

# Life of Christ

## Background of the New Testament

### I. Historical World Empires

A. Babylon - 605 B.C. to 539 B.C.

B. Medo/Persia - 539 B.C. to 333 B.C.

- Five major kings - Cyrus the Great, Cambyses, Darius the Great, Xerxes (Esther) and Artaxerxes (Nehemiah).

C. Greece - 333 B.C. to 63 B.C.

- Split into four parts upon Alexander's death - Lysimachus (Macedonia), Antigonus (Asia Minor), Ptolemy (Egypt), and Selucius (Syria and Palestine).
- Slowly decayed and was absorbed by Rome who ascended to power around 63 B.C.

D. Rome - 63 B.C. to Middle Ages

- Rome was never conquered, it just decayed.

### II. Palestine Under the Greeks

- Upon Alexander's death, Palestine was taken by one of Alexander's generals, Selucius. Thus began the Selucid dynasty.
- For over the next 100 years there was a constant war between the Ptolemaic dynasty (Egypt) and the Seleucid dynasty (Palestine). The Ptolemaic dynasty decreased in power until around 180 B.C. it was essentially a Roman protectorate.
- Antiochus Epiphanes marched against Egypt around 175 B.C. He was turned back by the Roman general and in frustration ravaged Jerusalem and attempted to force Hellenization on the Jews. This began the Maccabean wars started by Judas Maccabeus in the small town of Modein.
- Around 164 B.C. Israel won its "independence" and the temple was cleansed. This began the Hasmonean dynasty which lasted until A.D. 37 when Judea came under direct Roman rule.

### III. The Herodian Dynasty

- Herod the Great (father Antipater II) was given direct rule of Judea by Rome in 40 B.C.
- Herod was an Idumean by birth (descendant of Esau), and was hated by the Jews from the start.

- Herod was a great builder. Many of his building projects are still standing. Just before his death he began a massive rebuilding of the Jewish temple, which was destroyed by Rome only a few years after its completion.
- Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., just after the birth of Christ. After his death, his empire was divided up between his three sons.
  1. Archelaus the Ethnarch - very bad - deposed by Rome after ten years at which time Judea was put under Roman procurators (of which one was Pilate).
  2. Philip the Tetrarch - put over Iturea and Trachonitus (northern Palestine). Ruled until A.D. 34 at which time Rome took over direct rule of the lands over which he was a ruler.
  3. Herod Antipas the Tetrarch - put over Galilee and Perea (area of the Decapolis). Christ called him a fox and it was this Herod that had John beheaded.
- Herod the Great had several grandchildren that appear in the New Testament.
  1. Herod Agrippa I ruled all the lands formerly ruled by Herod the Great. He was loved by the Jews because he tried to live according to the law. He had James killed (Acts 12:1-19) and died suddenly because of pride at the age of 54 (Acts 12:20-23).
  2. Herodias - the wife of Philip and later Antipas. It was because of her unlawful marriage that John was put into prison and later killed.
- Herod's the Great's great-grandchildren.
  1. Herod Agrippa II - ruled over the lands formerly ruled by Herod the Great with the exception of Judea. It was this Herod that Paul almost persuaded to be a believer (Acts 26:28).
  2. Bernice - daughter of Agrippa I.
  3. Drusilla - married to Felix, procurator of Judea.

#### IV. Sects

##### A. Pharisees

- Origin unknown. Name could have come from "parsee" which means "to separate" since they separated themselves from all that was common.
- First mentioned under the reign of John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.).
- The Pharisees were a very small group probably numbering less than 5,000.
- The Pharisees were made up of middle-class people. Very few wealthy.
- The Pharisees accepted all of the Old Testament canon as Scripture.

- Several fundamental beliefs were
    1. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.
    2. The immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.
    3. Angels and demons.
    4. Written and oral law consisting of 613 commandments.
  - During Christ's time there were two basic schools, Hillel (very conservative) and Shammai (very liberal).
- B. Sadducees
- The Sadducees were the aristocracy of the day.
  - They did not accept all of the Old Testament, just the five books of Moses.
  - The Sadducees ran the temple and the temple concessions (making them very wealthy). The high priest was a Sadducee.
  - The Sadducees denied immortality of the soul (Matthew 22:23-33) and the oral laws of the Pharisees. They also did not believe in angels or demons.
- C. Essenes
- The Essenes were an ascetic group which lived in the areas to the north of the Dead Sea.
  - They had a very strict mode of life, refusing to live with and interact with the other Jewish sects.
  - They were the group that copied and preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- D. Zealots
- A very fanatical group that used terrorism to overthrow the Roman government.
  - Simon, one of Christ's disciples, was a Zealot.
  - One group, the Sicarri, carried knives that would be used to randomly murder Romans and other Roman collaborators.
- E. Herodians
- A group of Jews that thought it best to support the Herodian rulership. They were despised by the Pharisees.
  - It is interesting to see that the Herodians, Pharisees, and Sadducees united to attempt to discredit Christ in Matthew 22.

## V. Religious and Political Institutions and Groups

## A. The Synagogue

- A Jewish place for worship. In Jesus' day it was a school and a local law court.
- Many think that it began during the Babylonian captivity.
- The synagogue was ruled by a board of elders with some elected to read the law.
- Later, the synagogue became a model for the local church.

## B. The Sanhedrin

- The ruling body in Israel consisting of 70 men.
- The high priest was an *ex officio* member and became the 71st.

## C. Scribes and Lawyers

- Official interpreters of the law.
- Scribes had the responsibility for producing copies of the law for public worship.

## VI. Some Important Dates

- Most events in the New Testament are very difficult to date. The only time we can assign accurate dates is when a New Testament event intersects with a verifiable historical date. The following are some of the more important dates.
1. Christ's birth - 4 or 5 B.C.
    - Christ was born shortly before Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C. We date this from a lunar eclipse which occurred in March 12 or 13 of 4 B.C. at which time Herod died.
  2. The Beginning of Christ's Ministry - A.D. 26 or 29
    - The rebuilding of the temple was started by Herod in approximately 20 B.C. In John 2:20 we read that at that time the project had been going on for 46 years, which would put the start of Christ's ministry around A.D. 26.
    - Another possibility is that Luke 3:1 tells us Christ began his ministry during the 15th year of Tiberius' reign. This would correspond to the year A.D. 29.
  3. The Crucifixion - A.D. 29 to A.D. 30
    - This depends on when we begin Christ's public ministry.
  4. Death of Herod Agrippa I (martyrdom of James the brother of John) - A.D. 44

5. Famine in Jerusalem - A.D. 46
  - Josephus mentions the famine during the procuratorship of Fadus and Alexander (A.D. 44 to A.D. 48).
  
6. Gallio's Procounselship in Corinth - A.D. 51-52
  - This would place Paul's 18 month stay in Corinth during the years A.D. 50 - A.D. 53.
  
7. Procuratorship of Festus - A.D. 58 - A.D. 60
  - This places Paul's Roman imprisonment during A.D. 60 - A.D. 62.