

BC 323–300 The Diadochi

Since Alexander died unexpectedly and never named his successor there were over twenty years of murders and struggle for power before any stability was reached. By BC 300 the empire was carved into three large sections: (1) Ptolemy ruled over Egypt, southern Syria, and various territories on the southern coast of Asia Minor. (2) Antiochus ruled the vast Asian territories of the Empire. (3) Macedon and Greece fell to Antigonos. Two of these kingdoms have special interest for Palestine: the Ptolemaic Dynasty and the Seleucid Dynasty that continuously battled over control. Geographically, Judah was caught in the cross fire time and again of these two powers. The Ptolemaic Empire generally allowed native people to practice their religions and customs but the Seleucids were intent on Hellenizing all territories under their control by force. This worked in many cases but the Jews were particularly unwilling to adopt Greek culture, religion, philosophy, etc.

BC 305–30 Ptolemaic Empire

Ptolemy I Soter was appointed as the satrap of Egypt after Alexander's death in BC 323. He declared himself King Ptolemy I in BC 305, claiming to be the savior of Egypt, and that his family line were the successors of the pharaohs. His reign lasted until BC 282. The Ptolemies were very fond of art and learning and invited scholars from all over the Greek world at state expense. Ptolemy I constructed the largest library in the world consisting of 700,000 manuscripts. Many of the most famous Greek scientists and mathematicians studied in or lived in Alexandria the capital of the Ptolemaic Empire. The Ptolemies treated the Jews well and many of them came to live in Alexandria. Ptolemy II invited scribes to come to Alexandria and translate the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek. This is the first translation of the Old Testament and was known as the Septuagint (LXX).

BC 305–60 Seleucid Empire

Seleucus I Nicator was the first king (BC 311-281) and won out the power struggle against the others for the eastern portion of Alexander's vast empire. Seleucids were very concerned to Hellenize the peoples under their control. Since the empire was so vast (from modern day Turkey to the Punjab Province of modern India) it was essential to find a mechanism to control/unify the people. Many new Greek cities were made and colonization of Greeks into the middle east facilitated assimilation of many native groups into the Greek way of thinking. Cities were encouraged (or forced) to adopt Hellenized philosophic thought, religious sentiments and politics. Under the Seleucids, Judea was ruled by high priests appointed by them and eventually Judaism was outlawed to encourage the Jews to adopt Greek ways of thinking. Pompey conquered the Seleucids for Rome in BC 63.

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BC 175–164 Antiochus IV (Epiphanes)

Antiochus IV ruled the Seleucid Empire and fought hard against Egypt and the Jews. In BC 167 Antiochus decided to forcibly Hellenize the Jews. He introduced the gymnasium (a place where young men were schooled in Greek education and philosophy). The Jewish religion was outlawed forbidding them to circumcise their children or obey the Torah. He changed the temple (built by Zerubbabel and Joshua) into a temple of Zeus and even sacrificed a pig (an unclean animal) on the altar to Zeus. Sadly, many of the Jews went along with this and even promoted the new changes (cf. 1 Maccabees 1). He constructed a fortified citadel in Jerusalem and put his men in it to control the city (this would later be called the Fortress of Antonia in Roman times).

BC 167–164 Maccabean Revolt

One day the officers of Antiochus IV came to Modein (20 miles NW of Jerusalem) to insist that the people would make sacrifice. Mattathias rose up and killed the Antiochus' representatives and then took to the hills (1 Maccabees 2). What ensued were many years of guerrilla warfare in which the Jews fought the Seleucid army. Those who joined Mattathias were called the Hasidim, the ancestors of both the Pharisees and the Essenes. Within a year, Mattathias died and commissioned his son Judas Maccabeus (hammer) to lead the rebellion. In BC 164 Judas was successful after many battles to win back the entire territory of Judea and cleanse and rededicate the Temple.

BC 164 Hanukah—Dedication of the Temple

On the 25th of Kislev the temple was cleansed and rededicated. The word Hanukah is the Hebrew word meaning “consecration” or “dedication.” At the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem following the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire, there was only enough consecrated olive oil to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days - which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate new oil. This miracle and the winning of independence from the Seleucids (and Antiochus in particular) are commemorated by the Hanukah festival.

BC 164–63 Hasmonean Dynasty

However, in BC 163 the Seleucids came back and laid siege on Jerusalem. The battle was at a stalemate and ended with a peace treaty allowing the Jews religious freedom. Even so, Judas now decided he wanted political freedom too. However, the Hasidim did not support this idea and rift developed between the Jews who favored Judas and those who were satisfied with just religious freedom. Those who sought the continuation of the war of national identity were led by Judah Maccabee. On his death in battle in BC 160, Judah was succeeded as army commander by his younger brother, Jonathan, who was already High Priest. Jonathan continued fighting until they again reached a peace treaty in which Judea was given religious freedom and Jonathan was appointed as governor. On Jonathan's death in BC 142, Simon Maccabee, the last remaining son of Mattathias, took power. That same year, Demetrius II, king of Syria, granted the Jews

complete political independence and Simon, great high priest and commander of the Jews, went on to found the Hasmonean dynasty. This is the first time since the Babylonian captivity (BC 605) that the Jews were completely independent; they no longer had to pay taxes to a foreign king.

In BC 135, John Hyrcanus (Simon's son and grandson of Mattathias) assumed the throne after a brief yet bloody power struggle (he reined until BC 104). Because of the pressure applied by Rome in the west and the upcoming threat of the Parthians in the east, the Seleucids had their hands full and John Hyrcanus took advantage of the situation. He conquered Samaria in the north destroying their temple on Mount Gerizim. He also conquered Idumea (Old Edom) and forced them to become circumcised and practice the Jewish religion. This greatly expanded the borders of Judea and he even minted his own coins (something that even David and Solomon never did).

The Pharisees & Sadducees

The Hasidæans (or Hasidim) were date back to when the Hellenization was first gaining popularity in Judea. They remained true to the customs of their fathers and had a profound hatred for the foreign, Hellenic spirit, and for those of their Jewish brethren who were filled with it. In the Maccabean wars they came to an accounting with both. The Hasidim (who initially supported the Maccabean revolt) were not happy about the way the Hasmoneans were running the country. A division occurred between the Hasidim splitting them into the Pharisees and Essenes. Both groups felt that the high priesthood had become worldly and unholy. The Pharisee ("separatist") party emerged thought the meaning of the name is unclear; it may refer to their rejection of Hellenic culture or to their objection to the Hasmonean monopoly on power. The Pharisees began publicly calling for John Hyrcanus to step down as high priest.

Around this time the Sadducean party emerged (the name Sadducee may come from Zadok) who supported John Hyrcanus and his priesthood. John and the Sadducees joined forces against the Pharisees. This gave the Sadducees considerable power and this is how they came to be a group of aristocratic priests. The Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisees on a number of practices in the temple and were able to run the temple because of their allegiance with the priest-king. The Hasmoneans ruled as "priest-kings", claiming both titles high priest and king simultaneously, and like other aristocracies across the Hellenistic world became increasingly influenced by Hellenistic syncretism and Greek philosophies. Like Epicureans, the Sadducees eventually rejected the existence of an afterlife, thus denied the Pharisaic doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead. Sadducees also rejected certain beliefs of the Pharisaic interpretation of the Torah including the oral tradition.

Hasmonean Dynasty

In BC 104 John Hyrcanus was succeeded by his son, Aristobulus. He conquered (in his one year reign) Galilee and forced them to be circumcised and convert to Judaism. When Aristobulus I died, his wife Salome Alexandra released Alexander Jannaeus from prison in order for him to ascend to the throne, and then married him (this was a violation of Jewish law because the high-priest is supposed to marry a virgin). Alexander Jannaeus reigned from BC 103 to 76 and conquered all of the Greek coastal cities from Carmel to Gaza, circumcising their inhabitants,

and forcing them to practice Judaism. He also conquered regions to the south and ruled over a kingdom the same size as David and Solomon. Alexander was a drunkard who loved war and knowingly lived in violation of the Mosaic Law. Eventually the Jewish people rebelled against Alexander and the Pharisees actually asked the Seleucid rulers to come their aid in deposing him (how ironic). This succeeded and Alexander fled but then regained control and had 800 Pharisees crucified and then slaughtered their wives and children before their eyes while they were dying.

In BC 76 Salome (Alexander Jannaeus' wife) ascended to the throne as the first Queen of Judea. She made peace with the Pharisees (her own brother was their leader). Soon the Pharisees came to political power through Salome's influence and had the Sadducees slaughtered who were behind the Pharisean massacre. In BC 67 Salome died and her son Hyrcanus II (who was already high-priest) became the king. Unfortunately, Hyrcanus was weak and easy to manipulate. His brother, Aristobulus II (leader of the Sadducees) declared war and took the throne from Hyrcanus II (after only a few months of ruling). Aristobulus II ruled from BC 66-63.

Meanwhile in Idumea, the Jewish appointed governor, named Antipater convinced Hyrcanus II that he was in fact the rightful heir to the throne and that Aristobulus wanted to kill him. Hyrcanus fled and convinced a Gentile ruler to invade Judea and force Aristobulus from being king. At this time Pompey, the general of the Roman Empire was advancing and was fighting in Damascus (the old capital of Syria). Both brothers (Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II) sent envoys to Pompey to try to win his support. Pompey said he would make the decision when he was done fighting (which could take a couple of years). This infuriated Aristobulus who then withdrew the troops he had sent to help Pompey. This caused Pompey to quit fighting in Damascus and chase Aristobulus all the way back to Jerusalem and lay siege on the city. Since most of the people in the city supported Hyrcanus, they opened the gates of the city and let the Roman army in. Aristobulus and twelve thousand of his supporters were held out at the temple mount but were defeated and slaughtered by Pompey's army. Aristobulus was taken captive back to Rome. Hyrcanus was reinstated as the high priest but not the king. This marks the beginning of Roman control in BC 63.

Antipater had all along supported and accompanied Hyrcanus and now was left as the ruler (though he had now title) of Judea on behalf of Pompey. Then civil war broke out in Rome between Julius Caesar and the Senate. Pompey backed the Senate and Antipater backed Julius Caesar. In BC 47, Caesar was victorious he rewarded Antipater for his support and made him the Procurator of Judea (Hyrcanus was the Ethnarch, a title with little or no authority). At this point Antipater appointed his 25 year old son, Herod, as governor of Galilee. After Antipater was murdered in BC 43, Herod (who had married into the Hasmonean dynasty) became king of the entire region (though he was subject to Rome). He did not fully gain authority over all of Judea until BC 37. He was later known as Herod the Great and was king when Jesus was born. Herod reigned until his death in BC 4 and successfully established the Herodian Dynasty which included Herod Archelaus, Herod Philip I, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa I, and Herod Agrippa II.

1 Maccabees 1:1 ^{NAB} After Alexander the Macedonian, Philip's son, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated Darius, king of the Persians and Medes, he became king in his place, having first ruled in Greece. ² He fought many campaigns, captured fortresses, and put kings to death. ³ He advanced to the ends of the earth, gathering plunder from many nations; the earth fell silent before him, and his heart became proud and arrogant. ⁴ He collected a very strong army and conquered provinces, nations, and rulers, and they became his tributaries.

⁵ ¶ But after all this he took to his bed, realizing that he was going to die. ⁶ He therefore summoned his officers, the nobles, who had been brought up with him from his youth, to divide his kingdom among them while he was still alive. ⁷ Alexander had reigned twelve years when he died.

⁸ ¶ So his officers took over his kingdom, each in his own territory, ⁹ and after his death they all put on royal crowns, and so did their sons after them for many years, causing much distress over the earth.

¹⁰ ¶ There sprang from these a sinful offshoot, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus, once a hostage at Rome. He became king in the year one hundred and thirty-seven of the kingdom of the Greeks.

¹¹ ¶ In those days there appeared in Israel men who were breakers of the law, and they seduced many people, saying: "Let us go and make an alliance with the Gentiles all around us; since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us." ¹² The proposal was agreeable; ¹³ some from among the people promptly went to the king, and he authorized them to introduce the way of living of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ Thereupon they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to the Gentile custom. ¹⁵ They covered over the mark of their circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant; they allied themselves with the Gentiles and sold themselves to wrongdoing.

¹⁶ ¶ When his kingdom seemed secure, Antiochus proposed to become king of Egypt, so as to rule over both kingdoms. ¹⁷ He invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants, and with a large fleet, ¹⁸ to make war on Ptolemy, king of Egypt. Ptolemy was

frightened at his presence and fled, leaving many casualties. ¹⁹ The fortified cities in the land of Egypt were captured, and Antiochus plundered the land of Egypt.

²⁰ ¶ After Antiochus had defeated Egypt in the year one hundred and forty-three, he returned and went up to Israel and to Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹ He insolently invaded the sanctuary and took away the golden altar, the lampstand for the light with all its fixtures, ²² the offering table, the cups and the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the golden ornament on the facade of the temple. He stripped off everything, ²³ and took away the gold and silver and the precious vessels; he also took all the hidden treasures he could find. ²⁴ Taking all this, he went back to his own country, after he had spoken with great arrogance and shed much blood. ²⁵ And there was great mourning for Israel, in every place where they dwelt, ²⁶ and the rulers and the elders groaned. Virgins and young men languished, and the beauty of the women was disfigured. ²⁷ Every bridegroom took up lamentation, she who sat in the bridal chamber mourned, ²⁸ And the land was shaken on account of its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was covered with shame.

²⁹ ¶ Two years later, the king sent the Mysian commander to the cities of Judah, and he came to Jerusalem with a strong force. ³⁰ He spoke to them deceitfully in peaceful terms, and won their trust. Then he attacked the city suddenly, in a great onslaught, and destroyed many of the people in Israel. ³¹ He plundered the city and set fire to it, demolished its houses and its surrounding walls, ³² took captive the women and children, and seized the cattle. ³³ Then they built up the City of David with a high, massive wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. ³⁴ There they installed a sinful race, perverse men, who fortified themselves inside it, ³⁵ storing up weapons and provisions, and depositing there the plunder they had collected from Jerusalem. And they became a great threat. ³⁶ The citadel became an ambush against the sanctuary, and a wicked adversary to Israel at all times. ³⁷ And they shed innocent blood around the sanctuary; they defiled the sanctuary. ³⁸ Because of them the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled away, and she became the abode of strangers. She became a stranger to her own offspring, and her children forsook her. ³⁹ Her sanctuary was as desolate as a

wilderness; her feasts were turned into mourning, Her sabbaths to shame, her honor to contempt. ⁴⁰ Her dishonor was as great as her glory had been, and her exaltation was turned into mourning.

⁴¹ ¶ Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, ⁴² each abandoning his particular customs. All the Gentiles conformed to the command of the king, ⁴³ and many Israelites were in favor of his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. ⁴⁴ The king sent messengers with letters to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, ordering them to follow customs foreign to their land; ⁴⁵ to prohibit holocausts¹, sacrifices, and libations in the sanctuary, to profane the sabbaths and feast days, ⁴⁶ to desecrate the sanctuary and the sacred ministers, ⁴⁷ to build pagan altars and temples and shrines, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, ⁴⁸ to leave their sons uncircumcised, and to let themselves be defiled with every kind of impurity and abomination, ⁴⁹ so that they might forget the law and change all their observances. ⁵⁰ Whoever refused to act according to the command of the king should be put to death.

⁵¹ ¶ Such were the orders he published throughout his kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people, and he ordered the cities of Judah to offer sacrifices, each city in turn. ⁵² Many of the people, those who abandoned the law, joined them and committed evil in the land. ⁵³ Israel was driven into hiding, wherever places of refuge could be found.

⁵⁴ ¶ On the fifteenth day of the month Chislew, in the year one hundred and forty-five, the king erected the horrible abomination upon the altar of holocausts, and in the surrounding cities of Judah they built pagan altars. ⁵⁵ They also burnt incense at the doors of houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶ Any scrolls of the law which they found they tore up and burnt. ⁵⁷ Whoever was found with a scroll of the covenant, and whoever observed the law, was condemned to death by royal decree. ⁵⁸ So they used their power against Israel, against those who were caught, each month, in the cities. ⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of each month they sacrificed on the altar erected over the altar of holocausts. ⁶⁰ Women who had had their children circumcised were put to death, in keeping with the decree, ⁶¹ with the

babies hung from their necks; their families also and those who had circumcised them were killed.

⁶² ¶ But many in Israel were determined and resolved in their hearts not to eat anything unclean; ⁶³ they preferred to die rather than to be defiled with unclean food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Terrible affliction was upon Israel.

^{NAB} **1 Maccabees 2:1** ¶ In those days Mattathias, son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib, left Jerusalem and settled in Modein. ² He had five sons: John, who was called Gaddi; ³ Simon, who was called Thassi; ⁴ Judas, who was called Maccabeus; ⁵ Eleazar, who was called Avaran; and Jonathan, who was called Apphus. ⁶ When he saw the sacrileges that were being committed in Judah and in Jerusalem, ⁷ he said: "Woe is me! Why was I born to see the ruin of my people and the ruin of the holy city, and to sit idle while it is given into the hands of enemies, and the sanctuary into the hands of strangers?" ⁸ "Her temple has become like a man disgraced, ⁹ her glorious ornaments have been carried off as spoils, Her infants have been murdered in her streets, her young men by the sword of the enemy. ¹⁰ What nation has not taken its share of her realm, and laid its hand on her possessions? ¹¹ All her adornment has been taken away. From being free, she has become a slave. ¹² We see our sanctuary and our beauty and our glory laid waste, And the Gentiles have defiled them! ¹³ Why are we still alive?" ¹⁴ Then Mattathias and his sons tore their garments, put on sackcloth, and mourned bitterly.

¹⁵ ¶ The officers of the king in charge of enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to organize the sacrifices. ¹⁶ Many of Israel joined them, but Mattathias and his sons gathered in a group apart. ¹⁷ Then the officers of the king addressed Mattathias: "You are a leader, an honorable and great man in this city, supported by sons and kinsmen. ¹⁸ Come now, be the first to obey the king's command, as all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those who are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons shall be numbered among the King's Friends, and shall be enriched with silver and gold and many gifts."

¹⁹ ¶ But Mattathias answered in a loud voice: "Although all the Gentiles in the king's realm

¹ A holocaust is a sacrifice consumed by fire

obey him, so that each forsakes the religion of his fathers and consents to the king's orders, ²⁰ yet I and my sons and my kinsmen will keep to the covenant of our fathers. ²¹ God forbid that we should forsake the law and the commandments. ²² We will not obey the words of the king nor depart from our religion in the slightest degree."

²³ ¶ As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king's order. ²⁴ When Mattathias saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused; he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar. ²⁵ At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the

altar. ²⁶ Thus he showed his zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did with Zimri, son of Salu.

²⁷ ¶ Then Mattathias went through the city shouting, "Let everyone who is zealous for the law and who stands by the covenant follow after me!" ²⁸ Thereupon he fled to the mountains with his sons, leaving behind in the city all their possessions.

²⁹ ¶ Many who sought to live according to righteousness and religious custom went out into the desert to settle there, ³⁰ they and their sons, their wives and their cattle, because misfortunes pressed so hard on them.