

THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

Adapted from The Outlined Bible by Steve Flatt

From the time we leave Malachi, approximately 400 years pass before the opening lines of the New Testament. In that time many important historical events and transitions occur. Combined, these conditions constitute the "just the right time" for the coming of Jesus Christ. (cf. Roman 5:6)

I. The Babylonian Empire

During the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, several permanent, significant changes took place in Judaism.

1. The synagogue became the dominant place of worship and instruction.
2. The scribe replaced the priests as the men of greatest spiritual influence. (Bible scholars replaced God's servants.)
3. The exile to Babylon also created the Diaspora, scattered Jews as many of the Jews never returned to Palestine.

II. The Medo-Persian Empire

King Cyrus Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

III. The Greek Empire

- A. While the Greek empire had been predicted by the prophet Daniel (cf. Daniel 2) the time of its domination was not reflected in the scripture.
- A. Greece came to power as Philip of Macedon was successful in unifying the Greek city-states under one rule. He reigned from 359 BC to 306 BC.
- B. Alexander the Great succeeded his father in 336 BC and ruled for thirteen years.
 1. Alexander was a military genius.
 2. Tutored by Aristotle he was consumed with the idea of conquering and unifying the world under the Greek culture.
 3. As nation after nation fell, Greek architecture, Greek sports, the Greek language, Greek customs, etc. spread through the Mediterranean world.
 4. Alexander and his troops conquered Palestine in 332 BC.
 - a. The Jews offered no military resistance.
 - b. Like the Persians, the Greeks allowed the Jews religious freedom.
- D. After Alexander's death, the worldwide Greek influence continued, but fighting broke out among his generals, and the empire fragmented into four parts:
 1. Ptolemy controlled Egypt.
 2. Antipater controlled Greece and Macedonia.
 3. Seleucus ruled Babylonia.
 4. Lysimachus ruled Thrace.
- E. Eventually, two powers, Ptolemy and Seleucus, prevailed.

IV. The Post-Greek/Pre-Roman Years

- A. The Ptolemies had political and military control over Palestine from 323BC to 198 BC.
 1. Under their rule, Greek influence continued to grow stronger.
 2. The "Scriptures" were translated about 250 BC. into the Greek - The Septuagint (LXX)
- B. Antiochus III gained control of Palestine in 198 BC. (cf. I Maccabees 1:15)

1. Thirty years later, his son Antiochus IV Epiphanies was on the throne.
2. Antiochus Epiphanies tried to conquer the Ptolemies of Egypt but was forced out by upstart Rome.
3. He retreated through Palestine and vented his anger upon the Jews. (I Maccabees 1:20-53)
4. He desecrated the temple, stripping it of her treasures. On December 16, 167 BC,
5. Antiochus Epiphanies even offered a pig on the holy altar. (I Maccabees 1:54-64)

C. A Jewish priest named Matthias and his five sons led a revolt against the Seleucids in 166 BC.

1. From the hill country, they organized guerilla fighters. (I Maccabees 2:1-70)
2. Matthias died the following year and the leadership of the revolt passed to his son Judas.
3. Judas Maccabeus took control of Jerusalem.
 - a. He constructed a new altar and refurbished the temple.
 - b. He rededicated the temple to the Lord on December 14, 164 BC.
 - c. Hanukkah (Feast of Lights) is the annual Jewish holiday season that celebrates this event.
4. Under Maccabean leadership, Palestine rid itself of Syrian (i.e. - Seleucid) influence, particularly through a treaty made with Rome in 139 BC.
5. During the Maccabean reign, two groups came to prominence
 - a. The Hasidim became the Pharisees.
 - b. The Hellenists became the Sadducees.

V. The Roman Empire

A. Rome took control of Palestine under Pompey in 63 BC.

B. While Roman power dominated the civilized world throughout the period of time covered by New Testament literature, Rome basically allowed conquered territories to govern themselves.

C. After Pompey's conquest of Palestine, the rule of Palestine was given to Antipater. He was the beginning of the Herodian dynasty

D. After Antipater, Herod the Great, a cruel and ruthless man, reigned the Jews from 37 BC to 4 AD.

E. After Herod's death, Palestine was divided between his sons - Philip, Antipas, and Archileus.

F. Under the Roman empire, several things were in place for the "fullness of time."

1. A common language.
2. General worldwide peace.
3. Widespread poverty among conquered peoples.
4. Slavery was enforced.