

SOURCES**Jewish:** Josephus, 1-2 Maccabees**Roman and Greek historians:** Polybius, Livy, Tacitus, Appian**EXPLANATION OF THESE YEARS****In 400 BC**

The majority of Jews are settled in Babylon, Persia and the northern parts of the empire. But about one million are living in the restored land of Judah. Major empires recognize them as a people and nation with their land belonging to them. The common language is Aramaic. Jerusalem, the capital is protected with its wall. Temple services and holy days are fully restored. The people want to obey because Nehemiah, their former governor, Ezra their current priest and Malachi, their current prophet have led them in spiritual restoration.

From 400 BC - 6 BC - 400 Silent Years

After Malachi, God does not give the Jews another prophet until John the Baptist. The Jews always believed if God would just give them a list of rules, they could meet His requirements. Now they have God's words given to Moses and the prophets in *written* form. With their local synagogues, they have teachers always available to explain it so they can obey. From this point on, the Jews have all they need for spiritual guidance. If ever the Jews could be right with God just by keeping His laws, these would be the years. God gives them 400 years to discover they cannot keep His laws. He wants them to see how much they need their Messiah as Savior.

EZRA PREPARES and PROTECTS THE NATION for the future.

- 1st** Ezra develops squared Hebrew consonants and a way to write the vowels above or below the letters.
- 2nd** He confirms which books of Jewish literature are God-given, adds the books of Psalms, Ezra and Nehemiah. He then declares the Hebrew Canon complete or *closed*.
- 3rd** He develops local synagogues as the place to worship, pray and receive instruction.
A trained rabbi /teacher reads the Scripture in Hebrew and explains it in the language of people.
- 4th** He forms the Great Synagogue - a group of 120 men called *Sopherim, The Scribes*.
As teachers, after reading God's Word from Hebrew scrolls, they translate it into Aramaic, explain and show how to apply it, so the Jews can live godly lives.
As protectors to preserve Jewish faith, they keep alive the expectation of the coming Messiah.
As guardians of the faith, when anyone says he **is** the Messiah, they must investigate and decide for the nation, *Yes, He is our Jewish Messiah or no, He is not our Messiah and this is why.*

GOVERNMENTS OVER THE JEWS**Persian Empire** 536 - 334 BC

- **The Jews' Enemies** are no longer a threat, but their hostility is passed down to the generations of the 1st century AD.
Samaritans in the north build their own temple in Samaria; they continue mixing pagan worship with the worship of Israel's God. There is less inter-marriage between the Jews and Samaritans.
Edomites in the south lose their own nation and are forced onto land south of Judah. In Greek, they are called Idumeans.

• **The Jews' Leaders****536-380 BC** Jews have 2 leaders over them; a civil governor and a religious high priest.

When Jewish governors become corrupt, the Persians remove the position of governor.

380-334 BC Jews have only their high priest as leader.

When the high priest murders his brother to keep his position, the Persians put restrictions on the Jews.

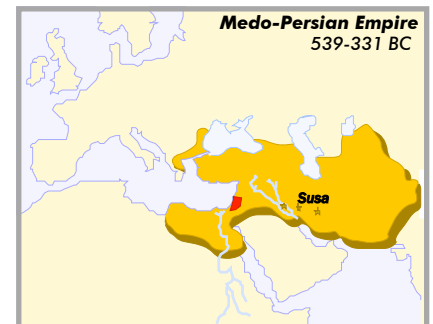
• **The Persians' Problems** in the 300's BC

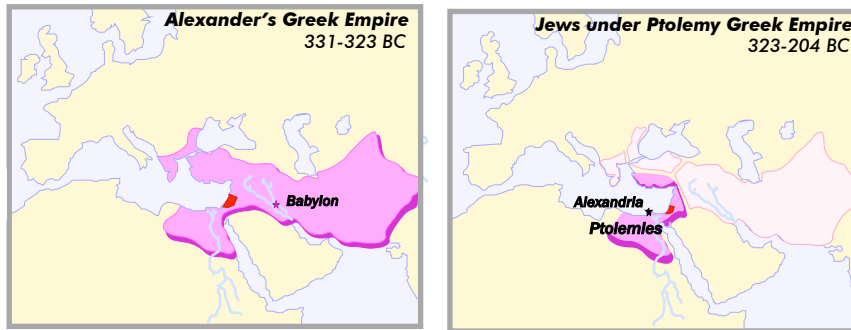
Her leaders do not have leadership abilities; people resent Persia's control and want their national freedom.

Altho Greece is outside the Persian empire, she seeks vengeance for the attacks of Xerxes, 150 years earlier.

Philip, king of Macedon (northern Greece), plans a war, but is killed. His 20 year-old son becomes king.

He has studied logic under Aristotle, studied military strategy under his father and since childhood has enjoyed taking risks. His name is Alexander.





Greek Empire 334 - 323 BC Alexander the Great conquers the Persians. His influence changes the course of history.

- Established Greek cities and colonies throughout the empire.
- Encouraged Greek soldiers to marry into other cultures in order to teach them the Greek culture.
- Simplified the Greek language so it could be the common or *koiné* Greek of the empire.
- Created the belief that Greek thought, customs and religion was the best - known as *Hellenism*.
- Gave preferential treatment to the Jews; in return, many Jews preferred the Greek ways; they became *Hellenized*.

Alexander's Divided Greek empire – it is divided into 4 areas - 1 for each of his 4 generals 323 BC
Greece; Asia Minor; Egypt, Syria

Egyptian Greek Empire 323 - 204 BC the Ptolemies

• Jewish Development

Politically, the high priest is their leader; he is helped by the Great Synagogue. This is when they change the name to *Sanhedrin* and change the number to 70, like the 70 who helped Moses. The number 70 is symbolic of God-appointed authority - 7 (deity) x 10 (government/authority). Besides teaching, protecting and guarding the faith, the Sanhedrin now takes the additional role of Jewish religious supreme court.

Spiritually, the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles are now celebrated on a national scale, both by local and dispersed Jews. It is the scattered (diaspora) Jews throughout the empire that set up synagogues in all their communities. Through them, Jewish faith and practice is kept alive.

To prevent disobedience, the Sanhedrin scribes start adding new laws to act like a fence around God's laws. If the people keep the scribes' laws, considered as guidelines, it will be impossible for them to break God's laws. For example, to keep people from breaking God's Sabbath law, they add 1500 laws of what could or could not be done on the Sabbath. This is when kosher laws were written. These laws are memorized and called the *oral law*, *tradition of the fathers*, *Mishnah*. About 200 years later, Sanhedrin teachers add even more laws.

• Ptolemy Influence

- Ptolemy II (Philadelphus), 284-246 BC, developed the Alexandrian Library in Egypt. He appointed 70 Hellenized Jews to translate the Hebrew Sacred Writings into *koiné* Greek. It became known as the LXX or *Septuagint*, meaning, *translation of the 70*. Every copy included the original books Ezra chose, plus additional Jewish literature. Ezra's group of books (Canon) were known as the *first group*; the additional books as the *second group* (*deutero-canonical*).
- Ptolemy III financially oppresses the Jews. The Jews rebel and turn to the Greeks ruling in Syria.

APPLICATION

From 200 years of Persian, Greek and Jewish history, we can see that nations, leaders and people had free-will to make choices. Some choices brought reward; others brought consequences. The free-will of people and nations is one side of history. The other side is God's sovereignty. This means He can utilize whatever choices are made and use them to accomplish His purpose. In the 1st century AD, God gathered together all the choices of nations and leaders as well as the choices of the godly and ungodly Jews. He used them to prepare the world for Jesus' coming the 1st time.

The same is true in our day. Nations and people are using their free-will and their choices are appalling. To us, it looks like everything is one big failure. But God is sovereign. He is utilizing all these choices and actions to set the scene for bringing the return of Jesus for us, the Church. He is also preparing the world for Satan's kingdom, which must happen before God's Kingdom can come.

When we see God is using events to bring about the return of Jesus, instead of living in fear, we can live with expectancy and thanksgiving. God is Sovereign. His plans and purpose for us and the world **will** be accomplished.

