

Inter-testament Times

World and Regional Empires- During the inter-testament time, the Jews returned to their land but continued to be under the control of other empires. These empires were prophesied by Daniel in the 500s B.C. (Daniel 2:31-45).

Babylon- In the 500s B.C. the Jews were held captive in Babylon for 70 years (Daniel 2:36-38; 7:4).

Persia- In the 400s B.C. Persia (the Medo-Persian Empire), after conquering Babylon (in 539 B.C.), let the Jews return to Jerusalem and ruled them through Nehemiah. This is how the Old Testament ends. After Nehemiah, Judah was basically ruled by priests responsible to Persia (Daniel 2:39; 7:5).

Greece- In the 300s B.C. the Greeks took over through the conquests of Alexander the Great. Alexander was also a friend of Aristotle (the last of the three classic Greek philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle). He conquered the whole western world in the late 300s but died at age 32, leaving his empire to be divided among his four top generals. One ruled in Macedonia (Greece), one in Asia Minor (Turkey), one in Syria, and one in Egypt. Significant for the Jews is the general in Egypt (called Ptolemy) and the one in Syria (called Seleucid) (Daniel 2:39; 7:6).

Egypt- In the 200s B.C. the Jews were under the Ptolemies of Egypt and were treated quite well. These Egyptians encouraged the Jews in Alexandria to translate the Old Testament from its original Hebrew into Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint (or LXX) and was the version used at the time of Christ and the Apostles.

Syria- In the 100s B.C. the Jews were persecuted by the Seleucids of Syria, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In 198 B.C. Syria took Judah away from the Egyptians. They appointed Greeks to the priesthood, offered a pig on the Jewish altar, and killed many Jews. About 175 B.C. an old Jewish priest named Mattathias and his sons rebelled against Syria and a guerrilla-type war began. These Jewish soldiers were called the Maccabees (after one of Mattathias' sons) and later Hasmonians (after his father). On December 25, 165 B.C. they reclaimed the temple and restored the sacrifices. This is celebrated yet today with the Jewish feast called Hanukkah. This war went on for years, but by the middle of the first century B.C. the Jews had established their independence.

Rome- About 50 B.C. Rome under Julius Caesar was rapidly becoming the next dominant world empire (Daniel 2:40; 7:7). Because of leadership squabbles within the old Maccabean/Hasmonian family, the appointed Hasmonian ruler used a man named Antipater to negotiate with Rome. Antipater came up with an arrangement where the Jews could more or less rule themselves. Antipater was an Edomite, i.e., an Esau-ite. (They were descendants of Abraham and Isaac through Esau, but they were not Israelites.)

After Julius Caesar was murdered (in 44 B.C.) and his nephew Augustus Caesar defeated Cleopatra of Egypt and ruled the western world, Antipater's son was appointed by Rome as king of the Jews. He was called Herod the Great. At first, Herod was good for the Jews. He married a granddaughter of a Maccabean leader, built many structures for the Jews, and repaired the temple. But then he went mad, even killing his own wife and sons because he thought they would take away his throne. When the wise men came from the East and went on to Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) looking for "the king of the Jews," Herod killed the boy babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill this king (Matthew 2:1-18).

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