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PALESTINE AND THE JEWS

Before Our Lord



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The Gospels: Their Message and Credibility—II.

PALESTINE AND THE JEWS BEFORE OUR LORD

In the first booklet of this series we considered conditions within the Roman empire as a whole, in so far as they shed light on the narrative of the Gospels and on the origins of Christianity. Even more important for the correct understanding of the story of the Gospels is a knowledge of conditions within Palestine and among the Jewish people at the time of Our Lord. Palestine provides the geographical setting and immediate historical background of the story of the Gospels; and some knowledge of the history of the Jewish people, their political status, their religious beliefs and hopes at the time of Our Lord, is essential if we are to understand fully the sequence of the narrative which the Evangelists have left us.

Palestine had first come under Roman control in the time of Pompey the Great, who had intervened in the year 63 B.C. in order to settle a domestic quarrel concerning the succession to the throne. At the time of Our Lord's birth the country was under the immediate rule of Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.), who exercised jurisdiction as an allied king under Roman overlordship. Though not of pure Jewish ancestry, Herod had been assigned this territory by the Romans in 40 B.C., and within three years had succeeded in establishing himself by force of arms. He was a man of remarkable ability and political shrewdness, and throughout all the changes of the Roman civil wars had maintained and even strengthened his position. Within Palestine he carried out immense programmes of construction, building new cities, fortresses and harbours. In the vain hope of winning the favour of the masses of the Jewish people he undertook the task of reconstructing the Temple buildings. But the material achievements of his reign are completely overshadowed by the cruelty and ruthlessness which have made his name a byword. Among these put to death on the suspicion of disloyalty or conspiracy

were his first and favourite wife Mariamne and some of his sons. To the Emperor Augustus is attributed the famous remark that 'it were better to be Herod's pig than Herod's son.' His name will always be linked with the massacre of the Innocents of Bethlehem.

After the death of Herod, in 4 B.C., the kingdom was divided between three of his sons. The southern territory, Judaea and Idumea, was assigned to Archelaus whose reputation for cruelty equalled that of his father. This helps us to understand why St. Joseph, on returning from Egypt with Jesus and Mary, was afraid to dwell in Judaea. (Matthew c. 2, v. 22). As a result of representations made to Rome by his subjects he was deposed in 6 A.D.; and from that time till 41 A.D., this part of Palestine was ruled directly by Roman Procurators or Governors, of whom Pontius Pilate, who was in charge at the time of Our Lord's death, is the most famous. The northern territory called Galilee, together with part of Transjordan (Peræa), was allotted to Herod Antipas. This is the man who was called 'a fox' by Our Lord, and who makes a brief appearance in the Gospel account of the trial of Christ. He was consort of the ill-famed Herodias, through whose machinations he won the sorry distinction of having put John the Baptist to death. The third portion of the kingdom of Herod the Great, the district lying to the north and east of the Lake of Galilee, was assigned to Philip. In this territory stood the town of Caesarea Philippi, famous for ever by reason of the confession of St. Peter: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' (Matthew c. 16, v. 16).

Though the Romans allowed many privileges and gave a considerable measure of authority to such petty kings, they were jealous guardians of their own over-lordship. Even the most powerful subject kings had to tread warily, and complaints of a serious character against their administration, not to speak of disloyalty or attempts to throw off the Roman yoke, were dealt with summarily and severely.

The inhabitants of Palestine were not exclusively Jewish, either in race or religion. There were cities of Greek origin, predominantly pagan in culture and population. The people of Samaria were of mixed descent; and the bitterness which

existed between them and the rest of the Jews was partly due to this, but more especially to the fact that they maintained on Mt. Garizim a sanctuary in opposition to the great central shrine, the Temple of Jerusalem. Three languages, Latin, Greek and Aramaic, were in use in Palestine at the time of Christ. Aramaic, which is closely akin to Hebrew, was spoken by the Jews who returned from the Babylonian Captivity (586-536). Gradually it supplanted Hebrew as the spoken tongue of the Jews, and at an early date became the vernacular of Palestine. It was spoken by Our Lord; and the books of the New Testament have handed down a few of His words in that tongue, e.g., *Talitha, cumi*. Maiden, arise: *Eli, Eli, lamma sabbachthani*. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?; *Abba*. Father. The inscription on the Cross was written in Greek, Latin, and Aramaic. The situation in Palestine at the present day, with foreign control, plurality of languages and mixture of races, bears a striking resemblance to the situation in the time of Our Lord.

In order to give any satisfactory account of religious and social conditions in Palestine at the beginning of the Christian era, it is necessary to glance back at the earlier history of the Jews. Conditions in the New Testament period were the result of many changes of fortune, and are difficult to understand without some knowledge of the course of events at an earlier date. Account must be taken of those distinctive factors in the religion and way of life of the Jews which so largely influenced their history. Their religious beliefs and hopes were something quite unique among the races of the ancient world; and the account of their effect on the fortunes of the Jews makes a story without parallel in ancient times.

The contrast between the Jewish and the current pagan view of man's place in the universe has been well expressed in a recent work¹: "In sharp and startling contrast to the view of man's nature and destiny held by the great classical civilization of Greece and Rome was that of the Jews, a primitive, pastoral people who dwelt on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. Faced with the immensity of the material universe, the Hebrew poet might ask:

¹ R.A.L. Smith, *The Catholic Church and Social Order*, pp. 13-15.

*When I consider the Heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*

"Yet in his reply there is a ringing note of confidence and triumph:

'For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.' Psalm viii.

"How explain this astonishing contrast between the deeply pessimistic view of man of the Greeks and Romans, who had risen to dizzy heights of intellectual and material achievement, and that of the despised Jewish people? . . . It would seem at first to be a quite inexplicable paradox. Yet the answer is, in fact, quite simple. Amidst all their misfortunes and reverses the Jewish people had retained their belief in God as Creator and Ruler of the universe, and in man created 'in His own image and likeness.' . . . This tenaciously held belief in God as Creator of the universe and of man caused the Jews to hold a view of nature and of human history which stood in equally glaring contrast to that of the Greeks and the Romans. Nature, far from being hostile, or an illusion, was to them the visible symbol and garment of the Invisible God, while history bore witness to the purification through suffering of God's chosen people. Increasingly the Jews came to cherish a Messianic hope, a belief in the coming of a Saviour who would redeem Israel from their sins and establish a universal dominion of peace and justice . . . there was a situation fraught with all the elements of paradox. On the one hand, the sophisticated, brilliant civilization of the Roman Empire, rich in intellectual and material achievement, yet attaching no ultimate significance to human nature or to human history. On the other hand, the Jewish people, poor, neglected, despised, yet full of the consciousness of their historic mission and of the conformity of man to the divine image."

Before proceeding to sketch the earlier history of the Jews, it may be well to direct attention to those factors in their religion and life, which marked them off from the nations with whom they were brought into contact at various times.

As the author of the passage just quoted has pointed out, the Jewish religion was based on belief in One Supreme God,

Who was not a mere local patron or national divinity, but Creator and Ruler of the whole universe and all its peoples. This fact alone places the Jews in sharp contrast to the pagan and polytheistic races by whom they were surrounded. Despite lapses on the part of individuals or even large numbers of the Jews, the worship of the One Supreme God survived all the vicissitudes of Jewish history.

The Jews were God's chosen people, bound to Him by a special alliance or covenant, and selected to be the bearers of the promise of spiritual blessings for the whole world. The terms of the covenant were embodied in the Mosaic Law, particularly in the Ten Commandments. The Mosaic code, in addition to moral and religious precepts, contained a whole system of civil and liturgical law, which governed practically every aspect of life. Despite defects and imperfections, it was far superior to any contemporary code of law in its insistence on divine sanction for the moral law, and in the high religious and ethical standards which it inculcated.

It is not surprising, then, that the Jews regarded themselves as a theocratic nation, i.e., as owing allegiance to God alone. This concept was somewhat obscured by the introduction of kings, but the essential idea remained, since the king was regarded as the representative of God. It was inevitable that this attitude should lead to trouble when the Jews became subject to foreign dominion, as some could never reconcile their allegiance to God with loyalty and payment of tribute to a foreign ruler. The question addressed to Our Lord by His enemies, "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?" (Matthew c. 22. v. 17), was not, therefore, merely academic. Its cleverness lay in the fact that however Our Lord answered, it seemed inevitable that He would either be in conflict with the Roman authorities or be discredited in the eyes of many Jews.

It was not for their own sake alone that the Jews had been selected as God's chosen people. They were privileged to be the first recipients and guardians of God's promises of salvation for the whole world. This universal spiritual redemption would be achieved by the Messiah or Christ (the Anointed One). He would come at the appointed time and establish God's kingdom on earth. These messianic promises were

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gradually developed and clarified in the course of time by a long line of prophets.

The prophets figure frequently in Jewish history, and it is well to have a clear notion of their office, closely connected as it was with the position of the Jews as chosen people of God and guardians of the messianic promises. Prophets were raised up to act as God's spokesmen to His people. In that capacity they instructed them concerning the true nature of God, emphasizing, as occasion demanded, His supreme dominion as Creator and Lord of the universe, His justice, His mercy, His fidelity to His promises; they reminded the people of their obligations to the One God who had made His covenant with them; they urged repentance for past transgressions of the Law, and warned against renewed transgression. In all this the prophets were concerned with the high dignity and mission of the Jewish nation as trustees of the messianic promises, the nation through which, in the designs of God, messianic salvation would be brought to the whole world—"because salvation is from the Jews" (John c. 4 v. 22). The primary function of the prophets of Israel was not to predict but to teach—to convey a doctrinal or moral message from God to men. Prediction of events was only a secondary function of the prophet, and its purpose was to secure acceptance of the message which the prophet had brought. The people were told that if they accepted and obeyed the prophets' message they would prosper; if, however, they rejected the message, disaster would follow. Unlike the messianic promises, which were unconditional, these "prophecies" were, therefore, conditional, depending for their fulfilment on the attitude adopted towards the prophet's message by those to whom it was addressed.

Another factor of some importance in Jewish history was the geographical position of Palestine. It was the bridge between the great centres of ancient civilization in Asia and Africa, and through it passed the commerce of these two continents. To the south lay Egypt, the mighty empire of the Pharaohs; to the north the territories dominated at different periods by Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece. Whenever any of these powers embarked on a policy of expansion, Palestine immediately became invaluable as a

bridgehead for offensive or defensive purposes. The result was that Palestine frequently became a battle-ground in imperial struggles; and the inhabitants, like many another nation which would have preferred to remain at peace, became involved in wars which were not of their seeking. Even in our own day, Palestine has lost nothing of its significance as a strategic bridgehead.

The following brief outline of Jewish history will show, in some measure, the influence of these various factors on the fortunes of the Jewish people.

The Jews were descendants of Abraham, a native of Ur of the Chaldees, who had received from God the promise that through his posterity all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis c. 12. vv. 1-3). He also received the promise that his descendants would one day occupy Palestine as their permanent home (Genesis c. 15. v. 18). After a temporary sojourn in Palestine his descendants migrated to Egypt, where they settled and remained for centuries and attained a considerable measure of influence and prosperity. But a change of rulers led to a serious deterioration of their position, and they found themselves treated as bondsmen. From this bondage in Egypt they were led forth by their great leader and law-giver, Moses, to occupy the promised land of Palestine. But their departure from Egypt was followed by forty years of wandering in the desert as a penalty for their lack of trust in God. It was at this time that they received the Mosaic Law, the legal code which was to regulate their lives for centuries.

The actual conquest of Palestine was begun under the leadership of Josue, successor to Moses and an extremely capable military and political leader. The date of entry into the Promised Land is uncertain, but it was either the 15th or 13th century B.C.—more probably the latter. The country was not completely subdued and occupied by the Jews immediately. For a long time they had to wage intermittent wars with neighbouring tribes and previous inhabitants of Palestine, particularly the Philistines, inhabitants of the coastal plain, who remained a constant menace until subdued finally by David.

The appointment of Saul as first king of Israel, in the

eleventh century marks the beginning of a new phase. The prophet Samuel, last of the "Judges,"¹ advised against the election of a king, because of the burdens on the people which a monarchy would involve. But in the end he yielded to their demands, and Saul became king. He scored notable victories over the Ammonites, Amalecites and Philistines. But his last battle with the Philistines ended in disastrous defeat for Israel, and cost Saul his own life and that of his son Jonathan. It was then that David composed the famous lament:

The illustrious of Israel are slain upon the mountains,
How are the valiant fallen?
Saul and Jonathan, lovely and comely in life,
Even in death they are not separated:
They were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.
(2 Kings c.1.vv. 18-27).

David, who had been already anointed king by Samuel, soon succeeded in securing recognition as king from all the tribes of Israel. During his reign the Philistines were finally crushed, and the kingdom reached its greatest extent in territory, and also the summit of its power and glory. To his son and successor, Solomon, fell the distinction of erecting the magnificent Temple of Jerusalem; which was the pride of all Israel. But Solomon, whose "heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (3 Kings c. 11. v. 4), in his last years tolerated, and even took part in, idolatrous worship. With his death a period of decline set in, the ten northern tribes breaking away and setting up an independent kingdom with a new capital at Samaria. This political cleavage was due mainly to the failure of Solomon's successor to do anything to meet an appeal that he should lighten the burden of taxation and forced labour which had been imposed in order to carry out the grandiose schemes of the preceding reign.

The northern territory was the stronger in respect of territory and population, but it lacked stability and suffered much from the inroads of the Syrians from the north. In the

¹ "Judges": The name is given to individuals like Gideon, Jephthah and Samson, who won distinction for exploits against the enemies of the chosen people.

ninth century the Assyrians, a people who lived in Mesopotamia, had resumed their policy of expansion towards the west, thereby menacing the independence of all the small states of Syria and Palestine. The next century was one of wars, alliances, submissions and partial deportations of the population, until finally, in 721 B.C., the capital city of Samaria fell to the Assyrians, and the majority of the inhabitants were deported to the regions of the Assyrian empire lying close to the borders of modern Iran. Such mass deportations were a regular feature of imperial policy at the time. The deported tribes gradually lost their identity among their new pagan neighbours—they are sometimes referred to as "the lost tribes of Israel." To replace them in northern Palestine the Assyrians introduced colonists from other parts of their empire, who intermarried with the few remaining Jews. The new-comers, who had brought with them the worship of the deities of their own lands, took over also the worship of the God of the Jews, Yahweh, whom they regarded as the national divinity of this new land. The contempt for the Samaritans which was affected by the Jews of Jerusalem had its origin in this mingling of races and religions, and was further accentuated by later developments.

The southern kingdom, with its capital city of Jerusalem, included the tribe of Judah and part of the tribe of Benjamin. Though lacking the resources of the northern kingdom, this territory had certain other elements which made for stability. It had all the prestige of the dynastic line of David which lasted till the Exile in 586 B.C., and also the great central sanctuary and capital city of Jerusalem. During the century following the partition of Palestine the southern kingdom (Judah) was repeatedly engaged in wars with the northern and also with other neighbouring peoples. Peace was eventually restored by a marriage-alliance which was, however, responsible for the introduction of the worship of pagan deities, with a consequent falling away from the worship of the One God.

From the middle of the eighth century onwards invasion by Assyria became an imminent danger for all the small states in this region which had so far retained their freedom. In an endeavour to meet this threat, there were endless political

discussions with a view to forming a coalition against the common enemy, Assyria. The great prophet Isaiah insisted that the only hope for Judah lay in allegiance to God alone, and in the avoidance of all political entanglements. Despite his warnings that lack of trust in God would entail disastrous consequences, King Ahaz, in the year 735, became an ally of Assyria, in order to defeat the plan of the anti-Assyrian coalition to depose him and place on the throne a creature of their own.

Since the fall of Samaria in 721, Egypt had taken a particular interest in the attitude of the Palestinian states towards Assyria. The expansionist policy of Assyria constituted a menace to the security of Egypt, which her rulers sought to avert by stirring up anti-Assyrian revolts in Palestine. The kingdom of Judah, now following the advice given by Isaiah, kept aloof from these movements until 703, when the reigning king joined a coalition of states which revolted. This led to an Assyrian invasion of Judah, and Jerusalem was saved only by a miracle (4 Kings c. 19. v. 35). Egypt was conquered in the next century, and rulers favourable to Assyria were installed there. The Assyrian empire went down, however, in 612, before the rising power of Babylon; and in 606 the Babylonians entered Jerusalem and deported some of the inhabitants. A revolt led to a further siege and capture of the city in 597, when another section of the population was deported. A further revolt in 586 led to the complete destruction of the city and Temple, and practically the whole of the surviving population was deported to Babylon. Thus began the period of the Exile. In the natural order it seemed as if all the high hopes of the chosen people were blighted and shown to be fallacious. But the future was to put the matter in a totally different light.

The beginning of the Exile is a convenient point from which to cast a glance back over the religious history of the preceding centuries. From the religious point of view the history of the period was a constantly recurring cycle of corruption, chastisement and reformation. The worship of pagan gods had frequently found its way into the life of the chosen people; some of their rulers had actually encouraged it; social and moral evils, the indolence and luxury of the upper

classes and oppression of the poor, etc., had become rife. Against these evils, and also against formalism (the absence of true interior spirit in the worship of God) prophets like Elias and Eliseus, and later, Isaiah and Jeremiah, strove incessantly. Isaiah and Jeremiah, in particular, had sought to instil the lesson that all the material disasters of invasion, etc., were the divine punishment for the people's failure to abide by the terms of their covenant with God. Worship of false gods and moral corruption were the root-causes of their misfortunes, and while these remained it was idle to seek for safety in political alliances. Their misfortunes were simply the fulfilment of the conditional prophecies which had predicted disaster as the inescapable consequence of failure to accept and abide by the teaching of the prophets. These had striven to keep them faithful to the alliance with God, from whom their high spiritual mission to the world derived. But despite all the efforts of the prophets no lasting reform was achieved.

With the final deportation in 586, coming after the transfers of population in 734, 721 and 597, the Hebrews, as a race, ceased to have any importance in Palestine. Some of those left behind emigrated to Egypt, but little is known of their fate or of the subsequent history of those still left in Palestine. Those deported in 586 were settled in compact groups around the great city of Babylon itself. Some of them became so contented in their new surroundings that when Cyrus, the Persian monarch, gave them permission to return to Palestine in 536 they preferred to remain in Babylon. Authority over the exiled community, now that the tribal system was at an end, was vested in a council of elders, in which, at a later date, the High Priest was the predominant figure. Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the Babylonian empire at this time, began to take the place of Hebrew as the spoken tongue of the exiles.

From the religious point of view, the Exile was a period of purification. The prophets compared it to the furnace which purifies, purging out impurities and leaving only the tested metal. A certain section of the Jews concluded that all their misfortunes were due to the superiority of the gods of Assyria and Babylon to the God of the Jews, and, attracted

by the splendid ceremonial which surrounded the worship of these deities in Babylon, went over to idolatry.

But there was a faithful section which not only held on to the Law, but became more devoted than ever to it. For these, the Exile was a period of reflection in which they came to realize clearly that their misfortunes were the fulfilment to the letter of what Isaiah and Jeremiah had foretold, i.e., that their neglect of the Mosaic Law would bring precisely the calamity of exile upon the nation. It was to this purified remnant of the nation that the prophets looked as the nucleus of the new nation which would carry out the great mission of the Jews—to bring the light of messianic salvation to the gentiles. It was quite natural in the circumstances that a new interest was taken in the Mosaic Law, an interest which was responsible for the rise of a new class, the Scribes, whose task was the exposition of the Law. The Scribes attained great influence with the people, and figure frequently in the Gospels as opponents of Our Lord. The Synagogue also, a characteristic institution of later Judaism, had its origin in the period of the Exile. It began with informal meetings in which a ritual of prayer and readings from the Old Testament was gradually evolved. This supplied for the absence of religious services which had ceased with the destruction of the Temple.

The empire of Babylon collapsed, in 539 B.C., before the power of the Persians under Cyrus, a conqueror of a type new to the people of the Orient. His victories were not followed by atrocities or mass-deportations, and his rule was characterized by a liberality and humanity which were new to subject peoples. The biblical account of his attitude to the Jews is in harmony with all that history and legend record concerning him. Shortly after his accession to power, he issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Palestine, to rebuild the Temple, and to bring back the sacred vessels which had been carried off in 586. Thus began, in 536, the return from exile, which fifty years before had seemed an empty hope. The story of the gradual repatriation of the Jews, of the difficulties encountered, of the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of Jerusalem, of the reforms carried out in order to prevent a repetition of their former disasters and,

in particular, the story of a man called Nehenias who did so much for the returned Jews—all this makes absorbing material for reading and reflection. Here, however, we can do no more than summarize the points of greatest importance.

The returned exiles formed a closely-knit community under the immediate direction of a council of elders, subject to the general over-lordship of the Persian Satrap or Governor. They were extremely devoted to the Law of Moses, and tended to a policy of religious and national isolationism, cutting themselves off from contacts with other nations. This was an intelligible development in the post-exilic period, but it reached extremes which did not accord with the spirit of the teaching of the great prophets. This exclusiveness was responsible for the view of Judaism which came to be accepted among the pagan nations, and which is expressed with his usual conciseness by the Roman historian Tacitus ("towards all other peoples they are inspired by bitter hatred").

Not until the conquests of Alexander the Great, who defeated the Persians at the Battle of the Issus in 333, do we find the Jews entering again into the full light of world history. They submitted to Alexander and were allowed to live according to their own Law. Many of them served in the army of Alexander, and when the great city of Alexandria was founded, a Jewish colony established itself there and grew to great power and influence.

Part of the plan of Alexander for a new world-order was to introduce Greek culture everywhere, and with it the Greek language and religion. This Hellenistic movement, as it is usually called, had very important consequences for Judaism. Greek cities were founded in Palestine, and the Jews were encouraged to found colonies abroad. These colonies were established all round the Mediterranean in the course of time, and maintained full allegiance to the Jewish race. St. Paul, born in Tarsus of Cilicia in Asia Minor, was one of those who belonged to this Diaspora or Dispersion of the Jews. Both through the Greeks resident in Palestine, and through their own colonies abroad, the Jews were brought into contact with Greek culture. This influence is manifest in the later books of the Old Testament, and in the rise of a Jewish school at

Alexandria, which sought to combine the revelation of the Old Testament with the philosophy of the Greeks.

Serious elements of conflict, however, were present in this situation. We have already mentioned the growth of a spirit of exclusiveness and isolationism among the Jews in the post-exilic period, a tendency to become more Jewish than ever before. Now, however, a contrary tendency towards assimilation with Greek paganism began to manifest itself. A certain section, particularly the rich and educated, in their eagerness for Greek culture, showed themselves willing to adopt Greek religious ideas also. But these were opposed by a strong party, supported by the masses of the people, who prized the Mosaic Law and their position as chosen people more than anything that Greece could offer, however seductive the guise in which it was presented. In Our Lord's time these rival parties were represented by the Sadducees (Hellenists) and the Pharisees (Nationalists) respectively.

It was not till about the year 175, when Palestine was under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria, that the antagonism between these two sections broke out into open conflict. The trouble began with rivalries concerning the succession to the High-Priesthood and, finally, a revolt against Antiochus broke out in Palestine. Antiochus attacked, captured and sacked Jerusalem, and decided to end the troubles between Nationalists and Hellenists once and for all by the eradication of Judaism, and the complete hellenization of the people. The Sabbath, circumcision and the ritual services of the Temple were abolished; the sacred books were burned and a statue of Zeus set up in the Temple. As proof of their acceptance of this new order, Jews were required to offer incense at pagan shrines and to eat the flesh of swine. The penalty for refusal was death. Large numbers of the Jews apostatized. But a chosen few determined to resist, and under the leadership of Mathathias and his five sons, commonly known as the Maccabees, raised the standard of revolt. The account of their achievement against the might of Syria makes one of the most amazing stories of recorded history. Their struggle was crowned with success in 163, when religious liberty was restored. Then began a struggle for political liberty, which attained success under John Hyrcanus (135-104), who extended

his sovereignty over all Palestine. Though he had risen to power through the support of the Nationalists, he abandoned them in favour of the Hellenists as soon as he got control. His immediate successor reigned only one year, and was followed by Alexander, whose reign was disturbed by constant wars, external and internal. After the death of Alexander the kingdom was ruled by his widow, Alexandra, until her death in 67.

Then began the domestic quarrels concerning the succession to the throne, which led to the intervention of Rome in the year 63. Hyrcanus II, the eldest son of Alexander, was considered the natural successor. He had held the office of High Priest during the lifetime of his mother, and was supported by the Pharisees. His brother, Aristobulus, however, who was supported by the Hellenists, determined to seize power for himself. Civil war broke out upon the death of Alexandra, but a temporary cessation of hostilities was secured by an agreement whereby Aristobulus became King and High Priest, while Hyrcanus, though possessing no authority, was given large revenues. This, however, was far from being the end of the dispute. Hyrcanus, accompanied by Antipater, the governor of Idumaea, who supported his cause, fled to Aretas, king of the Nabateans, and persuaded him to invade Judaea. Aristobulus was defeated in battle, and fled to Jerusalem, where he was besieged.

At this time the Roman legions, with Pompey as commander in chief, were engaged on the conquest of Asia. A force led by Scaurus, one of Pompey's subordinates, had reached Damascus in Syria, and both parties to the Palestinian conflict appealed to Scaurus for assistance. Scaurus took the side of Aristobulus and ordered Aretas to leave Palestine. When Pompey came on the scene shortly afterwards both parties again sent delegations, and a third delegation came before him with the request that the monarchy be abolished. Pompey deferred his decision until he should return from the campaign against the Nabateans. Meanwhile, he ordered all concerned to maintain peace. But Aristobulus disregarded this order, with the result that Pompey immediately invaded Judaea and in the year 63 captured Jerusalem which was held by the forces of Aristobulus. Hyrcanus was appointed High Priest

without the title of King. His jurisdiction was limited to Judaea alone, and the rest of Palestine became subject to the Roman governor of the province of Syria. Aristobulus was taken prisoner and carried off to Rome where he figured in the triumphal procession of Pompey. It was thus that Palestine became a subject territory of the Roman empire.

For the next twenty years, Antipater, who had supported Hyrcanus against Aristobulus, exercised considerable influence in Palestinian affairs owing to the weakness of Hyrcanus. In the year 47 Julius Caesar restored the whole of Palestine to the jurisdiction of Hyrcanus, who was given the title of Ethnarch. At the same time Antipater was given the privilege of Roman citizenship and appointed Procurator of Judaea. He was thus placed in an even stronger position to pursue his primary aim of promoting his own interests and those of his family. The post of Governor of Galilee was secured for his son Herod, later known as Herod the Great. During the confused period following the Parthian invasion, Herod made his way to Rome where he won the support of Anthony and Octavian, and was proclaimed king of Palestine in 40. Three years of war against Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus, were brought to a victorious conclusion with the capture of Jerusalem in 37. Herod's father was an Idumæan, and his mother was the daughter of an Arabian prince. Thus the sceptre passed from Judah finally, as the time for the coming of the long-expected Messiah drew near.

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