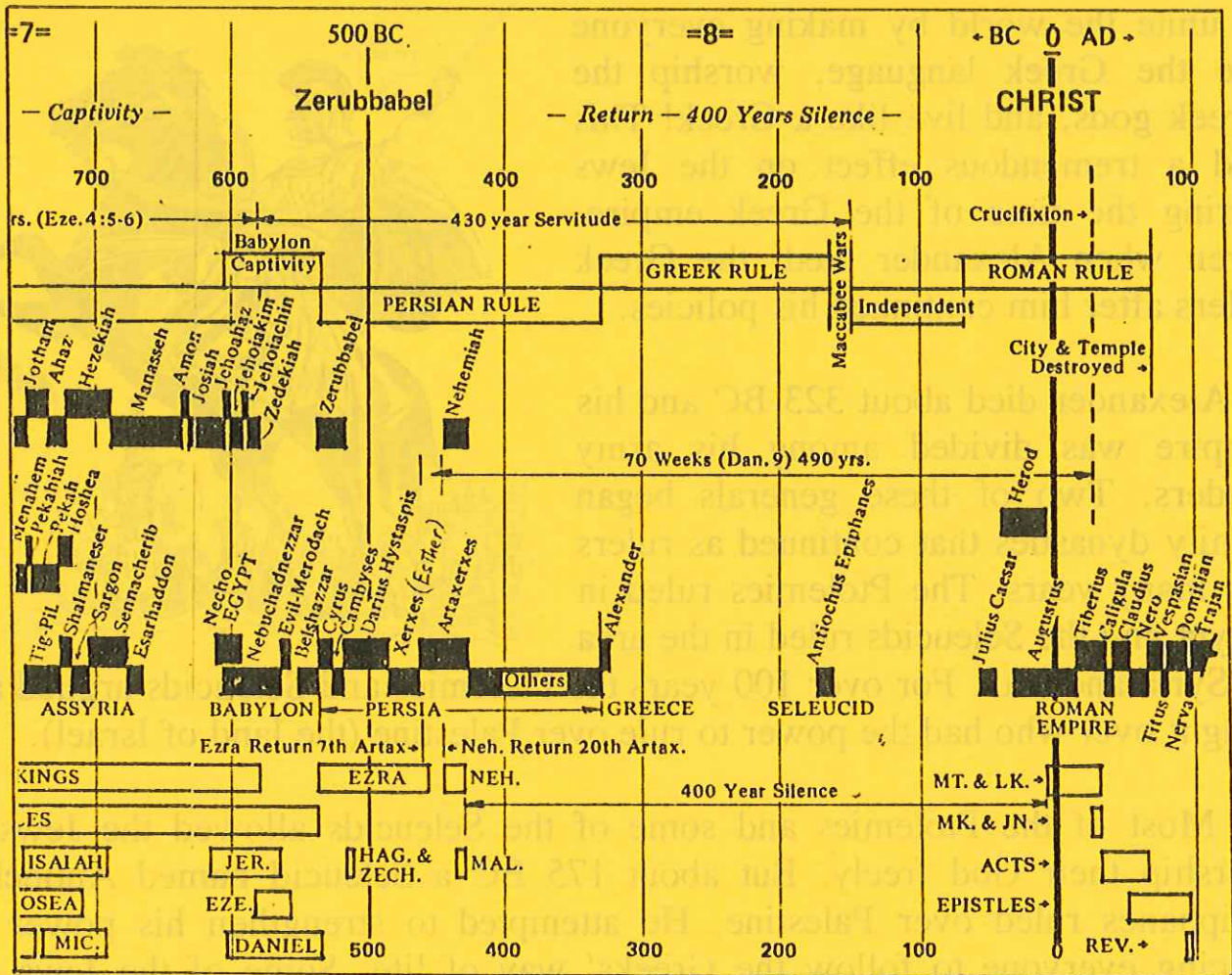


The Time Between the Testaments

About 400 years went by from the time of Nehemiah until the birth of Jesus Christ. These years are commonly referred to as "the time between the testaments" because they cover the years of history from the end of the Old Testament until the beginning of the New Testament in our Bibles. The Old Testament finishes with the story of Nehemiah. Then the New Testament begins with John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

The Bible does not contain much information about the 400 years between the testaments. There were no prophets and no stories are written about people during these years. Nebuchadnezzar's image in the book of Daniel indicated that another power would arise after the Medes and Persians, but Daniel does not tell us much about what happened during that time.



Even though the Bible does not say much about this period, many things did occur that effected the people later on in the days of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. When we learn about these events during the time between the testaments, it helps us to better understand the people in the days of Jesus and Paul

History

Back in the days of Daniel, Judah was taken captive and the Jews in the land of Israel no longer were able to rule over themselves with their own kings. The Babylonians ruled over the land of Israel first. Then after them the Persians ruled during the days of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

After the Persians, the next people to rule over Israel were the Greeks. (Remember the Greeks were represented in Nebuchadnezzar's image by the belly and thighs of bronze.) Alexander the Great was the leader of the Greeks and he took control of the land of Israel about 330 BC (that's about 330 years before Jesus was born). Alexander tried to unite the world by making everyone use the Greek language, worship the Greek gods, and live like a Greek! This had a tremendous effect on the Jews during the time of the Greek empire. Even when Alexander died, the Greek rulers after him continued his policies.

Alexander died about 323 BC and his empire was divided among his army leaders. Two of these generals began family dynasties that continued as rulers for many years. The Ptolemies ruled in Egypt and the Seleucids ruled in the area of Syria and Iran. For over 100 years the Ptolemies and Seleucids argued and fought over who had the power to rule over Palestine (the land of Israel).

Most of the Ptolemies and some of the Seleucids allowed the Jews to worship their God freely. But about 175 BC a Seleucid named Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over Palestine. He attempted to strengthen his power by forcing everyone to follow the Greeks' way of life. Some of the Jews did adopt the Greek ways, but the majority of Jews did not and became furious! *In a similar way today, many people of this world will try to get us to go along with their ungodly ways and we must be like the Jews who refused to worship the Greek gods and they would not become involved in the evil ways of the Greeks.*

THE YEARS OF WAITING

Between the Old Testament and the New

THE LAND OF JUDAH IS STILL UNDER THE RULE OF THE PERSIANS WHEN ALEXANDER, THE YOUNG KING OF MACEDONIA, SETS OUT TO CONQUER THE WORLD. RIDING HIS FAMOUS HORSE, BUCEPHALUS, HE LEADS HIS ARMY AGAINST THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIGHTY PERSIAN EMPIRE. ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY FALL, AND IN 332 B.C....



THE CITY WAITS IN TERROR! BUT WHEN ALEXANDER'S ARMY COMES IN SIGHT, THE HIGH PRIEST OPENS THE GATES AND LEADS A PROCESSION OUT TO GREET THE CONQUEROR. ALEXANDER RECOGNIZES THE PRIEST AS A MAN OF GOD AND BOWS BEFORE HIM. THEN HE ENTERS THE CITY AND WORSHIPS IN THE TEMPLE. UNDER THE RULE OF THIS DARING YOUNG WARRIOR THE JEWS ARE ALLOWED TO KEEP THEIR OWN RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS -- AND THEY ARE HAPPY.

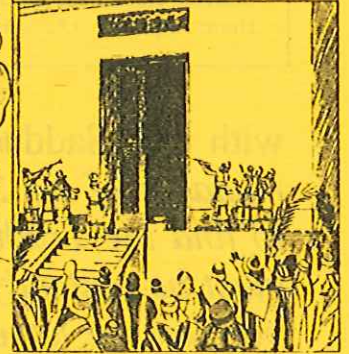


Antiochus tried to get rid of the Jewish religion. He stopped the Jews from practicing some of their important services. He even tried to destroy all copies of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Antiochus required the Jews to make offerings to the Greek god Zeus! He even put up a statue of Zeus with a pig being sacrificed to him, in the Jerusalem temple!

Some of the Jews rebelled against Antiochus. They were led by an old man named Mattathias, who was from a priestly family. Mattathias destroyed a Greek altar in his village and killed the village leader that Antiochus had put in charge. This started a major rebellion of the Jews that gave the Jews some freedom until the Romans took over Palestine in about 63 BC.

BUT--SUDDENLY--ALEXANDER DIES... AND THE GIANT EMPIRE IS DIVIDED AMONG HIS GENERALS. WHEN THE RULER OVER JUDAH COMMANDS THE PEOPLE TO WORSHIP AN IDOL, A PRIEST SLAYS THE KING'S MESSENGER. THIS BOLD ACT STIRS ALL JUDAH TO REVOLT...

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PRIEST'S BRAVE FAMILY (KNOWN AS THE MACCABEES), THE JEWS DRIVE THE ENEMY FROM THEIR LAND. ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THEY DO IS TO REDEDICATE THE TEMPLE, WHICH THE ENEMY HAD USED TO WORSHIP IDOLS. FOR A HUNDRED GLORIOUS YEARS JUDAH IS FREE!



The Septuagint Bible

As the influence of the Greeks began to have effect on the Jews, more and more Jews outside the land of Israel began to speak Greek. Jewish children were born who grew up speaking Greek and they didn't know Hebrew at all! Some time around 250 BC, some Jewish scholars got together in Egypt and translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This new Greek translation of the Old Testament became known as the Septuagint.

This Septuagint Bible quickly became the common Bible among the Jews who were living outside the land of Palestine. Later on in the days of the Apostle Paul, this still was the common Bible many of the Jews and Gentiles used to read the word of God.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees

During the time between the testaments, the Jewish people developed different religious views and divided into groups. Two of the most common groups were the Sadducees and the Pharisees.



Sadducees

While some Pharisees accepted Jesus, we do not know of any Sadducees who did. The Sadducees were a group of priests who did not believe in life after death or the resurrection. They also did not accept all of the rules of the Pharisees, only the law of Moses. The Sadducees were always working against Jesus. After Jesus returned to heaven, they arrested the apostles and put them in prison. (Acts 5:17, 18.)

The Sadducees were the most influenced by the Greeks. Many of the high officials and the rich people belonged to the Sadducees. They usually controlled the temple and the office of the high priest.

They rejected all religious writings except the Torah and refused to accept any doctrines that were not clearly stated in the first five Bible books. For example, the Sadducees did not believe God would resurrect anyone to eternal life because they did not think that was clearly explained in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers or Deuteronomy. Jesus

Christ had many discussions and arguments with the Sadducees because they did not believe his true teachings. *The mistakes of the Sadducees should remind us to carefully read the whole Bible to find the Truth. Some important teachings in the Bible are hard to find and must be patiently studied. We have a wonderful advantage over the Pharisees because we have the entire Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, to read so we can know the Truth!*

While the Sadducees controlled much of the temple, the Pharisees took control of many of the Jewish meeting places called *Synagogues*. The Pharisees studied very hard to come up with interpretations of the Law of Moses that fit their teachings. They taught people that God is more interested in the food we eat and the washing of our hands than whether or not we learn to be kind, patient and loving.



Pharisee

The Pharisees hated Jesus because He healed and cared for people even if it meant breaking some of their harsh rules. The Pharisees were a Jewish sect that did not mix with ordinary people. Even their name means "separated one." Jesus scolded the Pharisees for pretending to be godly when they were trying to make people follow rules instead of pleasing God. (Matt. 5:20.)

Jesus Christ many times had to criticize the Pharisees for stressing the less important things in the Bible and failing to emphasize the real important issues in God's word. *We can learn from the mistakes of the Pharisees so that we will be careful to treat each other with kindness, like Jesus Christ did.* Although there is not a lot in the Bible about the time between the testaments, it clearly was a very important time for the Jews. Many changes were taking place in their lives, and God was challenging them to trust Him and faithfully follow His ways, even when times became very tough.

We live in a time today which is a lot like the time between the testaments. We do not have any prophets around today who speak by the spirit of God and we live in a country far away from the land of Israel. We are constantly being pressured to live and talk like the people of this world, instead of following the ways of God that we read about in our Bibles. We need to carefully read God's word every day and get together as often as possible with other children who follow God's ways, so we will be able to withstand the influences of this world and be ready for the Kingdom of God when Jesus Christ returns.

