

THE TIME BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

The Maccabees, Rome, and Herod

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The time between the Testaments was one of ferment and change; a realignment of traditional power blocs and the passing of Near Eastern cultural traditions that had lasted for almost 3,000 years. The approximately 400 years between Malachi and the birth of Christ is known as the inter-testamental period (c430-4 BC). Sometimes called the “silent” years, they were anything but silent, as events, literature and social forces during this time would shape the world of the New Testament.

Introduction - Some Historical Background

A Brief Overview of Israel’s Early Foundation: Led by his father Terah, Abraham moved from his home in Ur (Iraq) to Haran (Syria) [Gen 11:27-32], then later on to Canaan (Promised Land) [Gen 12:1-5] in about **2100BC**. Abraham, by God’s blessing, fathered Isaac (and Ishmael), who then fathered Jacob (and Esau). Later, Jacob moved his family (clan) to Egypt in a time of severe famine where his son Joseph (sold into slavery years before by his jealous brothers) was a co-ruler under Pharaoh – this brings us to **1886BC**. After 430 years in Egypt (Ex 12:40), Jacob’s descendants, now known as Hebrews (Israel) find themselves enslaved, and by God’s grace and power, are delivered by Moses, (the Exodus) - **1446BC**. After 40 years of wandering, led by Joshua, Israel emerges from the wilderness (**1406BC**) and takes over the “Promised Land” of Canaan during about **1407-1380BC**. Following this, they are led and governed by Judges for about 300 years when the people clamor for and insist on a king “like everybody else has” (1Sam 8-9). God gives them what they say they want, a king of their choosing – **Saul** - which proved disastrous. He rules for 40 years (**1050-1010**), and then is followed by **David**, a man of God’s choosing (**1010-970**), who in turn is followed by his son **Solomon**.

The Kingdom Divided: During King **Solomon’s** reign (970-930BC) one of his officials, **Jeroboam**, plotted against him and when discovered fled to Egypt. After Solomon’s death his son **Rehoboam** took the throne and **Jeroboam** returned. Greedy for power himself, he stirred up the people against **Rehoboam** due to his heavy taxation policy (1Kings 12:1-14). Consequently, a civil war erupted which divided the kingdom; ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom (Israel) under **Jeroboam** with Samaria as the capital, and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom (Judah) under **Rehoboam** with their capital in Jerusalem. The Northern Kingdom lasted about 200 years as an apostate nation under a collection of bad and evil rulers until it was destroyed by Assyria in 722/721. Meanwhile the Southern Kingdom continued under a mixed bag of good and evil rulers as a client state of Assyria until the time of **Hezekiah** (715-686BC).

The Northern Kingdom (Israel): In order to keep the two kingdoms separate, **Jeroboam** (930-909) adopted worship of the Golden Calf (a religion of Egypt) as Israel’s State religion. Worship of Jehovah had become identified with Judah and David’s family, and the Calf symbolized Israel’s independence from Judah (and from God). **Jeroboam** was then followed by a series of bad kings until the time of **Omri** (885-874) who was worse than any of the previous others. **Omri** was then followed by his son **Ahab** (874-853) who was even worse than his father, and who with his wife Jezebel introduced Baal worship into Israel. During this time both the prophets **Elijah** and **Elisha** attempted to turn the people away from their false gods and bring them back to the true God, but with no success. The nation was, however, given further opportunities for repentance, as the prophets **Amos** (760-750) and **Hosea** (750-715) both came to Israel during the reign of **Jeroboam II** (782-753), and warned of God’s coming judgment on the nation if they did not change their disobedient and rebellious ways. They foretold Israel’s destruction and captivity, and that the kingdom would be abolished forever if the people and their rulers did not repent.

They also prophesied that Assyria would come upon them as a vulture (eagle), and that Israel (the ten Northern tribes) would be deported to Egypt and Assyria, and end up as wanderers among the nations. Additionally, both **Micah** (740-700) and **Isaiah** (740-681), although primarily prophets to Judah (the Southern Kingdom), warned of Israel's coming destruction. God did indeed care about these people, and extended His hand of mercy if they would turn back to Him. Unfortunately, they did not take God's prophets and the warnings seriously and instead continued going their own way, rejecting God's offer of restoration. God's plan was for a chosen people to follow and obey Him thereby exalting and dignifying His holy laws as a testimony and witness to all nations. The northern ten tribes ignored this and were defeated and exiled as the result of God's judgment. History testifies to the fact that Israel and its capital, Samaria, were assaulted and the people taken into bondage by Assyria (722BC), then deported and transplanted en masse throughout Assyria's empire and sold to Egypt as slaves.

The Southern Kingdom (Judah): As Israel was going into captivity in 722BC, Judah's King **Ahaz** (735-715) was afraid that Assyria would come down on him next. Rather than looking to God and trusting Him for deliverance, however, he sought to appease Assyria by following a pro-Assyrian foreign policy. As a result, pagan influences made their way into Judah and gained a hold on the people. Although the prophets **Isaiah** and **Micah** protested they did not find a ready ear until the next king, **Hezekiah** (715-686), King **Ahaz's** God-fearing son. **Hezekiah** sought to honor God by instituting spiritual reforms with the support and encouragement of both **Micah** and **Isaiah**. He still, however, trusted in his own political judgment and made an alliance with Egypt against Assyria, and in 705 both rebelled against Assyrian rule. Bad idea as the Assyrians invaded the area attacking both the Egyptian and Jewish forces. As Assyria moved to threaten Jerusalem itself, God intervened and 185,000 Assyrian troops were destroyed by the "Angel of Death" (2Kings 19:5-37). Although Jerusalem was spared, **Hezekiah** still paid tribute to Assyria, and Judah remained as part of the Assyrian empire.

Prelude to the Inter-Testamental Period

Some Relevant Historical Markers

626: Assurbanipal, the last of Assyria's truly strong kings, dies. A Babylonian noble, Nabopolassar, then forms a coalition of Scythian and Medes, and with Babylonian troops successfully leads a revolt against their Assyrian overlords. Meanwhile, Judah's good king Josiah begins purging Judah of pagan influences (**II Chron 34:3**) and institutes real national reforms. Unfortunately, due to the long and wicked reigns of their previous kings, the Jewish people were remained idolaters at heart. Josiah's reforms delayed but could not avert Judah's eventual doom and judgment. Nevertheless, God's mercy and patience were offered in the person of **Jeremiah**, His prophet sent to warn the people either repent or face punishment.

612: Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, is destroyed by the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians, but the Assyrian king escapes to Haran with remnants of his army. Egypt's Pharaoh Necho II (a nominal ally of Assyria) prepares to go to Assyria's aid and assist her against Babylon.

609: King **Josiah** (against God's will) tries to stop Egypt from aiding Assyria, but is killed in battle at Megiddo. His youngest son **Jehoahaz** (aka Shallum) then ascends Judah's throne by popular demand in place of his older brother, **Eliakim** (aka Jehoiakim), and "did evil in the sight of the Lord". Meanwhile, Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar defeats the last of Assyria's forces at Haran. Egypt then decides to remain in Palestine to establish control over this area near to her border. (**II Ki 23:29-30, II Chr 35:20-23**).

608: Jehoahaz rules 3 months after which Necho deposes him because of his popularity with the people and his known antagonism to Egypt; he wasn't a reliable puppet. Jehoahaz is then taken to Egypt as a prisoner in chains (**II Kings 23:32-33, Jer 22:10**). Pharaoh Necho then made Eliakim king of Judah and named him **Jehoiakim** (indicating his subservience as a vassal to Egypt), and was responsible for raising tribute demanded by Egypt. By now, however, Babylon claims ALL of Assyria's former empire and prepares to confront the Egyptian forces in Palestine. Jehoahaz's only distinction was that his 3-month reign was the shortest of all Judah's kings. By now, however, Babylon claimed control over all of Assyria's former empire and prepared to confront the Egyptian forces stationed in Palestine.

605: The Egyptians move north to Carchemish where they are defeated by the Babylonians, and Necho is forced to retreat back into Egypt (**Jer 46:2**). Nebuchadnezzar then lays claim to Judah and takes control of Jerusalem and King Jehoiakim. As a result, Judah's most promising young men (**Daniel** is in this group) and a large portion of her wealth are taken away to Babylon so as to weaken Judah and minimize any chances of future rebellion (**II Kings 24:1**) (*1st stage of the Captivity*)

602: Babylon and Egypt battle again in southwestern Palestine with heavy losses on both sides. Although Egypt was prevented from coming into Israel, Nebuchadnezzar also had to withdraw to re-equip and reorganize his own army. Babylon's losses and withdrawal encouraged Jehoiakim to rebel against Babylon and again ally himself with Egypt despite Jeremiah's warnings to the contrary (**Jer 22:13-19**). This was short lived, however, as Babylon's allies in the area put down Jehoiakim's rebellion.

598: Jehoiakim dies and is succeeded on the throne by his son **Jehoiachin** (also called Jeconiah or Coniah). Apparently, other cities subject to Babylon had also rebelled upon hearing of the costly battle of 602 and Babylon's military reverses. Upon rebuilding his forces, however, Nebuchadnezzar returns to punish Judah's last rebellion and assaults and takes Jerusalem. As a consequence, Jehoiachin is deposed and deported to Babylon, and replaced by his uncle Zedekiah (**II Kings 24:17**). Also, about 10,000 Jews (**II Kings 24:14**), including the prophet Ezekiel and most of the skilled craftsmen are deported to Babylon. (*2nd stage of the Captivity*). Jehoiachin ruled a little over three months; like his uncle, Jehoahaz, a short reign.

597-586: Zedekiah almost immediately enters into negotiations with Egypt and, trusting in this new ally rather than God, rebels against Babylon (**II Kings 25:1-7**). By 588 Babylon responds by assaulting and laying siege against Jerusalem, and in 586 the city falls (for the third time). This time, however, her punishment is total destruction with great slaughter. Nebuchadnezzar then appoints Gedaliah as Governor of Judah (**II Kings 25:22-26**), but he is later assassinated. Jeremiah goes to Egypt while Zedekiah (who sees his sons killed before his eyes, and then is blinded) and most of the surviving Jewish population are deported en masse to Babylon. (**Jer 25:8-13**) (*3rd stage of the Captivity*). **Note that Jer 41:10 and 43:1-7** testify that the royal line was preserved through the rescue of the king's daughters!!

SUMMARY:

Last Kings of Judah

Some Prophets

Hezekiah*	715-686	Amos	780-740
Manasseh*	697-642	Hosea	760-720
Amon	642-640	Isaiah	740-681
Josiah	640-609	Micah	740-700
Jehoahaz	609	Zephaniah	638-608
Jehoiakim	608-597	Nahum	630-610
Jehoiachin	597	Jeremiah	625-585
Zedekiah	597-586	Zechariah	520-516

NOTE (*) Hezekiah and Manasseh shared a 10 year co-regency

A CAPTIVE PEOPLE: As noted above, by **586BC**, after several unsuccessful rebellions in Judah, Babylon's King attacked and destroyed Jerusalem, and took the bulk of people captive. Israel (aka Judah) then ceased to be a nation and became simply a minor territory of the greater Babylonian Empire. This situation changed in **539BC** when the Persians, under **Cyrus**, conquered Babylon and incorporated her territory into Persia's growing empire. The Persians then allowed and encouraged the captive peoples (including the Jews) of the previous Babylonian Empire to return to their former homelands to rebuild their economies and thus strengthen and enrich the Persian Empire. The process of the Jewish return consisted of 3 stages over almost 100 years.

- **536:** After the Persians decreed that the captive Jews could go back to their homeland, the first stage took some time to organize, and the actual return probably began around 536. This first stage only took in 50,000 people ([Ezra 2:64-65](#)); after several generations in the Babylonian empire, apparently not everyone wanted to return to a homeland they had never known. Under **Zerubbabel** as governor, and **Joshua** the high priest, the people began their return and started rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Local opposition (trouble with the neighbors), however, caused work to proceed in spurts and soon it was halted completely. The Temple remained in ruins until about 520 when God raised up the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah** to encourage and spur the people on. The Temple was finally completed in 517 [sixth year of Darius]; a 20 year effort. ([Ezra 1:3-6](#), and on).
- **458:** Under Persia's King Artaxerxes (464-423), **Ezra** took some treasure and more people (4,000 - 5,000) back to Israel. As High Priest, Ezra set out to beautify the temple and institute badly needed and necessary religious reforms among the people. (See [Ezra 7:1-28](#) and through chapter 10)
- **445:** Thirteen years later Artaxerxes permitted his cupbearer Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls ([Ne 6:15](#)). As newly appointed governor, Nehemiah also spearheaded reforms to help the poor ([Ne 5:2-13](#)), and he convinced the people to shun mixed marriages, to keep the Sabbath ([Ne 10:30-31](#)) and to bring their tithes and offerings faithfully ([Ne 10:37-39](#)).
- **433:** Nehemiah returned to the service of the Persian king, and during his absence the Jews fell into sin once more. Later, however, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to discover that the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath was broken, the people had intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt ([Ne 13:7-31](#)). Several of these sins are condemned by Malachi ([Mal 1:6-14](#); [2:14-16](#); [3:8-11](#)).

Note: Although Ezra and Nehemiah were co-workers, Ezra's writings deal with all four of these periods while Nehemiah deals with only the latter three. The events of **Esther** take place between these two books during the reign of the Persian King, Xerxes. The similarity between the sins denounced in Nehemiah and those denounced in Malachi suggest that the two leaders were contemporaries. Likewise, this is also the time period in which the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, was written. The prophet Malachi wrote after the city of Jerusalem and the second Temple were rebuilt, but apparently the people's initial enthusiasm had worn off. Following a brief and unsuccessful revival under Nehemiah as noted above, ([Neh 10:28-39](#)), the people and the priests become mechanical in their observance of the Law. Lax in their worship and delinquent in their tithing, they could not understand why God was dissatisfied with them. Malachi sets them straight and thus ends what we know as the Old Testament – about **430BC**.

The Inter-Testamental Period

The Inter-Testamental period (aka “The Time Between the Testaments”) covers the times of Nehemiah and Malachi (the last book in the OT) to the birth of Christ; the period between **430BC - 4BC**. Often called the “Silent Years”, because they are not covered in the Bible, this is a misnomer – they were anything but silent. Instead this was a time of ferment and change; a realignment of traditional power blocs and the passing of Near Eastern cultural traditions that had lasted for almost 3,000 years. As a result, events, literature, and social forces during this time shaped the world of the New Testament – the one Jesus entered into and lived.

Little is known about Israel between Nehemiah and Christ, but we do have the Apocryphal books of Maccabees and writings of the Jewish historian Josephus, as well as written records of surrounding nations. Taken together we can, therefore, paint at least a partial picture of Israel’s history during this period. Further, available evidence indicates that Persian rule (**536 to 331BC**) was fairly liberal and benign rather than cruel and harsh.

THE LEGACY OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT: In 334BC, Alexander the Great (from Macedonia - Northern Greece) invaded the Persian Empire. By 331, he had successfully conquered the Persians and controlled their territory including Palestine. This change in masters, however, - from Persians to Greeks - brought a new and more insidious threat to Israel. Alexander was committed to the creation of a world united by Greek language and culture, a policy called “Hellenization” which had a dramatic impact on the Jews. (*Note - The Greeks called themselves Hellenes and their land Hellas after an ancient deity. The Romans, in their early history, had contact with a minor tribe of people called the Gracii who had emigrated from Hellas to the area near present day Naples. From them, the Romans gave the name Gracii to all Hellenes whom they subsequently encountered; aka “Greeks”. From that circumstance, the world came to know Hellas by a term which its own people never applied to themselves.*) Upon Alexander’s death in 323BC [he died in Babylon at 33 years old of a fever after a night of heavy drinking], the empire he won was divided among four of his generals, two of whom founded dynasties of their own; the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria & Mesopotamia. The other two, Macedon/Greece under Cassander and Thrace/Asia Minor under Lysimachus, were shortlived due to internal struggles and foreign invasions.

- ◆ **SIDEBAR - The “Septuagint”:** The first two Ptolemies ruling Egypt during 305-246BC made Alexandria their capital city and developed it into a center of Greek learning and culture which drew many displaced peoples from all over the ancient world including numerous Jews. In order to fit in and be accepted, however, these Jews had to immerse themselves into Greek language and culture. As a result, they began to forget their mother tongue of Hebrew and eventually could no longer follow along in the services of their synagogues. These Jews, therefore, set about translating the Hebrew scriptures into Greek - a project that was completed around 250BC and of immeasurable import for the rest of the world. Legend says that Ptolemy II, who prided himself in his extensive library at Alexandria, wanted a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Torah) in Greek, and that he made a request to the High Priest in Jerusalem for men who could undertake the translation. The High Priest supposedly sent 72 scholars (6 from each of 12 tribes) to do the task, and when they finally finished the Greek version was called the Septuagint meaning “the Seventy”.

Following Alexander's death in 323BC, Israel was under the Ptolemies of Egypt who were considerate of Jewish religious sensitivities and things went fairly well for the nation. In 198BC, however, the Seleucids of Syria took control of Palestine and Israel, and the early Seleucid years were largely a continuation of the tolerant rule of the Ptolemies. This changed, however, when **Antiochus IV “Theos Epiphanes”** (God Made Manifest) [175-164] attempted to consolidate his fading empire through a policy of radical Hellenization. While a segment of the Jewish aristocracy had already adopted Greek ways, the majority of Jews were outraged. In 170BC Antiochus successfully invaded Egypt and proclaimed himself King of that empire, but as he was returning back to Syria, a revolt broke out in Jerusalem. In response, Antiochus completely subjugated the city, and plundered and desecrated the temple. A few years later, in 168, Antiochus returned to Egypt to solidify his control, but was met by Roman representatives who ordered him to retire from African soil (Rome also desired to control Egypt).

Antiochus stalled for time, but the Roman envoy Popilius took a spear and drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and told him to decide before he stepped out of it. Not prepared for a war with Rome, he yielded in humiliation and fury. The news of his being ousted from Egypt reached Jerusalem in the form of a report that he had been killed. The Jews rejoiced and took this opportunity to depose and kill their Syrian overlords and cleanse the Temple of pagan abominations. The very alive Antiochus, however, took vicious revenge upon Judea by slaughtering Jews by the thousands and again plundering the Temple at Jerusalem to restore his treasury. His atrocities were aimed at the eradication of Jewish religion; he prohibited some of the central elements of Jewish practice, and attempted to destroy all copies of the Torah (the Pentateuch). His crowning outrage was when he rededicated the Jerusalem Temple as a shrine to Zeus by building a Greek altar over the old one and sacrificing a pig in the temple itself.

THE MACCABEES: Serious opposition to Antiochus was ignited when Mattathias, an elderly villager from a priestly family, and his five sons -- Judas, Jonathan, Simon, John and Eleazar -- destroyed a Greek altar in his village, Modein, and killed Antiochus's local representative. They then went into the mountains of Ephraim and organized a rebel movement - the Maccabean revolt. Although Mattathias died soon after, the rebellion continued under his son Judas (called Maccabeus; the Hammer). Judas was an inspiring leader and gave his name to this struggle as he and his band defeated the Syrians in several key battles. Concurrently, Antiochus also had to deal with the expanding power of Rome encroaching into his kingdom. By 165BC Judas had taken over Jerusalem, and in December he cleansed and rededicated the Temple reinstating the ancient worship services. The anniversary of this event is still celebrated by Jews today as Hanukkah starting on December 25 and lasting for 8 days.

- ◆ **SIDEBAR:** Antiochus IV died in 164, and was followed by a series of weak successors with short reigns allowing their empire to be slowly whittled away. The last Seleucid king, Phillipus II [65-63], was displaced by the Roman general Pompey who took over Palestine making it a Roman province.

ISRAEL'S (Judah's) INDEPENDENCE: As a result of their success against Antiochus, the Jews finally gained their independence, a luxury they'd not enjoyed for many centuries. Eventually Mattathias' last son Simon (142-135) ruled as prince and high priest over the small independent Jewish kingdom. The dynasty thus founded was known as the Hasmonean (from Asamoneus, the father of Mattathias). In the succession of rulers, **Simon** was followed by his son John **Hyrcaeus** (134-104), and grandson **Aristobolus I** (104-103), and then by Aristobolus' brother, Alexander **Janneus** (103-76BC). Under these rulers, the "orthodox" Jews who had supported the Maccabees fell out of favor, and with only a few exceptions, the ruling Hasmoneans supported the Jewish Hellenizers.

The Hasmoneans did, however, expand the Jewish kingdom to include the non-Jewish areas of Samaria and Edom (Idumaea), where the inhabitants were forced to accept Judaism. The kingdom was also strengthened politically by various foreign alliances, and reached limits similar to those of the kingdom of David. Unfortunately, the hard won victory of Mattathias' family ended up to be hollow, for the Jewish state had evolved into an aristocratic "Hellenistic" regime - characterized by Greek culture, values, world views, and language - that was hard to distinguish from that of the Seleucids. The Hasmoneans established the **Sanhedrin**, the council of state or national tribunal of the Jewish people. Composed of 71 Jewish leaders and sages and chaired by the High Priest, it was the supreme authority for civil and religious legal decisions (perhaps derived from [Exodus 24](#) when God told Moses to "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel). Concurrently, a small group of aristocrats with considerable political power allied themselves with the Hasmonean rulers and constituted the "temple" party of priests -- the "Sadducees".

They may have taken their name from Zadok, an Old Testament priest during the reigns of Kings David and Solomon ([2 Samuel 15:24-29](#)), or perhaps from the Zadokites ([1 Kings 4:2-4](#)), a family of priests. These "priests", however, were not distinguished for their righteousness, but rather by their political power and support for the Hellenization of Israel. They also; (1) held only to the written law, not the traditions; (2) denied the resurrection of the body, immortality, and retribution in a future life; (3) denied the existence of spirits (angels and demons); and (4) denied all ideas of divine interposition in the affairs of the world. The orthodox Jews who had originally supported the Maccabees recoiled from the Hasmonean policies and the values of the Sadducees, and reacted strongly against the secularization of their society. They felt that the monarchy itself conflicted with the lordship of Yahweh, and many of them bonded together to oppose what they regarded as the religious deterioration of the Jewish nation.

They became known as the "Chasidim" or "Those Loyal to God". We know them as the "**Pharisees**" -- Semitic for "the separated ones". These Pharisees, as a group or brotherhood, reacted against the Hellenization of Jewish society by devoting themselves to strict observance of the body of law that had been made over the years as contained in the holy words of the Pentateuch (Torah), the traditions in the Talmud, and other writings. Their strictness separated them from their fellow Jews as well as from the heathens, hence their name "separatist". Their loyalty to tradition and their idea of truth, however, eventually led to pride and hypocrisy which perverted the original pharisaical ideal. They took the Talmud, which consisted of man's interpretations, applications, and traditions, and made it into a body of Holy Law within the Jewish community. When Christ challenged this by contrasting the traditions of men with the commandments of God (Mt 15:3-9), He threatened what had become the man-made fabric of Jewish society along with the keepers of this fabric -- the **Pharisees**.

◆ **SIDEBAR:** The Babylonian Captivity (586-536BC) had brought about a new quality to Judaism. With Jerusalem inaccessible to the exiles, the Temple destroyed, and the priesthood scattered, the Jewish exiles concentrated on the **law** rather than nationhood, on **personal piety** rather than sacramental rectitude, and on **prayer** as a replacement for the sacrifices denied them. They also focused on the “Torah” - the Law (The first five books of the Old Testament - The Pentateuch). The more pious Jews (zealous scribes and elders) elaborated upon and amplified the Law and defined their religion as obedience to its precepts in accordance with strict interpretations. The development of these commentaries, interpretations and applications of the Law eventually grew into a great body of exegesis which became known as the Talmud; the civil and canonical law of the Jews for ages to come. Over time, the Talmud became, next to the Torah, an object of reverence and importance. Upon returning to their land, the Jews brought with them this new form of religious expression with the synagogue as its center. Synagogue worship became characterized by an emphasis on personal piety and a relationship with God which helped preserve Judaism and paved the way for the Christian gospel.

After Alexander **Janneus'** death in 76BC, his wife Alexandra Salome succeeded him. Barred as a woman from the priesthood she appointed her older son, **Hyrchanus II**, as high-priest. Upon her death in 67, Hyrchanus succeeded her as ruler, but almost immediately he and his brother **Aristobolus II** began quarreling over the Jewish throne. Civil conflict erupted, and both appealed to the Romans for help to resolve the issue. In 64, the Romans, under Pompey, had made Syria a Roman province and he was near at hand in Damascus. Now a man named **Antipater** (from the non-Jewish district of Idumaea; ancient Edom) comes onto the scene as a supporter of Hyrchanus. Antipater intrigued with Pompey to resolve the conflict in both Antipater's and Rome's favor by making Judea a client state of the Roman Empire. In 63BC Pompey obliged by taking over Judea and Palestine. He then removed Aristobolus from any position of authority and established **Hyrchanus** as ruler and high priest, but as a client of Rome without his former royal powers (63-40BC). **Antipater** was also designated as his civil advisor, and from then on the Jews were subject to the Romans – their independence was ended!

ROME: By the mid-second century (c.150BC), Rome's influence was spreading throughout the Mediterranean world through victories in a series of wars in Asia, Syria, and Macedonia establishing her as the dominant power in the Middle East. By 77BC, a young Roman commander, Gnaeus Pompey, became a leading figure within the Roman government and organized conquests in Asia and Syria into a group of provinces and client kingdoms. As part of this he pacified Judea in 63BC by taking Jerusalem, and making Palestine a Roman province - the Seleucid Empire was now gone forever! Meanwhile Julius Caesar, who had also made a name for himself, brought his wealthy master Crassus into alliance with Pompey, and together they formed a ruling coalition called the “First Triumvirate”. Caesar then went into Gaul to bring it into the Roman sphere while Crassus went east to deal with an invasion of the Parthians.

◆ **SIDEBAR:** In 248BC, the area of ancient Persia fell under the power of the Parthians, an Iranian people who began a dynasty enduring until about AD226. They were succeeded by one of Parthia's vassal kings, Ardashir, who ruled AD 226-241 and was a descendent of Sasan. Thus the Sassanian or Neo-Persian Empire was established which endured until conquered by the Moslem Arabs in 651.

In 53BC the Parthians defeated the Romans and killed Crassus. With Crassus dead and Caesar off in Gaul, Pompey now controlled Rome and had the senate designate him as sole consul - essentially dictator. By 51BC, Julius Caesar had subjugated Gaul and started back to Rome with his victorious legions. Pompey well knew that upon return, his former “partner” would challenge him, so he had the senate declare Caesar a “public enemy” unless he disbanded his forces before crossing onto Roman soil. Caesar, however, went ahead with his plans and with his forces crossed the Rubicon, a stream marking the border between his assigned province and that of Roman territory proper.

This was a treasonous act which marked Julius Caesar as a public enemy of the Roman people and an outlaw. With his veterans behind him, however, he took the chance and marched on Rome. Pompey, fearing Caesar and his legions, fled to Greece to rally his own forces. Caesar followed him to Pharsalus in northern Greece where their forces clashed. Pompey's forces were defeated in 48BC, but he managed to escape to Egypt where he was treacherously slain by young king Ptolemy XII. In pursuit, Caesar landed at Alexandria, but was soon besieged by Ptolemy's forces. In the ensuing battles the Romans were victorious and Ptolemy perished. Caesar now controlled Egypt where he made Ptolemy's sister Cleopatra and her younger brother Ptolemy XIII joint rulers as clients of Rome. **Julius Caesar** was now the sole and absolute ruler of the Roman world. Many of his subordinates, however, were uncomfortable with Caesar's dictatorship and desired to retain the old republic dominated by the Roman senate. Consequently several formed a conspiracy and finally acted by assassinating Caesar in March 15, 44BC. They did not, however, have any organization ready to take over the government, which allowed one of Caesar's friends and officers, **Mark Antony**, to take control.

The assassins then fled Rome to various provinces in order to raise armies against Antony. Meanwhile, **Gaius Octavius**, Caesar's 18 year old nephew who had been named Caesar's heir and adopted in his will, came to Rome to claim his inheritance. After some initial difficulties, **Octavian** and **Antony** formed a coalition to destroy the last of Caesar's assassins, and were victorious over Cassius and Brutus at Philippi in 42BC. They then divided the Roman provinces between themselves with Octavian controlling the west and Antony the east (including Egypt). In 36BC, Antony married Cleopatra who was then the sole ruler of Egypt after Ptolemy XIII's death in 44BC. She hoped, with Antony's help, to restore the old Ptolemaic Empire and prepared to attack Octavian. The rivals met in 31BC at Actium in a decisive naval engagement where Octavian was victorious over the forces of Antony and Cleopatra. They fled back to Egypt where both ended up committing suicide; Egypt then passed totally into Rome's possession. By 27BC, Octavian was in firm control of what was now the Roman Empire and assumed the title of Emperor Caesar Augustus with a reign lasting from 27BC to 14AD.

JUDEA AND THE ROMANS: As noted above, after Pompey's defeat in 48BC, Julius Caesar was master of Rome. **Hyrchanus II** and **Antipater** (Pompey's designated client rulers of Judea in 63BC) were no political dummies, and quickly attached themselves to Julius Caesar's party, thereby securing their own positions and relative freedom for Judea. They also convinced Caesar to appoint Antipater's two sons, Phasael and **Herod**, as governors of Jerusalem and Galilee respectively. Upon Antipater's death in 43BC, Phasael and **Herod** succeeded him in Hyrchanus' court. Phasael ended his life when Hyrchanus' nephew Antigonus captured Jerusalem with the help of the Parthians. As the Parthians swept into Palestine, Herod escaped to Rome where he gained the favor of both Octavian and Marc Antony. [Remember that after Julius Caesar's assassination in 44BC, Octavian and Antony gained control and divided the Roman world among themselves.] In 40BC, Rome designated Herod as King of Judea who then returned with Roman forces and took Jerusalem back from the Parthians and Antigonus who was beheaded - the Hasmonean dynasty was ended. Herod, in order to solidify his position as "King of the Jews", then married Mariamne, the last of the Hasmoneans, and ruled for 37 years (40-4BC).

HEROD: Herod was Rome's client king of Judea from 37 to 4 BC. As noted above, his father, Antipater, was not Jewish, but an Idumean (Edomite), and sought to legitimize his position with the Jews by marrying Mariamne, a princess of the Hasmonaean line, whom he later put to death. The first years of His reign were troubled by hostility between two Jewish sects, the Sadducees and Pharisees, and by the enmity of surviving members of the Hasmonaean house, but he managed to suppress his political enemies. The years from 25 to 13BC were for the most part prosperous. During this period Herod devoted himself to numerous architectural projects, including the construction at Jerusalem, Jericho, and Caesarea of theaters, amphitheaters, and hippodromes for the Grecian games inaugurated in honor of Augustus.

To protect the Judean frontier against Arab incursions, he built or rehabilitated a chain of fortresses, which were later to prove of great value to the Jews in their insurrection against Rome. He also rebuilt and beautified the Temple at Jerusalem with close regard for the religious scruples of the people. For all these projects, he became known as Herod the Great, but his final years were embittered by the ceaseless and complicated political intrigues within his palace. Although a practicing Jew, and despite his attempts to win their favor, Herod was hated by the Jews as a foreigner (and Edomite) and a friend of the Romans. According to Matthew 2:16, Herod tried to kill the infant Jesus by murdering all the male infants in Bethlehem. After his death in 4BC, Rome divided his kingdom among three of his sons - Herod Antipas, Archelaus, and Herod Philip.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: The best scholarship puts Jesus' birth sometime immediately before the death of Herod in 4BC. This timeframe is also consistent with the general time of the imperial Roman census and opens up speculations on the "Star of Bethlehem". Why, then, is our calendar at least 4 years off (why wasn't Christ born on 1AD)? The answer to this lies with a 6th century AD Roman monk, mathematician and astronomer named Dionysius Exiguus (Denis the Short). In 533, he was directed to fix the beginning of the New Era (AD or Anno Domini - in "The Year of Our Lord") and reform the calendar to pivot about the birth of Christ. He began by working backwards in time, but unknowingly committed what became history's greatest numerical error in terms of cumulative effect. He apparently overlooked the four years when the Roman Emperor Augustus reigned under his own name of Octavian, and he ended up dating the nativity in the year 753 from the founding of Rome. Herod, however, died only 749 years after Rome's founding, hence a 4 year error. (Note; Rome numbered years A.U.C. or Anno Urbis Conditae - In The Year From the Founding of the City). Since we know that Herod died in 4BC, the birth of Jesus must have been at least that early, and Matt 2:16 suggests it may have been as much as two years before that (6BC). The result of Dionysius' chronology, which remains with us today, was to give the correct traditional date for the founding of Rome, but one that is at least 4 years off for the birth of Christ.

So What is December 25th All About?? Historians are unsure exactly when Christians first began celebrating the Nativity of Christ. However, most believe that Christmas originated in the 4th century as a Christian substitute for pagan celebrations of the winter solstice. Before the introduction of Christmas, each year beginning on December 17 Romans honored Saturn, the ancient god of agriculture, in a festival called Saturnalia. This festival lasted for seven days and included the winter solstice, which usually occurred around December 25 on the ancient Julian calendar. During Saturnalia the Romans celebrated the lengthening of daylight following the winter solstice. Although the Gospels describe Jesus' birth in detail, they never mention the date, so historians don't really know on what date of His birth. The Roman Catholic Church chose December 25 as the day for the Feast of the Nativity in order to give Christian meaning to existing pagan rituals, i.e. Saturnalia. The Catholic Church hoped to draw pagans into its religion by allowing them to continue their revelry while simultaneously honoring the birthday of Jesus. The Eastern Orthodox Church took a slightly different course. By the end of the 4th century the Eastern Church in Constantinople had also begun to acknowledge December 25 as Jesus' birthday, but it emphasized the celebration of Christ's baptism on January 6 as the more important holiday.

In Summary

An appreciation for this period is significant when we consider what Paul wrote to the Galatians (Gal 4:4 “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son.”). So what does “the fullness of time” really mean? One can study prophecies in Daniel, do some historical research and the math, and arrive at the time period of Jesus’ ministry and sacrificial death – the numbers add up. More to the point, however, history shows that Christ’s coming was at an opportune moment – the “right time”. During these “silent years”, Alexander the Great came on the scene imposing the unifying influence of Greek culture and language, followed by the Romans with their excellent and widespread road system, stable governmental structure, and overall peaceful order - just right for the spread of the gospel across three continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia). It is interesting that the period from the birth of Christ to the late second century AD (about 200 years) is characterized as the “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace). This was a time of relative peace and stability in the Roman Empire which allowed the gospel to flourish and be carried to distant areas. The providence of God had put all the pieces in place for the perfect time to send His Son. God is never late.

Footnote: After about 200AD, the Roman Empire was wracked with serious civil wars along with major barbarian invasions (primarily from eastern Europe). Although Rome barely managed to hold the invasions in check, serious decline set in. By 300AD, the Empire was divided into east and west portions. The West was conquered by Northern Europeans (Germans) in 476 while the East went on to become the Byzantine Empire lasting until it fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

-- JEWISH SECTS --

PHARISEES -- Their roots can be traced to the second century BC as the Hasidim or “Chasidim” -- “Those Loyal to God”. “Pharisees” means “the separated ones”; a brotherhood that reacted against the Hellenization of Jewish society by devoting themselves to strict observance of the body of law in the Pentateuch (Torah) and the traditions in the Talmud. Their strictness separated them from their fellow Jews as well as from the heathens, hence their name “separatist”. They were “the leaders of the masses” and exponents of conventional Judaism. Affirming strict adherence to the traditional Jewish beliefs and practices, the Pharisees strongly objected to the laxity of many members of the religious establishment. While fully observant of the Law and believing in revelation and resurrection, however, they were not ascetics and were content to lead normal lives. Their beliefs included;

- They regarded their oral tradition and the Torah as equally inspired and authoritative. Jesus strongly criticized them for equating their traditions (the Talmud - how the Law was to be applied) with God’s Law -- Mt 15:2-9, Mk 7:1-20)
- They accepted a rather developed hierarchy of angels and demons.
- They taught that there was a future for the dead - an afterlife.
- They believed in the immortality of the soul and in reward and retribution after death
- They were champions of human equality
- The emphasis of their teaching was ethical rather than theological.

SADDUCEES -- They had their beginning during the Hasmonean period (166-63BC), and disappeared with in with the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD. Most of the high priests and a majority of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees. Their faith was as much a philosophy as a religion, and rejected many basic supernatural tenets of Jewish tradition. They denied the resurrection of the dead and claimed that the soul does not exist, and therefore “after death one expects to suffer nothing , either good or bad.....

man passes into non-existence”. As for their philosophical orientation, Josephus compared the Sadducees to the Epicurean school of Greek philosophy; in more modern terms, the liberal branch of the Episcopalians church Additionally;

- They considered that only the books of Moses were authoritative scripture; unlike the Pharisees, they denied that oral tradition was authoritative and binding
- They interpreted Mosaic law more literally than did the Pharisees.
- They were very exacting in Levitical purity
- They attributed everything to free will
- They did not believe in either any resurrection of the dead or a future life. (That’s why they were sad, you see!)
- They rejected the idea of any “spiritual” world including angels and demons.

ESSENES -- probably originated among the Hasidim, along with the Pharisees, from whom they later separated (1 Maccabees 2:42; 7:13). They were a group of very strict and zealous Jews who took part with the Maccabees in a revolt against the Antiochus in 165-155BC. The Essenes denounced both the Pharisees and Sadducees for failing to live up to the Law, and for drifting into worldliness and apostasy. They followed a highly ascetic and communal lifestyle in accordance with the Law as they interpreted it, and were given to apocalyptic concerns about the battle between good and evil. Many of the views were based upon revelation as well as theology. They provided an outlet for those preferring a very intense and strict faith, the religious “escape valve”. The Essenes were an external challenge to conventional Judaism, especially to the religious establishment. Additionally;

- They followed a strict observance of the purity laws of the Torah.
- They were notable for their communal ownership of property
- They had a strong sense of mutual responsibility
- Daily worship was an important feature along with a daily study of their sacred scriptures
- Solemn oaths of piety and obedience had to be taken.
- Sacrifices were offered on holy days and during sacred seasons.
- Marriage was not condemned in principle, but was avoided
- They attributed all that happened to fate

ZEALOTS -- originated during the reign of Herod the Great (6BC), they ceased to exist after the disaster at Masada in 73AD.

- They opposed payment of taxes to a pagan emperor, saying that allegiance was due only to God.
- They were fiercely loyal to the Jewish traditions.
- They opposed the use of the Greek language in Palestine
- They prophesied the coming of the time of salvation.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS IN ROMAN HISTORY

- 14AD** Augustus dies; Tiberius becomes Emperor
- 37** Caligula (Gaius Caesar) becomes Emperor
- 41** Claudius becomes Emperor
- 43** The conquest of Britain
- 54** Nero becomes Emperor (persecution of Christians at Rome under Nero in 64AD)

66-73 Constant friction between the Jews and their Roman overlords and oppressors finally erupted into a serious rebellion which broke out in the late 60s. Vespasian, who became Emperor in 69, and his son Titus reacted by conquering the whole country and destroying Jerusalem and the Temple in 70AD. The last Jewish forces managed to hold out in their fortress of Masada until overwhelmed by the Romans in 73. Rather than surrender, however, the Jews in Masada committed mass suicide. When finally over, this revolt not only resulted in many Jewish deaths, but most of the survivors were deported and sold into slavery through Egyptian slave markets. Supposedly, these new Jewish slaves were so numerous, that the supply greatly exceeded demand and they were essentially worthless on the market. The Romans then changed the administration of Judea and made it an imperial province governed by a high ranking Roman official. They also stationed the tenth Roman Legion in Jerusalem to deal with any security needs.

With the Temple gone, the Sanhedrin was abolished and the nucleus of organized Judaism in the land was thus destroyed. Those Jews still in Palestine were no longer allowed to live in Jerusalem without special permission. Although most of Jerusalem was in ruins and off limits, however, it still remained of great sentimental and fiercely religious interest to those Jews who continued to survive in Palestine.

NOTE: Although Roman government was disinclined to impose a religion upon its subjects, the need was acutely felt for one common belief system that, in addition to the local cults, would be practiced throughout the empire. Such a common system was expected to serve as a cohesive force among the various and differing cultures, languages, and ethnic groups comprising the Roman domain. The Romans found such a religion in the cult of the deified ruler and, with Augustus, worship of the emperor became the religious bond of the empire. Although not all emperors claimed divine status for themselves during their lifetimes, the worship of their *gens* or genius (divine spirit) did become an established cult.

135 The Emperor Hadrian's (117-138 AD) tidy mind was offended by the ruins of Jerusalem, so in 130 he founded a Roman colony on the site of the city and named it Aelia Capitolina [the name memorialized the Emperor's family; his full name was Publius Aelius Hadrianus, and Capitolina recalled the Capitoline Hill in Rome as the site of a temple to Jupiter]. Hadrian, adding insult to injury, built a shrine to Jupiter on the Temple site. The idea of a foreign settlement on Jewish soil and a pagan temple on their sacred site inflamed Jewish passions and prompted another rebellion. A leader emerged known as Simon Bar Kochba, the so called "Messiah in the Wilderness". Although a fanatic, he managed to surprise and temporarily take back much of the land from the Romans. It took the Romans 3 years (132-135) to totally subdue the rebels with the result that Judea was left a wilderness. As in the first revolt, many Jews either were killed, or were enslaved or exiled.

Those lucky enough to be exiled were deported and dispersed among other peoples and nations (the final stage of the Diaspora) where they were generally despised and mistreated. Hadrian then forbade any Jews from entering Jerusalem, forbade the observance of the Sabbath and all Hebrew rituals, and prohibited public instruction of Jewish law. This completed the denationalization of the Jews begun by Vespasian.

It was not until 1919 (just after WWI) when Britain held Palestine as a mandate from the League of Nations after it was wrested from the fallen Turkish Empire, that Jews began to reenter their ancient homeland in any numbers. The nation of Israel was finally formed and recognized as a sovereign state by the United Nations in 1948.

161 Marcus Aurelius is Emperor; more persecutions of Christians

167-176 A long, desperate war between Rome and a confederacy of German nations

190-200 Serious civil wars occur throughout the Roman Empire along with the beginning of major barbarian invasions (primarily from eastern Europe). Included in these invasions was that of the Franks, a powerful Germanic tribe who immigrated to Gaul in about 250 AD (what is now France, named after the Franks). Although Rome managed to barely hold the barbarian invasions in check for about 200 more years, serious decline sets in.

284-305 In order to better consolidate the far flung areas of the Roman empire, the emperor Diocletian divided the empire in eastern and western portions for administrative purposes, and initiated a ruling system which called for 2 co-equal emperors (called Augusti). Each emperor was to choose an assistant and successor (called a Caesar) to take over in case one of the Augusti died. This tetrarchy was meant to stabilize the ruling order by decentralizing the government, and minimize any resultant civil strife by providing for an orderly succession to the imperial offices. Diocletian ruled the east from Nicomedia in Bithynia, and chose Maximian as his other Augusti (co-ruler) to rule the west from Milan, Italy. This move of the western capital from Rome to Milan left somewhat of a power vacuum in Rome which resulted in bestowing increased political power upon the Bishop of Rome.

305 Diocletian and Maximian retired and passed their authority onto their Caesars, Galerius (who chose Maximinus Daia as his Caesar) and Constantius Chlorus (who chose Severus as his Caesar).

312 Both Constantine (the son of Constantius) and Maxentius (son of Maximian) felt cheated by the new divisions of political power and, because of their personal ambitions and agitations, the tetrarchy soon began to unravel. By skillful political maneuvering, they both managed to gain political power, and eventually faced each other over the office of senior western Augustus. The Battle of the Milvian Bridge (outside of Rome) in 312 resolved this in favor of Constantine who now claimed mastery of the western part of the empire.

324-337 After defeating challenges from the Eastern part of the empire, Constantine became sole ruler in 324, and in 330 he moved the empire's capital to Byzantium (which was soon renamed Constantinople in his honor). Although the move was not meant to affect the Church directly, it did in fact leave the bishop of Rome heir to the mantle of the Caesars in the west which increased his political power even more.

Note: By the early fourth century, the western part of the empire had been continually infiltrated and invaded by barbarian tribes and it became necessary to move the seat of government to a more stable and secure site. Byzantium was a logical choice, as it was close to the main focus of the empire's trade and provided a bulwark against enemies from the east and checked the inroads of migratory tribes from the steppes of central Asia. Although the unity of the empire under Constantine continued in concept, it was a

fiction - a unified empire in name only; The division into western and eastern halves proved to be permanent.

410 Alaric the Goth sacks Rome

451 Attila the Hun is defeated at Chalons by a coalition of Romans and Germans

476 Odoacer, a Germanic chieftain, deposed the last western emperor at Rome and the Roman Empire's western half falls completely to outsiders. The Christian church was by now, however, firmly entrenched with a chief bishop (Arch-Bishop) in Rome and other Arch-Bishops located in Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem and Alexandria; the Big Five. NOTE: This changed, however, as within 200 years, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria fell under the dominance of Islam, and were no longer Christian centers. This left the Arch-Bishops in Rome and Constantinople as contending for seniority which resulted in the Roman Pontiff gaining control of the church in the west.