogue continued to fill the spiritual needs of the Jews of the Diaspora.
    - a. There were synagogues in many of the cities visited by Paul: Damascus (Acts 9:2); Salamis (13:5); Antioch of Pisidia (13:14); Thessalonica (17:1); Corinth (18:4); Ephesus (19:8); and others. Only ten families were needed to compose a synagogue.

- b. One rabbinic tradition has it that there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem alone.
  - c. Even the small villages of Galilee had synagogues at the time of Jesus. (Matt. 4:23; 9:35)
- B. The building and the service.
  - 1. “The typical synagogue was a rectangular auditorium with a raised speaker’s platform, behind which rested a portable chest or shrine containing Old Testament scrolls. The congregation sat on stone benches running along two or three walls and on mats and possibly wooden chairs in the center of the room. In front, facing the congregation, sat the rulers or elders of the synagogue. Singing was unaccompanied. To read from an Old Testament scroll, the speaker stood. To preach, he sat down. For prayer, everyone stood.” (R.H. Gundry, *New Testament Survey*, p. 41)
  - 2. The synagogue was a place of *instruction* and *worship* but not a place of sacrifice.
    - a. “The service consisted of recitation of the Shema (the Hebrew word for “hear”) (Dt. 6:4ff), and praise to God, prayer, singing of psalms, reading from the Hebrew O.T., with a Targum (an oral translation into Aramaic (or Greek), a sermon (if a competent person was present), and a blessing or benediction.” (Gundry)
    - b. There are several graphic descriptions of synagogue services in the New Testament.
      - 1) Jesus at Nazareth. (Luke 4:16-30)
      - 2) Paul at Antioch of Pisidia. (Acts 13:14-16)
- C. Archaeologists have uncovered several synagogues dating from the first to the fifth centuries A.D.
  - 1. A first century synagogue was discovered at Masada (1963-1965).
  - 2. Several 2nd to 5th century synagogues are to be seen in Palestine: Capernaum, Meiron, Beth Alpha, et.al.
  - 3. Archaeologists found a Greek inscription from a synagogue on Mount Ophel, not far from the Temple precinct in Jerusalem. The Theodotus Inscription states that the building was for “reading of the law.”
  - 4. In the Corinth Museum is a broken lintel with the inscription “synagogue of Hebrews.”

### III. The Septuagint

- A. During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.), the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures was begun. It was called the Septuagint. Hellenism was now so prevalent that the Jews were beginning to speak Greek.
- B. *The Letter of Aristeas*, written ca. 100 B.C., purports to have been written by an official in the court of Ptolemy Philadelphus. It says that six elders were chosen by the High Priest in Jerusalem from each of the 12 tribes to do the work of translation.
- C. The Septuagint is designated the LXX (the nearest round number in Roman numerals to 72).
- D. This meant that every person who read Greek could read the Scriptures. It made the prophecies of the Messiah available to thousands who could not have read Hebrew.
- E. More than half of the quotations in the New Testament from the Old Testament are from the Septuagint. The man of Ethiopia was reading the Greek Bible. (Acts 8:32)

### IV. The Sanhedrin

- A. Under Roman rule the Jews were allowed to exercise power over religious and domestic affairs. There were many local courts but the supreme court was the Sanhedrin.
  - 1. “There were 71 members: a high priest and 70 other members from both Pharisees and

- Sadducees. The Sanhedrin was dominated, however, by a priestly aristocracy (therefore, mostly Sadducees)." (D.A. Hagner, "Sanhedrin," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. V, p. 271)
2. New Testament names for the Sanhedrin: council (assembly) of the elders, chief priests, scribes. (Luke 22:66; Matt. 27:1; 26:59; Acts 22:5) The Greek name is *sunedrion*, literally meaning "a sitting together."
  3. They commanded a police force. (John 18:3)
- B. History.
1. Rabbinic tradition traced the Sanhedrin back to Moses. (Num. 11:16)
  2. Ezra is said to have reorganized the Sanhedrin. This was called the "Great Synagogue."
  3. The first historical record of the Sanhedrin is in the days of Antiochus III (223-187 B.C.).
- C. The Sanhedrin exercised some power in the Diaspora. From the Sanhedrin Paul received letters to the synagogue at Damascus. (Acts 9:1-2, 14)
- D. The Sanhedrin and the early church.
1. The apostles were admonished not to continue preaching. (Acts 4:5-22; 5:17-42)  
Gamaliel, the famous rabbi, made a plea for justice.
  2. Stephen was tried and stoned. (Acts 6:9 - 8:1)
  3. Paul was tried by the Sanhedrin. (Acts 23:1-10)
- E. Some famous members of the Sanhedrin.
1. Nicodemus. (John 3:1-5; 7:50-51; 19:39)
  2. Joseph of Arimathea. (John 19:38)
- F. The Sanhedrin was dissolved in 70 A.D.

## V. The Tax Collectors (Publicans)

- A. Under Roman rule wealthy men bought the privilege of collecting the taxes in certain localities.
1. These men were "tax farmers" who employed local Jews to do the actual collecting of the taxes.
  2. Revenue collected in Palestine went to the emperor. This prompted the question, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:17)
- B. "As a class, the tax collectors were hated by their fellow Jews. This was almost inevitable. They represented the foreign domination of Rome. Their methods were necessarily inquisitorial. That they often overcharged people and pocketed the surplus is almost certain. In the rabbinical writings they are classified with robbers. In the synoptic gospels they are bracketed with 'sinners' (Matt. 9:10; 11:19; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:30; 7:34). This shows the common attitude of the Jewish people toward them. They were considered to be renegades, who sold their services to the foreign oppressor to make money at the expense of their own countrymen." (R. Earle, "Tax Collector," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. V, p. 606)

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