

HOW TO REACH THE JEW FOR CHRIST

by

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CHAPTER NINE

THE SYRIAN AND ROMAN ERAS

This lesson will cover the period from the revolt under Syria until the birth of our Lord in 4 B.C. Palestine at that time was under the control of Rome. We are still in the four silent centuries between Malachi and the New Testament. We will study points C and D mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 8.

C. The Syrian, or Maccabean, Period

D. The Roman Period

C. THE SYRIAN, OR MACCABEAN, PERIOD

In the midst of their persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes the Lord once more raised up deliverers. About the year 168 B.C., a blow for liberty was struck by an aged priest named Mattathias, at Modein, in the hill country of Judea.

There was no definite plan of revolt or even a preliminary organization.

Mattathias refused to sacrifice to the heathen gods; when a renegade stepped forward in order to offer sacrifice, Mattathias slew him and the Syrian officer, and fled to the mountains with his family. Other brave Jews joined him and resistance grew rapidly into revolution.

Mattathias died early in the struggle and was succeeded by Judas, surnamed Maccabeus, "the Hammer," who won victory after victory, and in the year 166 B.C. captured the city of Jerusalem. He reconsecrated the Temple and renewed the sacred rites which had ceased for several years.

The anniversary of this event has been kept by the Jews in the Chanukah celebration, the Feast of the Dedication (John 10:22). Judas Maccabeus stands in Jewish annals as one of their great heroes, together with Joshua, Gideon and David.

Judas died in battle in 161 B.C. He was succeeded by his brother Jonathan, who secured practical independence for Palestine.

About 100 B.C., there appeared two great schools of thought known as the Pharisees and Sadducees. The leaven of these two principles had long been at work and can be traced back to Ezra.

- The Pharisees sought for an absolute separation from the Gentile world, and for a strict interpretation of Mosaic Law.
- The Sadducees, on the other hand, were liberal in their views and lax in their lives.

The Pharisees were popular with the people, but the Sadducees were popular with the foreign governments and eventually became the ruling class of Palestine.

During the first century B.C., a new power, the nation of Rome, was rising. Pompey had conquered the last king in the line of Antiochus and had annexed Syria to the Roman Empire. At this time, two brothers, Hyrcanus and Aristobolus, were fighting for the Jewish throne and each appealed to Pompey for assistance. Pompey decided for Hyrcanus, and Aristobolus revolted, holding Jerusalem against a siege by the Roman army.

Finally, Jerusalem fell and Pompey insisted upon entering the Temple and the Holy of Holies. From that time on Pompey's star began to decline before the rising power of his rival—Julius Caesar.

The Romans found it necessary to continue an army in Palestine. They were aided by Antipater, an Edomite by birth, who was minister to Hyrcanus, and who gradually usurped his power. The descendants of the Maccabeans had now become degenerate weaklings, while Herod, the son of Antipater, plotted for their overthrow. Herod married Marianne, the daughter of Hyrcanus, and through her maintained that he represented the Maccabean line. Finally in 40 B.C. Herod asked the Roman Senate to proclaim him king of Palestine. Thus Palestine came under the rule of a man who was not kingly, nor priestly, nor Jewish; but a member of the hated Edomite race.

D. THE ROMAN PERIOD

We begin the Roman period in the year 40 B.C., because at that time Herod the Great received his kingdom by vote of the Roman Senate, which was then, for the first time, recognized as having official authority over Palestine. Herod was personally one of the worst of men, but as a statesman he was of the highest order, keeping in favor with Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Augustus.

But Herod was hated by the Jews as a tyrant, a foreigner, and a friend to the Romans. They endured his rule only by compulsion. In order to gain the favor of the people, Herod began to rebuild the Temple on a magnificent scale. The Temple had become sorely in need of repairs, but Herod did not dare tear it down all at once. He made vast preparations, gathered the materials, and then took down the walls only as fast as he could replace them, so that not for one day were the services of the Temple interrupted. As a result, the Temple was not completed until long after Herod had died.

Late in the reign of Herod, in the year 4 B.C., a child was born in Bethlehem to an empire more vast and more enduring than that of any earthly monarchy. With the coming of Christ into the world the centuries of silence were at an end, for God now spoke to men, through His Son.

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THIS LESSON APPLIED TO JEWISH MISSIONS

The final victory of the Maccabean armies over all the hosts of Syria was won, according to the book of the Maccabees “**on the five and twentieth day of the month called Kislev** [the month which corresponds usually to our month of December]. There was great gladness among the people as they offered sacrifices according to the Law on the new altar, praising God because the reproach of the heathen was put away.

Some scholars believe that our Christmas with its date of December 25 carries us back to this Feast of the Dedication. We quote from Kligermans *Feasts and Fasts of Israel*:

There exists a stable basis for connecting Jewish feasts and Christian festivals. It is found both in the aspect of dedication and in that of light. Christ is the true Temple, and His Incarnation is the real Temple dedication. Moreover, out from Him has shined “**a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.**” It is for us who walk in His light to use every effort to lead Israel to rejoice, not in any flickering lights of man-made origin, but in the steadfast eternal radiance of the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

EXAMINATION

1. Who were the Maccabees? Describe their exploits.
2. Describe the beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
3. In what way does Pompey enter into Jewish history?
4. How did Rome become ruler over Palestine?
5. Describe the character of Herod the Great.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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