

Session 5

God Speaks to Us

A Summary of History between the Testaments

- I. **THE BABYLONIAN PERIOD** -- (605-536 B.C.) Period of the exile (included in the Old Testament--II Kings, II Chronicles, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Lamentations)
 1. **Summary of historical events** -- Please see the summary in the previous session.
 2. **Important religious developments during this period** --
 - (1) establishment of the synagogue as a place of worship
 - (2) more emphasis on the Law, especially Sabbath observance, circumcision and fasting
 - (3) the decline of idolatry
 - (4) the influence of Babylonian philosophy and religious ideas (seen in Jewish literature of this period, not in the Bible)
 - (5) beginnings of trade and commerce instead of farming as the chief occupation of the people
- II. **THE PERSIAN PERIOD** -- 536-332 B.C.) Period of restoration to the land (partially in the Old Testament--Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
 1. **Summary of historical events** -- In 538 B.C. Cyrus, king of Persia, captured Babylon and became ruler of the vast Babylonian empire. Cyrus' policy was to allow the people brought to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar and his followers (in order to keep them from rebelling against him in their homeland) to return to their native lands if they wished to do so. Only a small percentage of the Jews in Babylon chose to return to Judah (about 50,000) because the trip was expensive, long and difficult and most of the Jews had become well-settled in Babylonia.

Just as there were three deportations into the exile during the Babylonian period, so there were three stages in the return and restoration to Palestine in the Persian period. The first group returned in 535 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel who led

the people in the re-building of the temple (Ezra 2:1-2, 3:1-13, see also Haggai and Zechariah 1-7). The second group returned with Ezra in 458 B.C. Ezra stressed the importance of obeying God's Law (Ezra 9 & 10 and Nehemiah 8:1-13). The third group returned with Nehemiah in 445-444 B.C. Nehemiah led the people to re-build the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-6, 12:27-43) and in the restoration of proper temple worship (Neh. 12:44-13:31).

2. **Important religious developments during this period** --

- (1) Intensification of Jewish exclusiveness. No marriages with foreign women were allowed. Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13:3, 23-30 deal with separation from the Samaritans and other nationalities in Judah (see also Ezra 4, Nehemiah 4-6). Note: Ezra was combating the sin of Solomon--marrying many foreign women--which led Israel into idolatry--but in so doing he made the Jews think of themselves as superior to all other people--an error which Jesus had to correct in His day (see John 4, etc.). Jesus taught us how to be separate from worldly people and still love them and not be led into sin by their influence. We are IN the world, but not OF the world (John 17:13-19). One result of the Jewish policy of exclusivism was the building of the temple on Mt. Gerizim (John 4:20) as a rival to the temple in Jerusalem.
- (2) the end of idolatry
- (3) the rise of the scribes and their interpretations of the Law (building a "hedge" around the Law to keep one far removed from transgression--the oral traditions.)
- (4) growing concern with the spirit world, clearer doctrines of immortality and resurrection, angels and demons.
- (5) growth (or development) of the messianic hope
- (6) Aramaic became the language of the people and Hebrew had to be translated into it (Neh. 8:7-8).

III. **THE GREEK PERIOD** -- (332-167 B.C.)

1. **Summary of historical events** -- Alexander the Great conquered the Persians in 331 B.C. and ruled over all the lands from Greece to India. When he died in 323 B.C. at age 32 his great empire was divided into four parts, each part ruled by one of his generals. Two of these are important to us: Egypt was ruled by Ptolemy and his successors and Syria by Seleucus and his successors. Palestine was caught between these two and was sometimes ruled from Egypt and sometimes from Syria. At the end of the period Palestine was ruled by the Seleucids (Syria).

2. **Important religious developments during this period:**

- (1) the voluntary dispersion of the Jews because of their commercial interests
- (2) the general spread of Greek culture (Hellenism) throughout the entire area ruled by Alexander
- (3) the translation of the Septuagint (or "LXX" referring to the seventy scholars who were said to have done the translation of the Old Testament into Greek) about 250 B.C. in Alexandria
- (4) the beginnings of apocryphal writings (books not accepted as canonical)
- (5) the rise of the mystery religions (offering salvation by being introduced into a "mystery")
- (6) The proscription (outlawing) of Judaism and the insistence on the Hellenization of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes in 175 B.C. leading directly to the Maccabean revolt in 167 B.C.

IV. **THE PERIOD OF NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE** -- (167-63 B.C.)

1. **Summary of historical event** -- Antiochus Epiphanes became ruler of Syria and Palestine in 175 B.C. He determined to make Greek culture mandatory in order to unify the area under his rule. He therefore forbade the practice of Judaism in any form. He forbade circumcision, Sabbath observance, observance of the Mosaic feasts and the Day of

Atonement, the reading of the Old Testament and worship in the temple. In order to make sure temple worship would cease in December of 167 B.C. he sacrificed a sow on the altar, sprinkled its broth all over the temple and converted the altar and the temple to a place for the worship of Olympian Zeus! The observance of Judaism almost came to an end.

But one of the priests, Mattathias of Modin, a village a few miles NW of Jerusalem, became angry when he saw a Jew about to offer a sacrifice to Zeus. He killed both the Jew and the Greek officer who was promoting Zeus worship and fled to the mountains with his five sons: Simon, Judas, Eleazar, John and Jonathan. He and his sons then led a rebellion against Antiochus which, in spite of the overwhelming odds against them, was successful. By December of 165 B.C. the temple had been cleansed and was rededicated to the worship of God. This rededication of the temple became an annual celebration ("Afeast of the Dedication") and is referred to in John 10:22. Religious liberty was granted to the Jews but the sons of Mattathias (called "the Maccabees") continued their struggle until they gained political independence in 142 B.C. under the leadership of Simon. The grateful nation made Simon both governor AND high priest even though he was NOT a son of Aaron! His descendants became ruling high priests who were extremely evil. They used political assassination, murder, extortion, all kinds of violence and every scheme they could think of to maintain their power. For example, Aristobulus I, the first ruler to call himself "king of the Jews," put all his brothers and his mother in prison to keep them from plotting against him. He starved his mother to death in prison rather than murdering her but had his favorite brother murdered in prison--then grieved so over his death that he died a miserable death himself. His wife (Salome Alexandra) then freed the other brothers and married one of them (Alexander Janneus) who became even more cruel than Aristobulus had been. When 800 Jews displeased him he had their wives and children murdered before their eyes and then crucified them all at one time. He watched them die while he drank himself into a drunken stupor. He was often fighting, killing, drinking, plotting, concubining--SOME HIGH PRIEST!!!

Near the end of the period, Antipater, father of Herod the Great, became ruler of Idumea (Edom). He supported Hyrcanus II, who was high priest, against his brother Aristobulus II, who was then the political ruler of Judea. Antipater went to Damascus to visit the Roman general, Pompey, who had just completed the conquest of all Syria and Palestine (63 B.C.). At Antipater's urging Pompey confirmed Hyrcanus II as high priest and appointed Antipater as the political ruler of Judea in place of Aristobulus II. Antipater invaded Judea in 63 B.C., defeated Aristobulus in battle and took him to Rome as his prisoner. Thus ended the period of national independence.

2. **Important religious developments during the period:**

- (1) the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem, Dec. 25, 165 B.C.
- (2) the building of a rival temple in Heliopolis, Egypt
- (3) the writing of more apocryphal and pseud epigraphical (material written and attributed to famous but false authors in order to gain their acceptance) literature
- (4) the rise of Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Herodians, etc.)

V. **THE ROMAN PERIOD -- (63 B.C.-A.D. 135)**

1. **Summary of historical events** -- For several years Antigonus, son of Aristobulus II, struggled against Antipater for control of Judea. He had the support of the Jews because he was a Hasmonean (descendent of Simon). The Jews hated Antipater because they considered him a foreigner and they hated the Romans who supported him. Antigonus succeeded in killing Antipater and one of his two sons. The other son, Herod, escaped and went to Rome where he was confirmed as King of the Jews by the Senate in 40 B.C.; however, it took him three years to finally defeat Antigonus and begin his rule in Jerusalem in 37 B.C.

Herod was considered by the Romans to be a good administrator. He was ruthless in forcing his will on others. He literally murdered his way to the throne. He was opposed mainly by four groups:

- (1) the Jewish aristocracy -- He killed many of them and confiscated their estates.
- (2) the Hasmoneans -- relatives and descendants of Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. He

overcame some of their opposition by marrying one of them. She was perhaps the only one of his ten wives whom he really loved, but because of jealous plots in his family he had her murdered. This crime seems to have affected his mind so that in later years he suspected many of his sons and wives of plotting against him. He murdered them all or had others murder them.

- (3) the people in general -- They hated him so he tried to placate them by relieving them of heavy taxes when economic conditions were bad and by distributing food and provisions to the needy.
- (4) Cleopatra of Egypt -- She hated him, too, and plotted against him whenever she could, usually with Anthony's help.

Herod was a great builder. One of his most magnificent projects was the rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. He began this work in 20 B.C. In Jesus' lifetime it was reported to have been under construction for 46 years (John 2:20). It was finished in A.D. 62 and completely destroyed in A.D. 70. It took 82 years to complete the project and it was complete only 8 years before it was destroyed!

Herod died in 4 B.C. Jesus was born before Herod died in about 6 or 5 B.C. (because of a mistake in computing dates in the Middle Ages, the date of Jesus birth has always been incorrect.) during the period when he was mentally unbalanced and killing all those whom he suspected of plotting against him to take his throne. In light of this, the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem in order to kill one who was said to be "born king of the Jews" is quite in keeping with what we know of Herod's character.

After Herod's death his kingdom was divided into three parts, each of which was ruled by one of his sons. Archelaus ruled in Judea only 10 years (from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6) but he was so violent that the Romans banished him to Gaul and Judea was then governed by procurators, of whom Pontius Pilate was one. Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas whom Jesus called "that fox" (Lk. 13:32). It was because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, that John the Baptist condemned him. At Herodias' request he had John beheaded. This is the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for

judgment. He was removed by the Romans in A.D. 39 and his territory given to Herodias' brother, Agrippa I. It was Herod Agrippa I who opposed the Christians as recorded in Acts. He had James beheaded and tried to kill Peter. His death is described in Acts 12:20-23.

After Agrippa's death in A.D. 44 all of Palestine was ruled by Roman procurators or governors of whom two are mentioned in Acts: Antonius Felix (ruled from A.D. 52-60) and Porcius Festus (ruled from 60-62). Felix married Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Paul defended himself before Felix and Drusilla (Acts 24:24-27). He was also tried before Festus and appealed his case to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12). Festus died in A.D. 62 and from then until A.D. 66, when the war with Rome began in earnest, anarchy reigned in Palestine.

The war against Rome lasted seven years (A.D. 66-73). Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple with it as Jesus had predicted (Matt. 24:1-2), in A.D. 70 by Titus, son of the emperor Vespasian. The city was besieged for five months. People starved to death and murder and violence were common as groups of Jews fought each other for control of the city. More people died from violence, disease and starvation than were killed by the Romans.

After the war Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I and brother of Drusilla, was made king by the emperor Claudius. It was Agrippa II and his sister/wife Bernice who heard Paul's defense before Festus (Acts 25:13-26:32)). He continued to rule until he died in A.D. 100, the last of the Herods.

In A.D. 115-116 the Jews revolted again. The emperor Trajan crushed the revolt and killed thousands of Jews. The last revolt of the Jews against the Romans occurred in A.D. 135. The emperor Hadrian put down the rebellion, passed a law forbidding circumcision, re-built Jerusalem as a Gentile city (called Elia-Capitolinus) with a temple to Zeus built where the old Jewish temple had stood. He made it an offense punishable by death for a Jew to enter the city. The leader of the revolt was thought by many to be the Messiah until he was killed. He was known as ABar-Cochaba" (son of a star) or Athe

star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17).

Jerusalem continued under Roman rule until A.D. 395. Since then it has been ruled by the Byzantines, the Caliphs, the Crusaders, the Turks, the British and now, once again, by the Israelis.

2. **Important religious developments during this period** --

- (1) the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus
- (2) the establishment and spread of the churches
- (3) the break of the churches from Judaism
- (4) for Judaism, the triumph of Phariseeism with the establishment of the school at Jamnia in A.D. 90 for the study of the Law. The destruction of the temple drove the Jews back to the study of the Law. From then until now the study of the Law, good works and ethical conduct have replaced sacrifices in Jewish worship.