

**BBS#12 • The Silence Era**

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\_\_\_\_\_ Ezra \_\_\_\_\_ the people  
back from \_\_\_\_\_ to  
rebuild \_\_\_\_\_ .

\_\_\_\_\_ Pharisees and others  
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in \_\_\_\_\_ for the next  
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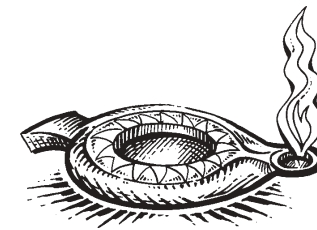
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**BASIC BIBLE STUDY**  
**An Introductory Guide**  
**To Understanding The Scriptures**

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**PART TWELVE**  
**The Silence Era**

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"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet,  
and a light unto my path"  
PSALM 119:105

The religious leaders of the Silence Era pretended to have power, and they became self-absorbed. It has been said that some people drink at the fountain of knowledge while others only gargle. All this pride caused a pattern of religious hypocrisy that was leading to self-destruction and made this period one of the most disappointing in the nation's history.

**THE ARC OF BIBLE HISTORY**  
**#9 ... THE SILENCE ERA**  
**(Between the Old and New Testaments)**



**I. Review:**

Fill in the blanks to bring the chart up to date with this era (pgs3&4).

**II. Story-Line Summary:**

**Pharisees and others entomb the Israelites in legalism for the next four hundred years.**

**III. Story-Line Expansion:**

There are four major subjects in the Silence Era:

1. The Changing Guard
2. Political Sects
3. Religious Sects
4. Messianic Hope

**1. THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD:**  
**THE MARCH OF NATIONS**

At the close of the Old Testament, Jerusalem is ruled by Persia. Between them, Ezra and Nehemiah gave Judaism the form in which

**Test #4: Story of the Old Testament** (Fill in the blanks)

ERA	FIGURE	LOCATION	STORYLINE SUMMARY
_____	_____	_____	Adam is created by God, but he _____ and _____ God's original _____ for man.
_____	_____	_____	Abraham is _____ by God to _____ a people to _____ God to the world.
_____	_____	_____	Moses _____ the Hebrew people from _____ in Egypt and then gives them the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Joshua leads the _____ of the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Samuel and others were chosen as _____ to _____ the people for _____ rebellious years.
_____	_____	_____	David, the greatest king in the new _____ , is followed by a succession of mostly _____ kings, and God eventually _____ Israel for her sins, sending her into exile.
_____	_____	_____	Daniel gives _____ and encourages _____ among the _____ for the next seventy years.

**TESTS**

**Test #1: Four Major Subjects in the Silence Era** (Write in the correct subject from the options at left)

OPTIONS:	SUBJECT:	DESCRIPTION:
The Changing Guard	Pharisees and Sadducees	
Political Sects	The march of nations	
Religious Sects	Expectation of a saviour	
Messianic Hope	Maccabees and Zealots	

**Test #2: Story-Line Summary** (Fill in the blanks from memory)

ERA	STORYLINE SUMMARY
Silence	Pharisees and others _____ the _____ in _____ for the next _____ years.

**Test #3: Geography of the Silence Era**

(Put a 1 next to Persia, a 2 next to Greece, and a 3 next to Rome. Then draw an arrow from Persia to Greece to Rome, to represent the movement of the seat of power during the Silence Era).



it was to survive through the following centuries. (It is important to appreciate that after the exile the Jews were no longer a nation defined by geography. Although many exiles had returned from Babylon, many more remained there, having thoroughly adapted to life away from their homeland. By the close of the Old Testament period, around 400BC, there were Jewish communities not only in Babylon, but throughout the Persian empire, from Egypt to what is now eastern Iran).

REVIEW (Fill in the blanks)

ERA	FIGURE	LOCATION	STORYLINE SUMMARY
_____	_____	_____	Adam is created by God, but he _____ and _____ God's original _____ for man.
_____	_____	_____	Abraham is _____ by God to _____ a people to _____ God to the world.
_____	_____	_____	Moses _____ the Hebrew people from _____ in Egypt and then gives them the _____.
_____	_____	_____	Joshua leads the _____ of the _____.
_____	_____	_____	Samuel and others were chosen as _____ to _____ the people for _____ rebellious years.
_____	_____	_____	David, the greatest king in the new _____, is followed by a succession of mostly _____ kings, and God eventually _____ Israel for her sins, sending her into exile.

\_\_\_\_\_ Daniel gives \_\_\_\_\_  
and encourages  
\_\_\_\_\_ among the  
\_\_\_\_\_ for the next  
seventy years.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ezra \_\_\_\_\_ the people  
back from \_\_\_\_\_ to  
rebuild \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ To be completed in this study.

**THE COMING OF THE GREEKS**

Judah remained part of Persia’s empire until 333BC, when the Persian realms were conquered by Alexander of Macedon (the Great).

Alexander began a policy of hellenization - the promotion of Greek culture - throughout his massive empire.

When he died in 323BC, his empire was divided among his generals, who continued the hellenization process.

Palestine initially belonged to Ptolemy, whose dynasty ruled Egypt, but in 198BC it was taken from the Ptolemies by the dynasty of Seleucus, which ruled Syria and Mesopotamia.



**UNDER GREEK INFLUENCE**

Alexander the Great, (son of Philip of Macedonia), marched from Macedonia and attacked Darius, king of Persia and Media. Alexander enlarged the Greek Empire by defeating Darius and seizing his throne. He fought many battles, captured fortified cities (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:1). With this victory of Alexander the Great over Darius III, King of Persia, in 333BC at Issus near the northern Syrian seaport of Iskendrun, the Macedonians assumed the mantle of the strongest nation of the world.

keep the political waters calm. While this group was smaller than the Pharisees, they were much more influential.

Most Sadducees were members of the families of priests. They supported the Hasmonean high-priest kings and later the Roman rulers.

There is little reliable information about the Sadducees, as most of it comes from their opponents. What we do know is that they did not accept the Pharisees’ extensions of the Law (cf. **Matthew 16:1-12; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 4:1&2; 5:17-19; 23:6-10**).

**THE SANHEDRIN**

A ruling board, called the Sanhedrin, is made up of representatives from both the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the two groups have little in common except their desire for religious freedom and, later, their antagonism for Jesus of Nazareth.

**4. MESSIANIC HOPE:  
EXPECTATION OF A SAVIOUR**

The “Messiah,” or “Saviour,” is one who is prophesied throughout the Old Testament to come save the Jews. Some feel they need spiritual salvation, and others are looking only for political salvation. For both reasons, the expectation and hope for the coming of the Messiah is strong during the four hundred Silent Years. Events of the Silence Era seem to especially prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah:

- (1) This part of the world has a common language and a common culture, which facilitates the spread of a Messianic message.
- (2) The Roman Empire has brought this region military peace, an extensive system of roads and sea travel, and a common government so that people can travel extensively without interference.
- (3) The Jews are suffering such religious persecution and political humiliation that widespread hope and expectation of a saviour exists.

These facts make the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, claiming to be the Messiah, an event that captivates the entire Jewish world.

**N.B. By this stage you have reached another vital milestone in Basic Bible Study. You have completed the overview of the Historical Books of the Old Testament - those books which outline the story of the complete Old Testament.**

**MEANING OF NAME AND MANNER OF LIFE**

The name 'Pharisees' may mean the 'separated ones.' Most likely they trace their origins to the second century BC. They were mostly ordinary Jews - not priests - who adhered closely to the Jewish Law. Characteristically, they would extend the scope of all the laws, making them impossible to fulfil. Pharisees deemed 'work' on the sabbath day to include:



- walking more than 3/5 mile (1 km) from one's town;
- carrying any kind of load;
- lighting a fire in the home.

Strict rulings like these were introduced by the Pharisees to 'build a fence around the Law.' They reckoned that if the people were burdened with detailed rules like these they would be in less danger of disobeying the actual Law of God.

**DRESS**

The Pharisees were quite distinctive in their dress. They took two articles of dress which were worn by other Jews and emphasized them in a special way until they became their 'trademarks.'

- One of these was the phylactery - the little box of metal, or bands of parchment, which was fastened to the hand or forehead by straps. It contained passages of Scripture referring to the Passover and the redemption of the first-born from Egypt (**Exodus 13:9&16**). The phylacteries worn by the Pharisees were broader than anyone else's.
- The other feature of the Pharisees' dress were the blue fringes placed at the corners of the mantle (**Num. 15:37&38; Deut. 22:12**). The Pharisees wore extremely long fringes (cf. Jesus' denunciation of them, **Matthew 23:5**).

Although the Pharisees were the largest Jewish sect in the time of Jesus, there were only about 6000 of them. While many were godly men, they did despise those who did not, or could not, keep their burdensome laws. Christ argued frequently with the Pharisees, condemning their self-righteousness and legalism. Nicodemus and Paul were two famous Pharisees. (cf. **Matthew 12:1-42; 22:34 - 23:36; Mark 7:1-23; Luke 18:9-14; John 18:3; Acts 23:6-10**).

- The Sadducees are more liberal. They are the party of the Jerusalem aristocracy, and they use their wealth and influence to

Alexander's first target was Egypt. With a specially selected force of 32,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry he marched south (aged 24), accompanied off shore by a fleet of 160 ships. He was held up twice on the coast of Syria and Palestine.

**CONQUEST OF TYRE**

The first occasion was at Tyre. This Phoenician city, heavily fortified and protected by stout and high walls, was built on a small island which guarded the coastline. Alexander pulled off a master-stroke of military ingenuity by building a 2,000 foot 'mole' in the sea out to the island city. To safeguard the operations, mobile protective shields, so-called 'tortoises' had to be employed. Despite this, the construction of the causeway was greatly hindered by an incessant hail of missiles.

At the same time his engineers were on shore building veritable monsters: Helepolis. These were mobile protective towers many stories high, which held the detachments of bowmen and light artillery. A drawbridge on the front of the towers enabled a surprise attack to be made on the enemy's walls. They were the highest siege towers ever used in the history of war. Each of them had 20 stories and the topmost platform towered at a height of over 160 feet far above the highest city walls.

After seven months' preparation these monsters, bristling with weapons, slowly and clumsily rolled towards Tyre. The fate of the maritime stronghold, once considered impregnable, was sealed. Just as Biblical prophecy had predicted; **Zechariah 9:3&4**: "And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire." **Zechariah 9:5** informs us that "Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful" – another reference to this year in Alexander's life.

**GAZA TAKEN**

It was the old Philistine town of Gaza which brought the Macedonian king to a halt for the second time. But this siege lasted only two months, and then the road to the Nile lay open.

After the fall of Gaza it seems that Alexander hurried on by the quickest road to Egypt, leaving the conquest of the territory inland to his general Parmenio, who had no difficulty in subduing the country. Only Samaria, the seat of the governor of the province, had to be forcibly brought to heel. As a punishment it had a colony of Macedonians settled in it.

**SUBMISSION OF JUDAH**

Jerusalem and the province of Judah seem to have submitted to their

new masters without a struggle. At all events no contemporary source has so far suggested that there was any resistance.



By all accounts, the Greek conqueror tolerated the way of life of the theocracy of Judah. It was left unmolested as a religious community. This is in agreement with what archaeology has been able to establish. There are no traces of either a Greek conquest or a Greek occupation of Judah at that time. Only in the neighbouring city of Samaria a strong Greek fortress came into existence about 322BC.

### ALEXANDRIA FOUNDED

Alexander remained in Egypt, which welcomed him as a liberator, during the winter of 332-331BC. On the western tip of the Nile delta he founded the city of Alexandria, which was destined for the role of the metropolis of the new age. It quickly blossomed into the centre of a intellectual life which attracted the best minds of the Greek and oriental world.

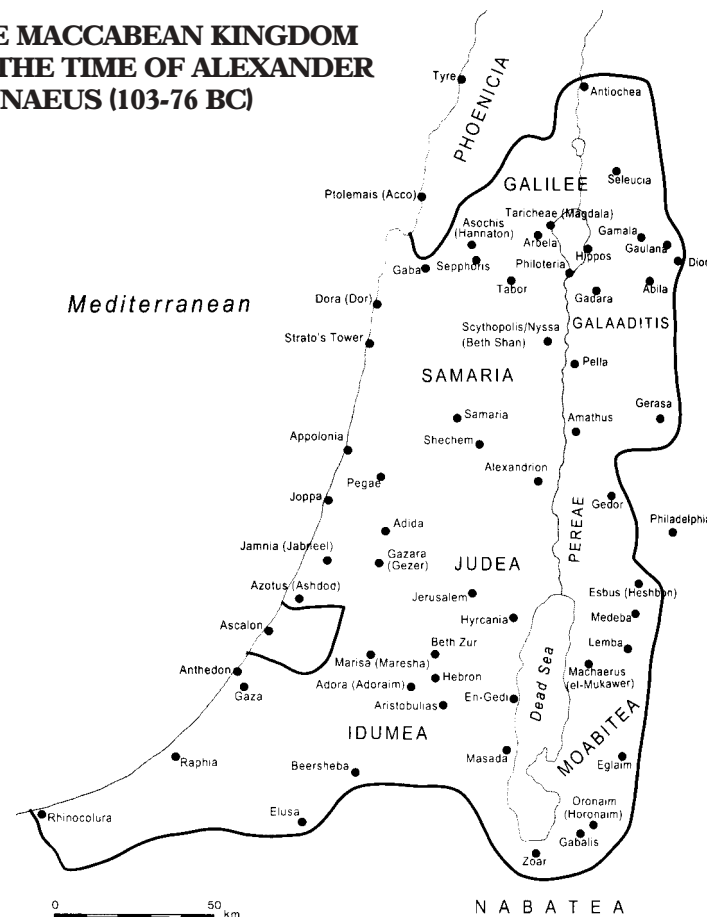
At its foundation Alexander issued instructions which were to be of the highest significance in future days. **He guaranteed to the Jews descendants of the refugees in the Babylonian era the same rights as were accorded to his own countrymen.** This provision, carried on by successors of the great Macedonian, led to Alexandria becoming subsequently one of the great reservoirs of Jewish life and culture.

The name of the city founded by Alexander does not appear in the Bible earlier than the Book of Acts: a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures (**Acts 18:24**).

### DEATH OF ALEXANDER

On the way to one of the greatest and most successful military expeditions known to history, Alexander marched once more through Palestine. Every country in the Ancient East fell before him. He pressed on to the Indus, almost to the foot of the Himalayas. On the way back he was attacked by a fever. Alexander died in Babylon at the age of 33 on the 13th of June 323BC.

### THE MACCABEAN KINGDOM AT THE TIME OF ALEXANDER JANNAEUS (103-76 BC)



### 3. RELIGIOUS SECTS: THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

There are two primary religious 'parties' in Jerusalem during this time. Unfortunately, neither offers much guidance in true spirituality, as they are caught up in promoting a religious 'legalism' of external adherence to rules while overlooking inner motivations and attitudes.

- The Pharisees are orthodox and conservative, and they foster separation between themselves and 'secular' society.

remain of the lowest and oldest. They date from Persian times. The next stage above it is of oriental character.

This is the work of Judas Maccabaeus dating from the first period of his successful revolt. Judas placed a detachment of soldiers at Jerusalem to guard the Temple. He also fortified the town of Bethqur, so that the people of Israel would have a fortress facing Idumea (1 Maccabees 4:61). After the Battle of the Elephants near Beth-Zachariah, Antiochus V Eupator occupied this border fortress: "The king occupied Bethqur and stationed a body of troops there to guard it" (1 Maccabees 6:50).

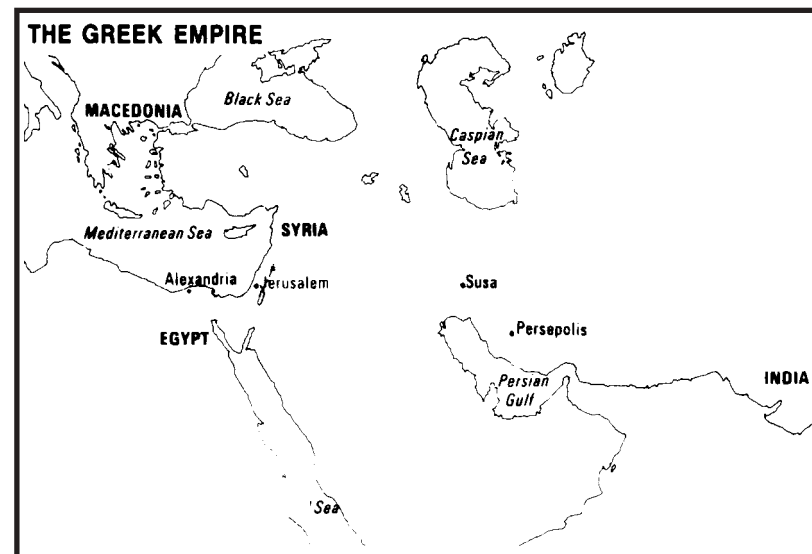
The troops of the Seleucids likewise have left unmistakable traces of their stay. As the archaeologists were able to establish, these consisted of relics of their catering arrangements, which were found among the ruins of the walls erected by Judas Maccabaeus. Part of the rations of these soldiers was wine of excellent quality from the hills of Greece. From the handles of the jars, which lay about among the mass of broken earthenware, Albright and Sellers were even able to tell where the wine came from. A wine merchant in Rhodes must have been the army's principal supplier. That was in 162BC. A year later the Seleucids fortified Beth-Zur again. A new citadel, with characteristic Hellenistic masonry, arose upon the ruined Maccabean walls. Their general Bacchides built fortifications with high walls and barred gates for a number of towns in Judaea . . . He also strengthened the fortifications of the towns of Bethqur and Gezer and of the fort in Jerusalem. He placed army units in them and stored up supplies there (1 Maccabees 9:50-52).

The record ends with the murder of Simon, brother of Judas Maccabaeus. The spiritual and political leadership of Judas was transferred, with the office of High Priest, to Simon's son John. He was called John Hyrcanus. 'John, the High Priest, and the Jewish people' and 'John the High Priest, Head of the Jewish people' are the inscriptions on coins which he had minted and which have since been found.

### EXPANSION OF BORDERS

Due to this incessant and purposeful fighting, the frontiers of Judah were extended farther and farther. Under Alexander Jannaeus they enlarged their territories until they almost covered the area previously occupied by the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

As time went on the Seleucids became less and less serious adversaries. They lacked the strength to cope with the Maccabeans when Rome now, having overthrown Hannibal of Carthage (undisputed mistress of the Western Mediterranean), had expanded its sovereignty beyond Greece into Asia Minor.



### GREEK EMPIRE DIVIDED INTO THREE KINGDOMS

When Alexander ... was about to die he called together his generals ... and divided his empire, giving a part to each of them. After his death, the generals took control, and each had himself crowned king of his own territory. The descendants of these kings ruled for many generations and brought a great deal of misery on the world (1 Maccabees 1:7-9).

Alexander's generals had no scruples about getting rid of his whole family by murdering them: Philip Arrhidæus his half brother, his mother Olympia, his widow Roxana and his posthumous son.

**The conflict came to a head in the division of the empire into three kingdoms.**

(1) The kingdom of Macedonia in Northern Greece was ruled by the dynasty founded by Antigonos.

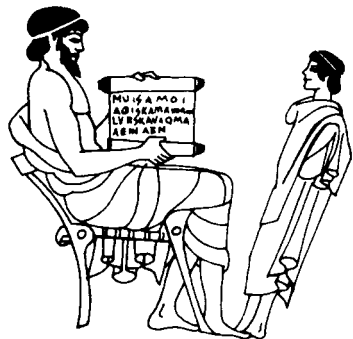
(2) The Kingdom of the Seleucids extended from Thrace through Asia Minor and Syria to the borders of India. Antioch, on the lower reaches of the Orontes in the north of Syria, and Seleucia, on the Tigris, were founded as capitals of this second and by far the largest of the successor states.

(3) The third was the Ptolemaic kingdom on the Nile with Alexandria as its capital. It was ruled by a dynasty whose last representative,

Cleopatra, has ever since enjoyed a certain amount of fame for having so successfully turned the heads of her distinguished contemporaries Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

**ADVANCE OF GREEK LANGUAGE & CULTURE**

**Two unusually far-sighted rulers, Ptolemy I and his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus, developed their capital city of Alexandria into a nursery of Hellenistic culture and learning whose fame extended far beyond the borders of their own kingdom.** It drew emigrants from



Judah, among others, into its charmed circle; and in this crucible they steeped themselves in the beauty of the Greek language. It was this language alone that allowed them to enjoy the prodigious advances of the human mind and the human spirit. **The international language of learning and of commerce became the language of tens of thousands of Israelites who knew no other home.**

**SEPTUAGINT**

The rising generation no longer knew Hebrew as their mother tongue. They could no longer follow the sacred text in the services of the synagogue. Therefore it came about that the Jews in Egypt decided to translate the Hebrew scriptures. About 250BC the Torah was translated into Greek, a fact of immeasurable import for Western civilization. The translation of the Bible into the Greek tongue was for the Jews in Egypt such an incredible step forward that legend took hold of it. The story is told in an apocryphal letter of Aristeas of Alexandria.

Philadelphus, the second of the Ptolemaic dynasty, took great pride in the fact that he possessed a collection of the finest books in the world. One day the librarian, the legend tells us, said to the monarch that he had brought together in his 995 books the best literature of all nations. But, he added, the greatest books of all, the five books of Moses, were not included among them. Therefore Ptolemy II Philadelphus sent envoys to the High Priest to ask for a copy of these books. At the same time he asked for men to be sent who could translate them into Greek. The High Priest granted his request and sent together with the copy of the Torah 72 learned and wise scribes. Great celebrations were organized in honour of the visitors from Jerusalem at whose wisdom and knowledge the king and his courtiers were greatly astonished. After the festivities they betook themselves to the extremely difficult task which had been assigned to them,

rebuilt and sacrifices to Jehovah were offered as in former times (1 Maccabees 4:36ff).

In the course of military expeditions which took him more and more across the frontiers of the province of Judah, Judas Maccabaeus entered Galilee and Transjordan and wherever there were Israelites who remained true to the old faith. On the way to Idumæa, the old town of Hebron in southern Judah was besieged and destroyed. This continuing good fortune of Judas Maccabaeus in battle compelled King Antiochus V Eucaptor, son of Epiphanes, to intervene with a large armed force.

**DECISIVE BATTLE**

In the decisive battle, which took place a few miles south-west of Bethlehem near Beth-Zachariah, the Seleucids employed elephants, flanked by detachments of cavalry. The Maccabees were unable to cope with this colossal superiority and were defeated. Dissension amongst themselves, however, drove the victors to make peace with surprisingly favourable terms for the vanquished. The decrees of Antiochus IV Epiphanes of 167BC were rescinded, liberty of worship was guaranteed and the religious community at Jerusalem was once more recognized (1 Maccabees 6:30ff, 58ff). The aims of the Jewish rebellion had been achieved!

**A FRESH STRUGGLE**

Not content with that, the Maccabees wanted political independence as well as freedom of religion. The successors of Judas Maccabaeus, his brothers Jonathans and Simon, began the struggle anew. It ended in 142BC under Simon, with Syria granting them also political freedom (1 Maccabees 15).

**FORTRESS OF BETH-ZUR**

A fortress which was in the midst of the struggle and changed hands several times was Beth-Zur. The results of excavation correspond to the historical circumstances described in the firstbook of the Maccabees. 'Khirbet et-Tubeka' is the modern name of this once hotly contested spot. It controls the old road from Jerusalem to Hebron on the frontier between Judah and Idumæa which lies to the south of it. In 1931 the American archaeologists W.F. Albright and O.P. Sellers found here a large collection of coins. 126 out of a total of other 300 were stamped with the names of Antiochus Epiphanes and Antiochus Eucaptor. The hill still bears the foundations of a powerful fortress in which three stages of construction can be clearly distinguished. Only fragments



**HEATHEN WORSHIP ESTABLISHED IN TEMPLE**

The worship of Olympian Zeus was set up in the Temple of Jehovah. For taking part in any Jewish religious ceremonies, the traditional sacrifices, the sabbath or circumcision, the penalty was death. The holy scriptures were destroyed. This was the first thoroughgoing religious persecution in history.

**REVOLT!**

Nevertheless, many in Israel preferred to die rather than break the holy covenant (1 Maccabees 1:63).

However, it was the resolute and fervent faith of an old man which first kindled the torch of revolt in the land.

**MATTATHIAS - AND WARS OF THE MACCABEES**

Modin was the name of a small village, 20 miles from Jerusalem on the western fringe of the highlands of Judah (Today it is the market town of el-Medieh). Here lived the priest Mattathias with his five sons. When Antiochus' officers came to Modin to force the inhabitants to "abandon (God's) Law", and to offer sacrifices and to burn incense, Mattathias steadfastly refused to obey the order. When he saw one of his countrymen offering a sacrifice, shaking with rage, he ran forward and killed the man right there on the altar. He also killed the royal official who was forcing the people to sacrifice, and then he tore down the altar (1 Maccabees 2:1-25).

This act was the signal for open resistance, for a life and death struggle for religious freedom – the 'Wars of the Maccabees.'

**JUDAS MACCABAEUS**

Mattathias and his sons escaped. In their secret haunts in the mountains and in caves they gathered round them a band of those who shared their beliefs and with their assistance waged bitter guerilla warfare against the occupying power. After the death of the old priest, his son Judas, (whose surname Maccabaeus means 'the Hammer'), became the leader.

It was in the highlands of Judah that the rebels achieved their first successes. Their achievements were indeed remarkable. This small untrained and badly equipped band mastered the well drilled and numerically superior occupation troops. BethHoron, Emmaus and Beth-Zur were captured. The Seleucids had to retreat until reinforcements arrived from Antioch. Judas Maccabaeus liberated Jerusalem in 164BC and restored the old order in the Temple. The altar was

and for which there was neither prototype nor dictionary. They set to work out at sea, on the island of Pharos off Alexandria, at the foot of one of the seven wonders of the world the 300 feet high lighthouse which Ptolemy II had erected as a warning for shipping far and near. Each of them worked in a cell by himself. When the scholars had completed their work and the translations were compared with one another all seventy-two are said to have corresponded exactly, word for word. Accordingly, the Greek translation of the Bible was called the Septuagint, meaning 'the Seventy'.

**What had previously been made known only in the sanctuary, only in the old tongue, and only to the one nation was now all at once available and intelligible for people of other tongues and other races.** The hitherto carefully guarded door into the 'tents of Shem' was thrown wide open, and Judah's attachment to the kingdom of the Ptolemies lasted for more than 100 years.

**SELEUCIDS EXPAND SOUTHWARDS**

Then the Seleucids of Antioch forced their way southwards, an expansion for which they had long been striving. After a victorious battle against Ptolemy V at the sources of the Jordan, Antiochus III, (called the Great), took over Palestine in 195BC, and Judah once more came under a new regime.

**HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE SHOWS ITSELF IN ISRAEL**

Gradually the foreign seed began to sprout even in the theocracy. The manifold and enduring influence of the Greek attitude of mind, which had been infiltrating since Alexander's victorious campaigns, became more and more apparent.

**ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES**

When Antiochus Epiphanes... became king of Syria in the year 137 (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:10) and Jason ... became High Priest by corrupt means ... he made the people of Jerusalem change to the Greek way of life ... he built a stadium near the Temple hill and led our finest young men to adopt the Greek custom of participating in athletic events ... the craze for the Greek way of life and for foreign customs reached such a point that even the priests lost all interest in their sacred duties. They lost interest in the Temple services and neglected the sacrifices. Just as soon as the signal was given, they would rush off to take part in the games that were forbidden by our Law (2 Maccabees 4:7-14). Why so much excitement over a sports ground? Gymnastics in Jerusalem - discus throwers and sprinters in the holy city - it sounds perhaps unusually progressive, but why should

Jehovah be displeased at it, how could a High Priest be denounced as ungodly on that account?

### **NATURE OF GREEK GAMES**

Between the method of playing games today and playing games in those days there is a very essential difference. It has nothing to do with the exercises themselves, which have remained practically the same for over 2,000 years. The difference lies in dress. Greek games were played completely naked. The body could only be 'covered' with a thin coat of oil.

Nakedness itself must have been regarded by all orthodox believers in Judah as an outrage, never mind a challenge. It is impossible that athletics in full view of the Temple, only a few steps from the Holy of holies, should not have been regarded as an outrageous insult, or that it should not have given rise to vigorous opposition.

Nakedness had become Judah's great temptation for a second time. The nakedness which had been the outstanding characteristic of the fertility goddesses of Canaan, was now paraded by the athletes in the sports grounds which had sprung up all over the country.

Added to this obvious problem of morality was the fact that in those days a much deeper significance was attached to athletics than to sport in the modern sense. **They were religious exercises, dedicated to the foreign Greek gods Zeus and Apollo.** The reaction of orthodox Judaism to this revival of a real threat to their religion could only be uncompromising [see **2. Maccabees & Zealots**]

### **THE ROMAN PERIOD (63BC-AD324)**

As the Seleucid empire disintegrated, the Roman general Pompey invaded Syria to bring stability to the region. He also intervened in Judean affairs to end a civil war which had broken out between rival factions of the Hasmonean house. After a three months' siege Roman legions entered Jerusalem in 63BC. Judah became a Roman province. With this event, the political independence of Israel came to an abrupt end. Judah (now Judea) became tributary to Rome in 63BC. From 37-4BC Herod the Great ruled Judea as a client-king.

## **2. POLITICAL SECTS: THE MACCABEANS AND ZEALOTS**

Some Jews in Jerusalem were strongly opposed to the hellenization

of their culture, as it was beginning to threaten the distinctiveness of Judaism. Throughout the 400 Silent Years, they attempt to revolt against foreign rule and make Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judea an independent country.

In 167BC the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, fearful for the stability of his southern realm, introduced measures to eradicate Judaism completely from its homeland. But the Jews rebelled under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, and in 164BC Antiochus revoked his anti-Jewish decrees.

The successors of Judas Maccabeus went on to fight for political as well as religious freedom. In 128BC this was achieved, and the Hasmonean priest-kings ruled an independent Judean kingdom for the next 65 years.

### **THE BATTLE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

King Antiochus IV, called Epiphanes, plundered and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem in 168BC (cf. 2 Maccabees 5:16). Plundering temples was his speciality: Polybius, the Greek historian, observed in his forty-volume 'History of the World' that Antiochus IV had despoiled most sanctuaries.

### **JERUSALEM PLUNDERED AND BURNED**

However, the treasures of the Temple were not enough for the Seleucid king. He sent in addition his chief tax collector Apollonius with an armed force to Jerusalem. This man plundered the city, set it on fire and tore down its buildings and walls. He and his army took the women and children as prisoners and seized the cattle (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:29-32; 2 Maccabees 5:24ff).

Throughout the chances and changes of its past history Israel had been spared none of the horror and ignominy which could befall a nation. But never before, neither under the Assyrians nor under the Babylonians, had it received such a blow as the edict issued by Antiochus Epiphanes by which he hoped to crush and destroy the faith of Israel.

The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judaea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country (1 Maccabees 1:44).