

## **27. Intertestamental Period (Pt. I)**

### *External Developments Between the Testaments*

Summary of the close of the Old Testament:

#### I. Medo-Persian Rule (539- 331 BC)

##### The Ram of Daniel 8

Dan. 8:3 Then I lifted my gaze and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. 4 I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him, nor was there anyone to rescue from his power; but he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

##### A. A Period of Dominance (539- 423 BC)

##### 1. The Defeat of The Babylonian Kingdom

NB: Herodotus notes the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus in one night):

“Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the river-side, entered the stream, which had now sunk so as to reach about midway up a man’s thigh, and thus got into the town. Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed their danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter the city, but would have destroyed them utterly; for they would have made fast all the street-gates which gave upon the river, and mounting upon the walls along both sides of the stream, would so have caught the enemy as it were in a trap. But, as it was, the Persians came upon them by surprise and took the city. Owing to the vast size of the place, the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents at Babylon declare), long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing of what had chanced, but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and revelling until they learnt the capture but too certainly.” (Herodotus 1.191)

NB: Darius the Mede from Dan. 5 is most likely the same as Cyrus the Persian mentioned by Herodotus

Dan. 5:1 Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 When Belshazzar tasted the wine, he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, in order that the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which was in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Dan. 5:5 Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. . . . 8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew even paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

Dan. 5:10 The queen entered the banquet hall . . . and said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. 11 "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners. 12 "This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas, and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned, and he will declare the interpretation."

Dan. 5:13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. . . ."

Dan. 5:17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, . . ."

Dan. 5:25 "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' 26 "This is the interpretation of the message: MENE — God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. 27 "TEKEL — you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. 28 "PERES — your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

Dan. 5:29 Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom. 30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. 31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

2. The 3 Returns of the Jews occur during the reign of the Medo-Persian Rulers
  - a. The First Return
    - 538 BC as described in Ezra 1-6
    - The Leaders were Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar, and Jeshua along with about 50,000 people.
    - They were assisted by the decree of Cyrus the Persian:

Ezra 1:1 "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the

spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

2 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 ‘Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 ‘And every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”

- The decree from Cyrus itself was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah 200 years earlier:

Is. 44:24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, “I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, And spreading out the earth all alone, 25 Causing the omens of boasters to fail, Making fools out of diviners, Causing wise men to draw back, And turning their knowledge into foolishness, 26 Confirming the word of His servant, And performing the purpose of His messengers. It is I who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited!’ And of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built.’ And I will raise up her ruins again. 27 “It is I who says to the depth of the sea, ‘Be dried up!’ And I will make your rivers dry. 28 **“It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”**

- Cyrus the Persian evidently had a habit of returning conquered peoples to their land—perhaps in an attempt to curry favor from them. This is evident from the Cyrus Cylinder which records just such a decree by Cyrus. This is not the decree mentioned by Ezra relating to the 1<sup>st</sup> Return of the Hebrew people following their captivity in Babylon.
- The rebuilding of the Temple is begun in 536 BC and the foundation of the Temple is laid:
- Trouble experienced by the Samaritans; Temple work stalled for 16 years due to the fear and selfishness of the people; Temple construction resumed in 520 BC due to the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah and completed in 516 BC.

Ezra 6: 14 And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 And this temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

NB: Between the 1<sup>st</sup> Return (under Zerubbabel) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Return (under Ezra) from the Babylonian Captivity the Book of Esther takes place. It is during the Persian era under the Persian King Ahasuerus (aka Xerxes) who reigned from 486-465 BC. Esther covers the period from 483-473 BC.

b. The Second Return

- 458 BC as described in Ezra 7-10
- This return led by Ezra including 1,758 people
- Assisted by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus the Persian
- Ezra is forced to deal with the serious problem of intermarriage of the people with non-Jews (Neh. 9-10).

c. The Third Return

- 444 BC as described in Nehemiah 1-13
- This return led by Nehemiah
- Assisted by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus the Persian
- Nehemiah leads the people to rebuild the Wall of Jerusalem in 52 days despite the opposition of scoffers (Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem)

B. A Period of Decline (423- 331 BC)

NB: This latter period of the Medo-Persian Empire is uneventful for both the Persians and the Jews.

II. Greek Rule (331- 143 BC)

The Male Goat of Daniel 8

Dan. 8:5 While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. 6 And he came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. 7 And I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. 8 Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

A. Alexander the Great (356- 323 BC) “the conspicuous horn”

- Son of Philip of Macedon who was murdered while preparing to destroy the Persian Empire
- 20 years old when he assumed the throne
- Taught by Aristotle he was one of history’s greatest military leaders
- He sought to Hellenize the entire world and succeeded in conquering the near eastern world as far as India

NB: This Greek cultural influence brought by Alexander and his successors eventually dominated the Jews to the point that the Jewish Elders sought to translate the Old Testament into Greek. This version of the Old Testament became known as the Septuagint and was the dominant version in use by the Jews of the New Testament Era

- Josephus mentions that Alexander entered Jerusalem and offered sacrifices in the Temple. He was evidently shown the Book of Daniel by the High Priest and was persuaded that Daniel had predicted that he would conquer the Medo-Persian Empire.
- He died at the age of 32.

#### B. The Division of the Greek Empire

- After Alexander dies his kingdom is divided up among 4 of his generals (this takes 22 years)
- The division of the empire is to Ptolemy, Seleucus, Lysimachus and Cassander (“But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven”)

##### 1. The Ptolemaic Rule (323- 198 BC)

- The Greek control centered in Egypt
- The Jews generally prospered during the early rule of the Ptolemies but later suffered (Judea had become a battleground between the wars of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids)

##### 2. The Seleucid Rule (198- 143 BC)

- The Greek control centered in Syria
- This is the period during which Judea became divided into sections (Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, Trachonitis) that we see in the New Testament times
- This is a tragic time for the Jews. They are permitted to live under their own religious laws but persecution was intense
- Under Antiochus Epiphanes IV Jerusalem was plundered, the wall torn down, the Temple was defiled and rededicated to pagan Greek gods.
- In 168 BC Antiochus Epiphanes IV caused a pig to be sacrificed on the altar in the Temple and a statue to be erected in the Temple to Jupiter Olympius

### III. The Maccabean Era (165- 63 BC)

- Revolt and resistance was inspired by the brutal oppression of Antiochus
- Initially, Mattathias (an old priest) killed the commissioners (along with an apostate Jew) sent by Antiochus to install the King's pagan religion. Mattathias then tore down the pagan altar.
- Mattathias, his 5 sons and other faithful Jews then fled to the mountains to escape reprisal from Antiochus
- Eventually, Mattathias and his followers grew into an army that opposed the Greek rule.
- One of his sons Judas Maccabeus led 10,000 Jews in opposition to the Greeks and prevailed. In 164 BC the Greeks attacked the Jews at Jerusalem but were defeated and withdrew. The Jews took control of Jerusalem and reinstated the sacrifices on December 25 164 BC (3 years to the day after the Temple had been defiled by Antiochus). The Jews instituted the celebration called the Feast of Dedication (aka Feast of Lights or Hanukkah)
- The Jews eventually obtained political as well as religious freedom.
- During the latter part of this period the Jews devolved into political compromise and strife—eventually becoming a civil war among the Jews. (This was terminated by the intervention of the Romans)

### IV. Roman Rule (63- 4 BC)

- The independent rule of the Jews was ended by the Roman General Pompey. After a 3 month siege of Jerusalem Pompey took the city and Israel became a province of the Roman Empire.
- Herod the Great was the political ruler over Israel at this time up until the birth of Jesus
- Shortly before his death in 4 BC (after the birth of Jesus) Herod was visited by the Magi. The slaughter of the Jewish children followed as recorded in Matt. 2

### Matthew 2

Matt. 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.” 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 And they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

Matt. 2:7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, “Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him.” 9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. 10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped

Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.

Matt. 2:13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.” 14 And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, “Out of Egypt did I call My Son.”

Matt. 2:16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi. 17 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; And she refused to be comforted, Because they were no more.”