

## Introductory Lesson 1A

## 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 land of Judah. Persia considers them a nation and believes the land of Judah belongs to the Jews and the God of the Jews. The common language is Aramaic. The people want to follow God because Nehemiah, their former governor, Ezra their priest and Malachi, their prophet led them in spiritual restoration.

## From 400 BC - 6 BC - sometimes called the 400 Silent Years

They are called *silent* because after Malachi, God does not speak to them thru a prophet until John the Baptist. Thruout Jewish history, the Jews 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 local synagogues, they will have teachers to explain it. In other words, the Jews have all they need to follow God. 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 try it out. He wants them to discover they cannot be good enough to meet His standards. They need their Messiah, not as King, but first as Savior. He is the One who will make them right with God the Father.

## EZRA PREPARES and PROTECTS THE NATION for the future.

- 1<sup>st</sup>** Ezra develops squared Hebrew consonants and a way to write the vowels above/below letters.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>** He confirms which books of Jewish literature are God-given, adds the books of Psalms, Ezra and Nehemiah. He then declares the Hebrew Canon (Tanakh, Jewish sacred writings) complete or *closed*.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>** 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.
- 4<sup>th</sup>** 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 of the faith, they keep reminding people to expect their promised Messiah; He will come.  
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 300's BC

- Spiritually - 400 BC Jews had godly leadership under a governor and a high priest.  
300's BC Jewish priests and governors become corrupt, interested only in power and money.  
Jewish high priests become both the ruler and spiritual leader of the nation.
- Politically - during most of 300's - Jews continue under the Persians.  
Near the end, Alexander the Great comes on the scene.

## Greek Empire 334 - 323 BC Alexander the Great conquers the Persians.

- His influence changes the course of history.  
He simplified the Greek language so it could be the common or *koiné* Greek of the empire.  
He creates the belief that Greek thought, customs and religion is the best - known as *Hellenism*.
- His death creates the division of his empire into 4 Greek empires.

## Egyptian Greek Empire 200's BC (the Ptolemies)

Many Jews become Hellenized

The Jewish sacred writings are translated from Hebrew to koine Greek - the *Septuagint* (LXX)

Because of Ezra, Jewish translators can clearly read the letters and know which books are sacred.

Jews living outside of Jerusalem develop Ezra's idea of local synagogues to keep their faith and practice alive.



### Egyptian Greek Empire 200's BC continued

In Judah, the Great Synagogue changes its name to *Sanhedrin / Council*. It changes its number to 70.

Besides its previous duties, it now becomes the Jewish supreme court, deciding religious legal issues.

To keep the people from breaking God's laws, it starts writing new laws to act like a fence around God's laws. To keep people from breaking God's Sabbath law, they add 1500 laws of what could or could not be done on the Sabbath. The laws are memorized and called *the oral law, tradition of the fathers, Mishnah*.

### Syrian Greek Empire 100's BC (the Seleucids)

Israel is divided into 5 provinces. Some in the Sanhedrin become Hellenized and no longer have Jewish values.

In the 170's, the Syrian king enters Jerusalem, desecrates the Temple and forbids the practice of Judaism.

Three years later the Jews regain control of their Temple under the leadership of the Maccabean brothers.

Over the next 23 years they lead the Jews in battles to gain political independence.

### Maccabean Independence 142 - 63 BC

Many people and the Sanhedrin now see the danger of Hellenism. They are conservative and want separation from Gentile influence. They become known as the *Separatists*. The Greek word is *Pharisee*. People in society and in the Sanhedrin who want Greek influence in the nation, in religious beliefs and culture are called *Hellenists*.

### Roman Empire From 63 BC - 70 AD, Rome is over the Jewish nation.

**63 BC** - One brother in the Maccabean line turns Israel over to the Roman general, Pompey, in exchange for being made high-priest and having his brother put in prison.

**48 BC** - Julius Caesar appoints an Idumean, (Edomite), as governor of Judea in reward for saving his life.

**40 BC** - Octavius Caesar appoints the Idumean's son as *king* of Judea - (a glorified title of *governor*).

This Idumean man uses Roman money to beautify Jerusalem and enlarge the Jewish temple. He marries a woman from the Maccabean line of rulers. He is *king* in Judea 36 years. Over this time, when he thinks his power is threatened, he kills family members - 2 of his sons, his Jewish wife, her mother and her 3 brothers.

This is Herod the Great - *King of Judea* - when Jesus is born in Bethlehem.

## APPLICATION

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, because 400 years had passed and the promised Messiah had not come, many Jews decide to make God's promises come true in their way.

Some decide to get involved in politics, to influence Roman decisions about their nation.

Some decide to be more like the world so they will be accepted.

Some think if they become more strict in following rules their leaders made, then God will send their Messiah.

Only a minority, a believing remnant, are still waiting and expecting His coming. They continue to be faithful in what they believe and how they live.

When it seemed like things were at their worst, God kept His promise and sent His Son.

In our days, we believe that Jesus will come for us, His Body, the Church. But years have gone by and He has not come. As a result - many Christians have decided to make God's promises come true in their way.

Some say we can do it thru politics. Some say if we are more like the world - the world will accept us. Others suggest if we follow more man-made rules, **God** will accept us.

We, who are still waiting for and **expecting** His coming are in the minority. Our responsibility is:

...to remain faithful in our beliefs based on Scripture.

This means we need to keep learning and studying God's Word.

...to remain faithful in how we live.

This means sharing our faith with those who are seeking and doing whatever God puts in front of us to do. It may be spiritual ministry, secular work or being involved with family and friends.

We can be sure, when it seems like things are at their worst, God will send Jesus once again. We who have accepted His payment - whether alive or we have died - we will meet Him in the clouds to be with Him forever. According to God's Word, this is our future and our certainty!

