

*In the
Fullness
of Time*

Louise Buffington

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Dedicated

to the memory of
my daughter

Sunny

She is a poem
Written down in earth
And a work of art,
Created by Divine hands —
Now framed in memory
For all time . . .

About the Author

Louise Scott Buffington was born into a farming community at Wicksburg, Alabama. She graduated from Alabama Christian College in Montgomery as salutatorian, and later earned a degree in English from Harding College in Searcy, Arkansas. She taught school several years prior to becoming librarian in her home town. She is a writer of short stories and poetry, and has had many of her works published, including a hard-cover book of poems, **Armchair Treasures**.

Louise has three granddaughters, children of her only child, Sunny, who is now deceased, and to whose memory this book is dedicated.

Louise recently retired from the library after 25 years, but not from what has been the most important activity in her life — that of researching the Bible on a daily basis, since her teen-age years. Each morning, until noon, is spent in that fascinating and engrossing study. It is her much-used copy of God's word that is shown on the front cover. Louise is a member of the church of Christ.



Introduction

This material was originally written as an assignment for a course I took under Dr. Rex A Turner, Sr., on The Inter-Testament Period. The reason for its final publication is found in the following comments, made by brother Turner to another fellow Christian. This brother, thinking his words were such a great compliment, handed the letter on to me. And this is what brother Turner had written:

“I expected Louise to present a good paper, but I was unprepared for the work which she did. It was professional. She took the historical information and made it read like a novel. I would like to see her treatment in print. I think it would be something that the rank and file of brethren would read as a matter of interest and learn at the same time a lot of historical information that belongs between the Old and New Testaments.” Brother Turner wrote personally to me later, saying he had lost his copy of my materials and asking for another, “Because,” he said, “I want to use it as supplementary reading in my Inter-Testament class.”

Sister Opal Turner also read my paper and stated on a Christmas card to me that “your work would be ideal for the Sound Doctrine Quarterly.”

I appreciated their comments. These two people have been such a great influence in my life down through the years, and in the lives of many other students who were for-

tunate enough to learn from their teaching and guidance. And though they both have gone on to “that other, and better realm”, that influence is still in action.

I hope that my book will help explain the forces that shaped the world in the centuries preceeding the birth of Christ, and that the reader will gain a much deeper understanding of the world to which Christ came “in the fullness of time”.

Louise Buffington
Jay, Florida
August 7, 2003

Maltreatment

I breathe
 near to God,
And pray
 I won't forget
The trip
 made to the cross
In my stead
 and for my debt.

Louise Buffington

Publisher's Statement

Sister Louise Buffington's book, **In the Fullness of Time**, is the result of a course she took (**The Inter-Testament Period**) under the direction of brother Rex Turner. She added to the course her own studies of the events of the centuries leading up to that silent era. She has brought together — in short form, but creating a sweeping panorama of history — an overview of the great world empires prophesied by Daniel. The Inter-Testament period is covered, relative to the secular world surrounding Judea at that time. And sister Buffington concludes with the resounding message from God at the end of that period of silence: the announcement by the angel Gabriel that, in the fullness of time, the long-awaited Messiah was about to be born.

We who live after the Inter-Testament period know that God's focus since that time has been on the empire of Christ, the heavenly kingdom of which there shall be no end.

I commend sister Buffington's book to you.

J.C. Choate

Winona, MS 38967

February 6, 2004

Table of Contents

1	<i>Assyria, the Rod of God's Anger.....</i>	<i>1</i>
2	<i>The Exile to Babylon</i>	<i>8</i>
3	<i>Judah's Return</i>	<i>21</i>
4	<i>The Jews Still in Persia</i>	<i>29</i>
5	<i>Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi</i>	<i>33</i>
6	<i>The Sea of Turmoil around Judah</i>	<i>38</i>
7	<i>The Maccabees</i>	<i>46</i>
8	<i>Rome — The Fourth World Empire</i>	<i>49</i>
9	<i>Judea Under Rome</i>	<i>52</i>
10	<i>The Dawning of the Day of the Lord</i>	<i>55</i>

*In the
Fullness
of Time*

When Time Shall Be No More

When time erases
All that was, and is,
And would have been,
From off this earth —
When there will be
No more pain,
No more death
And no more birth —
When we can hear no more
The lovely sounds of bird song —
Can do no more good,
No more wrong —
When we can feel no more
The warmth that comes
From the glowing sun,
Then, eternity
Will have begun . . .

Louise Buffington

Chapter One

Assyria, the Rod of God's Anger

Somewhere about 425 B.C., when the last historical books, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther had been written and the last prophetic book by Malachi had ended, the four hundred-year gap between the testaments begins. It is sometimes known as the silent centuries, because during this chasm no inspired writer, historian, or prophet appeared on the scene.

Throughout the pages of the Old Testament it was prophesied that Jesus Christ would come. This would eventually happen at the end of the four hundred years, at which time the angels would announce His birth. Many historic changes took place within this period, and as the years rolled by, God was carrying on His providential work. He was preparing the history of the world and the homeland of the Jews for that far-off future date when the baby Jesus would appear. Empire followed empire as history marched forward to that appointed time.

A new world language — Greek — came into being through the spread of the empire of Alexander the Great. The lives of the Jewish people changed, socially and economically. And after all of these drastic changes were brought about, God's eternal purpose would be realized in the fullness of the times.

But before these things took place, the Old Babylonian Empire, located in the southern part of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, ruled as the dominating power of the world (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.). Hammurabi, its most famous king



Hammurabi, ruler of Babylon



Atop the stela on which "The Code of Hammurabi" is engraved in cuneiform characters is this carving which is representative of Hammurabi receiving the code of laws from the sun god.



The famous stela on which the Code of Hammurabi was written in cuneiform.

(1792-1750), lifted it to its greatness. Under his reign, the whole country was unified. Some historians believe that he was a contemporary of Abraham, and the most renowned of the early Babylonian kings. His Code of Laws is one of the most famous of ancient documents.

Toward the latter half of the era of the Old Babylonian Empire, the small nation of Israel had come into existence with the return of Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt. First governed by God through prophets and judges, the Israelites had eventually asked for a king, like the nations around them. Saul was followed by David, the "sweet singer of Israel." His son, Solomon, ruled after David's death.

Though both of these men had done much to stabilize and strengthen the nation of Israel,

Solomon's reign had deteriorated in the latter years. He compromised his allegiance to the one God of heaven, cor-

rupted by the influence of his 300 wives, many of whom had come from neighboring ruling families and had brought with them their pagan gods. Solomon had lived and built extravagantly, taxing the people heavily to pay for his expenditures. When he died, about nine hundred years before Christ, the stage was set for great unrest, particularly among the northern tribes.

Ultimately, the nation was divided into two parts: Israel, the Northern Kingdom, included the ten tribes under Jeroboam. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, consisted of the remaining two tribes under Solomon's son, Rehoboam. The immediate cause of the breaking apart of the united kingdom was the foolish position held by Rehoboam when the people begged for relief from Solomon's heavy taxation. In this way, Solomon himself had sown the early seeds for division. When Rehoboam began his reign, the Northern ten tribes rebelled, bringing about the era of the "Divided Kingdom."

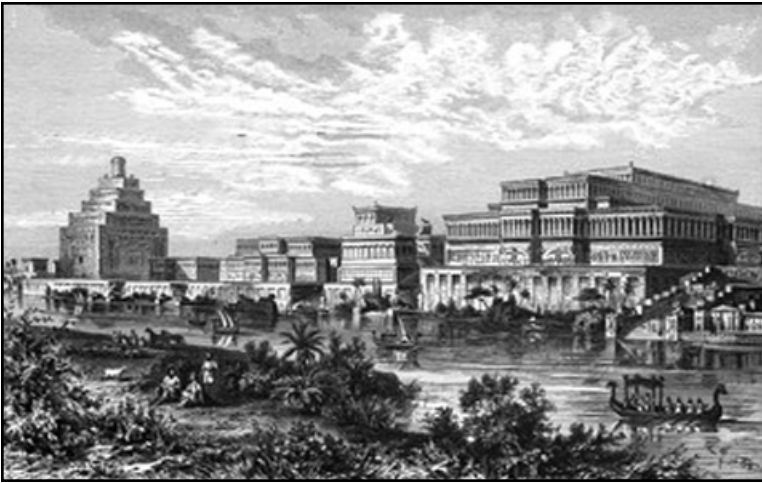
About this same time, the Assyrians, living in the northern part of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, began to move militarily. They were a nation of warriors, and for upwards of a thousand years there had been a struggle between them and the Old Babylonians. But around 1000 B.C. the Assyrian army swept down from their mountainous country into Babylonia and began to bring it under their control. They also subdued many other surrounding countries and made them a part of their growing empire which lasted from 911 to 609 B.C.

In 722 B.C., the Assyrian armies had taken the northern tribes of Israel into captivity and had completely scattered and destroyed them as a nation. The policy of the Assyrians was to deport conquered peoples to other lands under their control, thus overcoming their sense of nationalism and bringing them more easily under their subjection. The Assyrians seemed to be the worst scourge in that part of the world at that time. It was for that reason, when the northern tribes turned to the worship of the pagan gods around them, that God had prophesied through Isaiah that He would use the “rod” of Assyria to punish Israel for her abandonment of Him:

“Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, And against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, To seize the spoil, to take the prey, And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

“Yet he does not mean so, Nor does his heart think so; But it is in his heart to destroy, And cut off not a few nations. For he says, ‘Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?’

“As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, As I have done to Samaria and her idols, Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?” (Isaiah 10:5-11).



An artist's rendering of ancient Ninevah in Assyria.

But the evil and cruelty of Assyria's rulers could not be tolerated by God longer than was necessary to correct Israel's wrong. The conclusion of Isaiah's prophecy promised Assyria's downfall as punishment for her arrogance:

"Therefore it shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks'" (Isaiah 10:12).

In 612, Ninevah was destroyed by Nebopolassar, in a coalition of Medes and Chaldeans.

The Exile to Babylon

The Neo-Babylonian Empire came into power in 625 B.C. under the leadership of the Chaldean, Nebopolassar, as God had foretold through Habakkuk:

“Look among the nations and watch — Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the [Babylonians] Chaldeans...”
(Habakkuk 1:5,6).

After a thousand years of suppression by Assyria, this new Babylonian empire was to be even greater than the first. In a short time it had broken the power of Assyria and, in its sweep westward, conquered Egypt and other near-by countries, and destroyed Judah, taking her people into captivity as had been repeatedly foretold by the prophets.

“Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears of it, his ears will tingle. Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have

filled this place with the blood of the innocents (they have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind)... ” (Jeremiah 19:3-5).

In the following chapter, Jeremiah (20:4,5) spoke graphically of the punishment that would be brought on Judah for her sins, through the invading Babylonians:

“I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword. Moreover I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its precious things; all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies, who will plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon.”

Nebuchadnezzar II, son of Nebopolassar, became Babylon's greatest king. He was a strong leader in times of war, and a wise one in peacetime. Under his leadership the empire became powerful. Babylon was the capital city. It was made larger, stronger, and more beautiful than ever before. The palace he built to please his wife, a Mede, was constructed on top of a mound of earth more than a hundred feet high. Terraces and platforms were cut into the sides of the mound, and shrubs, vines, and flowers planted there. These hanging gardens became known as one of the seven wonders of the world. Besides these gardens, and his wife's palace, he built his own new palace in fifteen days. Temples were erected to the gods, and the great walls of the



One of the many depictions by artists of "The Hanging Gardens of Babylon", Nebuchadnezzar II's palace which came to be recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Also shown is a temple ziggurat, of the type dedicated to the "god", Marduk.

city were made with a moat all around them for protection against invasion. The Euphrates was lined with brick, and a strong fortress built.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king God used to carry out the prediction of the prophets concerning the taking of Judah into Babylonian captivity. He marched against Jerusalem, conquered Jehoiakim, taking part of the treasures of the temple, and the seed royal, to Babylon.

He returned to Jerusalem soon after, and this time he took the rest of the treasures, King Jehoiachin, and about ten thousand of the princes, officers, and chief men, and carried them away also. After deposing Jehoiachin, he made Zedekiah king in his place. It was Zedekiah's revolt that led to another siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. This time he burned Jerusalem, broke down the city walls, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, Judah's last king, and took him, bound in chains, to Babylon.

Among the captives, also, was a young man named Daniel. Because of his wisdom and integrity, he was made chief governor of that city, and at times filled other high offices in both the Babylonian and Persian Empires, since his life extended into several years of the Persian rule. Daniel had been brought to Babylon at the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and was among the first group of exiles. His captivity covered the entire seventy years that Judah was in Babylon, so Daniel was able to see all the development and world-wide power of that country under King Nebuchadnezzar. He even saw the releasing of the exiles.



Daniel's rise to prominence under Nebuchadnezzar began when He explained the meaning of the vision God gave the king concerning the four world empires (Daniel 2).

It was during these years that Daniel withstood temptations and challenges to his faith — in the court, when his friends were thrown into the furnace, and later under Darius' reign when he himself was put in the lions' den — in which God manifested His presence and power before the people. He saw also in his Messianic visions the four world empires — The Babylonian, in which he was living at the time; the Medo-Persian, with Cyrus as the king who would overthrow Babylon; the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great; and the Roman Empire.

The Babylonian Empire came within the time of prophecies and God's overt intervention in that part of the world scene. It was from the rising of this empire that the

times of the Gentiles are dated. The Persian Empire extended about 100 years into the “silent era” —the four hundred years between the end of the Old Testament revelation and the coming of Christ, when there was no spoken word from God. It was replaced by Alexander’s Grecian Empire which continued until its subjugation by the Romans about 100 B.C. The Roman Empire flourished throughout the remainder of the Inter-Testament period and until the fifth century A.D.

But through the vision God gave to him, Daniel also saw a fifth empire — the one that would last forever, known as that Great Spiritual Empire of Christ.

Idolatry had brought the two tribes of Judah into Babylonian captivity. God used the seventy years of exile as a crucible in which the people were refined and molded toward the coming of the promised Messiah. Returning to the promised land at the end of that time, they were never again plagued with overt idolatry.

The synagogue came into existence in the days of the captivity and became the ruling institution of Judaism after the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem. Wherever Jewish people gathered, there was the necessity for a place to carry on their religious services. Regular worship now took place in the synagogues, since there was no temple. Only the men took an active part, while the women and children were separated in a gallery-type platform. In charge was the ruler of the synagogue. The service followed a prescribed pattern, with prayers and readings from the law and prophets.

But the synagogue was more than a place of worship where the Old Testament Scriptures were studied. It served as a school, the community center, and the center of civil government. Its elders were the local authorities and guardians of public morals. It might be called the intellectual and social center of Jewish life.

After the return of the people from Babylonian captivity, the synagogues were continued both in the homeland and in centers in other lands wherever there were Jews. One or more sprang up in all the larger towns, and even after the temple was rebuilt, synagogues still flourished throughout Israel.

It was during this time that a class of men called scribes became increasingly important. Their work was to study, interpret, and copy the Scriptures by the most exacting of rules. Since they were familiar with the law, they were also known as lawyers and were acknowledged as authorities in spiritual matters. If one was a scribe before the days of printing, he had an important profession. There were many during the period of exile, at the time of the return of the captives to Israel, and even during the Maccabean years of the "silent era". Their work of teaching and unifying the people was very effective. Ezra, who returned to Judah with the second wave of Israelites in 458 B.C. is probably the most famous of the scribes. Contemporary with Nehemiah, Ezra was appointed governor of Judah.

The captivity also brought about the dispersion of the Jews to many parts of the world. God had warned their fathers through Moses, in Deuteronomy 28:25-28, that dis-

persion among other nations would be their lot if they departed from the the covenant they had made with Him:



Very strict and involved procedures were used by scribes in their copying of the cannon of Old Testament scripture.

Then people would say: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they did not know and that He had not given to them. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and

in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'

Even more specifically, God had warned through Jeremiah,

"I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword. Moreover I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its precious things; all the treasures of the kings of Judah I



Jews, who had accepted paganism to the point of burning their children as sacrifices to idols, saw their loved ones brutally killed, enslaved, and taken into foreign lands by their conquerors.

will give into the hand of their enemies, who will plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon” (Jeremiah 20:4,5).

These prophecies were largely fulfilled in the two captivities, by Assyria and by Babylonia, but there were also oppressions by other neighboring states which helped to scatter the Israelites.

Many who had been taken into exile, and their descendants who had been born there, chose to stay in the places of their captivity. It is estimated that perhaps two million were removed from the promised land, but only about 50,000 returned with Zerubbabel. The majority were eventually scattered all over the world. In this, perhaps providential, way the dispersion influenced the spread of the gospel because the apostles and preachers followed the Jews “into all the world.”

After Nebuchadnezzar’s death, the Babylonian Empire began to disintegrate. Again, as God had foretold through Isaiah more than 200 years before the events:

“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation...” (Isaiah 13:19,20).

The kings who followed Nebuchadnezzar were neither skillful warriors nor good rulers. One after another the countries which he had conquered revolted and became free.

Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, and was the last king of Babylon. On the occasion of a great feast to their gods, he had sent for the vessels of silver and gold which had been stolen from the temple in Jerusalem, the sacred vessels sanctified exclusively for use in the worship of God. The party of men, in their wild revelry, were drinking toasts from these vessels to their gods when a mysterious hand began to write on the wall.

In great fear, Belshazzar called for the astrologers and wise men, but they could tell him nothing. Finally the queen remembered Daniel, now an old man who had been in Babylon and even in the king's court for much of seventy years. She said, "*There is a man in your kingdom in*



In the midst of the drunken revelry of Belshazzar and his court, a hand appeared on the wall of the palace, writing words of doom: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father [or ancestor], light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him...now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation” (Daniel 5:10-12).

Daniel became God’s voice to the king, stating that it was because of his own contempt for the God of heaven that the pronouncement against him had been made:

“The God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of each word.

“MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

“TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;

“PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

That very night Cyrus took the city of Babylon. Ancient historians say that they diverted the course of the Euphrates River and entered from their encampment along the dry river bed while the feast was going on. And so it was that the first world empire, named and prophesied by God through Daniel, came to an end.

Chapter Three

Judah's Return

After the overthrow of Babylon in 539 B.C., Cyrus made Darius the Mede the vassal king of the realm which



It was during the reign of Darius the Mede (appointed by Cyrus, according to Daniel 5:31), that Darius was entrapped by jealous ministers to write the foolish decree that no request could be made of any one but himself. Daniel, now an old man, ignored the law and suffered the penalty of being put into the den of lions (Daniel 6).

included Palestine and Babylon, and Persia became the second of the world empires identified by Daniel. The Persian kings were more merciful than were the Assyrian and Babylonian kings in that under Persia the captives were returned to their homelands if they chose to go.

It had been prophesied of Cyrus by Isaiah, 200 years earlier, that he would be raised up by God to return His people to the land He had given them:

“Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” And to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.” ‘

“Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held — To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” And to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid” (Isaiah 44:28-45:1-3).

One of Cyrus’ first acts after he had subdued Babylon was to allow the Jews to return to their own country by the proclamation which he issued.



An artist's rendering of the scene as Cyrus returned the temple vessels to the Jews who were preparing to return to Jerusalem.

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2,3).

Cyrus even restored the sacred vessels of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had carried to Babylon. A large number of

the Jews responded to this edict, and went back to Jerusalem, but many remained in Babylon.

Since Isaiah had named Cyrus as the divine means by which the Jews would be released from the Babylonian exile, and this prophecy must surely have been called to Cyrus' attention, it is no wonder that he had such great respect for the God of the Jews.

Zerubbabel led the first expedition homeward from the Babylonian captivity. His company was rather large, consisting of about fifty thousand altogether. The long trip lasted four months, covering the distance of nine hundred miles by caravan trails in order to reach Palestine. Only the Southern Kingdom was restored — the Northern having been dispersed and destroyed by the Assyrians. From this time it is thought that the people first became known as "Jews", which signified the inhabitants of Judah.

The return of the captives was a sort of rebirth of the Jewish nation. During the long years of exile, there were times when the people thought their sovereignty was coming to an end from which it would never be resurrected. The prophets tried to keep before them God's promise that the exile would end, that it was only an interruption, and they were still His chosen ones. Now they were going home at last, having been purified from idolatry, and it would be through this people that the Messiah would come — a fact that should never be forgotten.

The first year after the Jews had returned home, an altar was constructed. A man named Jeshua, sometimes known

as Joshua, labored on the altar, and urged the people to build the second temple. He was a priest who had traveled back with the company under Zerubbabel. He took a leading part himself in rebuilding the temple, and in the whole restoration process. He was a man of honor, courage, and patriotism. Another important task he undertook was to restore the daily sacrifices on the new altar he had made. The old one had not been used for fifty years.

Though the foundation was laid, and work on the temple began in 535 B.C., opposition delayed further construction for about sixteen years. The Samaritans, descendants of the surviving Israelites of the Northern Kingdom who inter-married with the newly imported alien population after the fall of Samaria, came to see what was being done. Not only were these people a mixed race, they were wrapped up in idolatry. Worse still, they were associating it with the worship of the one true God. So the Jews refused their help, and they were wise in doing so. Surely they recognized the danger of falling back under the scourge of idolatry.

Among the Jews who had returned to Judah were two of the minor prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. They aroused the people, and encouraged them to start up the work again on the temple. Once more, enemies tried to stop the construction. They demanded that a search be made in the royal library for the decree which authorized the rebuilding of the temple:

“Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha, in the palace that



The great relief carving of Darius the Great on the sheer rock wall at Behistun, in the western edge of what is now Iran.

is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus:

“In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: ‘Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king’s treasury.

“Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of God’—

“Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your com-

panions the Persians who are beyond the River, keep yourselves far from there. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site.

“Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king’s expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. And whatever they need — young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem — let it be given them day by day without fail, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

“Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I, Darius, issue a decree; let it be done diligently” (Ezra 6:1-12).

So the Jewish leaders continued with their efforts to bring the building to its completion, realizing that the temple was a symbol of the presence of God. Its sacrifices and services would bring the people back into right relation with

Him. It was necessary that the Jews' religious institutions be re-established, and central to these was this temple.

At last the day came when it was finally finished, as had been commanded by God, and decreed by Cyrus and Darius. The laying of its foundation had been a joyful occasion for the Jews, but with the completion of the building itself, there was even more joy. However, many of the older people who had seen the first temple had wept when the foundation of this second house was laid. They realized that there was no comparison between this new place of worship and the one Solomon had built. The important fact remained, though, that both buildings had the same significance in the service of God.

The Jewish leaders, who had set about restoring the city and the temple, were also assembling the inspired writings of the prophets, and others, books that now comprise a part of the Old Testament history. As the service in the temple developed, there came into use the wonderful collection of religious songs known as the Book of Psalms. Many of these were written during the Persian period. From that time forward, Israel's greatness would lie in her heritage of Scripture and in the fact that the founder and teacher of Christianity was a Jew.

The Jews Still in Persia

Xerxes I, also known as Ahaseurus, became king of Persia, following his father Darius Hystaspis (Darius the Great) on the throne. He was also the grandson of Cyrus, through his mother, Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus. He ruled from 485-465 B.C. and was one of the most renowned kings in the ancient world. God used him providentially to spare the Jewish people from the destruction of their race, as the story unfolded.

A great feast was held in Xerxes' honor, who was making ready for his celebrated journey to Greece to complete the victory denied his father by an untimely death. So Xerxes gathered an army of two million men and a fleet of twelve hundred ships, according to Herodotus the historian (**Histories VII**, 59-100), and went to Greece by both land and sea. Even with such an army, the Persians were defeated. Xerxes returned to Persia, leaving part of his forces in Greece to continue the war under the command of Mardonius, one of his generals. In a later battle, Mardonius was killed and Persia's war with Greece ended.

Xerxes — raised in the court as a spoiled and self-centered person — was a fickle, cruel, and immoral tyrant. We see these characteristics in the Biblical account of his life

(in the book of Esther), when he commanded Vashti, his queen, to parade her beauty before the nobles and princes of the land. At her refusal, his wise men advised him to choose another queen. On this occasion, God overruled his choice, providentially, to bring Esther to the throne.

By the king's decree, the most beautiful young virgins throughout the land were brought to Shushan for consideration as the new queen. Esther, an orphan reared by her cousin, Mordecai, became the chosen one. Xerxes had been reigning as king for about seven years when Esther was made his queen.

In Xerxes' twelfth year, Haman, full of pride and love of distinction, was made the chief minister to the king. All the king's servants inside the palace gate bowed and paid homage to Haman — all except Mordecai, the Jew. This made Haman angry to the point that he determined not only to rid himself of the hated Mordecai but to use him as an excuse to annihilate the Jewish population living in Persia. His goal could have been the inspiration for a similar murderous plot developed by Adolf Hitler many centuries later.

Haman persuaded Ahasuerus to publish throughout the kingdom an order for the quick massacre of all the Jews on a certain day. When Haman's plot became known, there was terror and great mourning among the Jews.

Mordecai and Esther had been sending messages back and forth to each other, and in one of these was Mordecai's famous statement, "... *if you remain completely silent at this*



Esther appealing to Ahasuerus for the lives of her people.

time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Esther was to become the female hero of Persia, but by saving the Jews, not the Persians. After three days of fasting and prayer, she went unbidden to the king to plead the cause of the Jews. Her attitude: *"Though it is forbidden, I will go in to see the king, and if I perish, I perish"* (Esther 4:16).

When Esther had revealed her request to the king — that he grant a means of saving her life and the lives of her people from Haman's revenge — Ahasuerus realized that he had been used by Haman to achieve his own evil desires.

According to the law of the Persians, no decree made by the king could be revoked, so corrective measures were put in place instead. A second decree was sent throughout the empire, authorizing the Jews to defend themselves from those who hated them (Esther 9). They were victorious, and the Feast of Purim became an annual festival to remember their deliverance.

Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, and Mordecai was elevated to a position next to Ahasureus.

All of these things happened through Esther's providential positioning at Shushan, the palace.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi — God's Voices before the Silence

King Artaxerxes I (Longimanus), son of Xerxes I (and some suggest, of Esther) was, according to the historian, Plutarch, “among all the kings of Persia the most remarkable for a gentle and noble spirit.” He granted the request of Ezra to go to Jerusalem. Ezra 7:10 says *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*

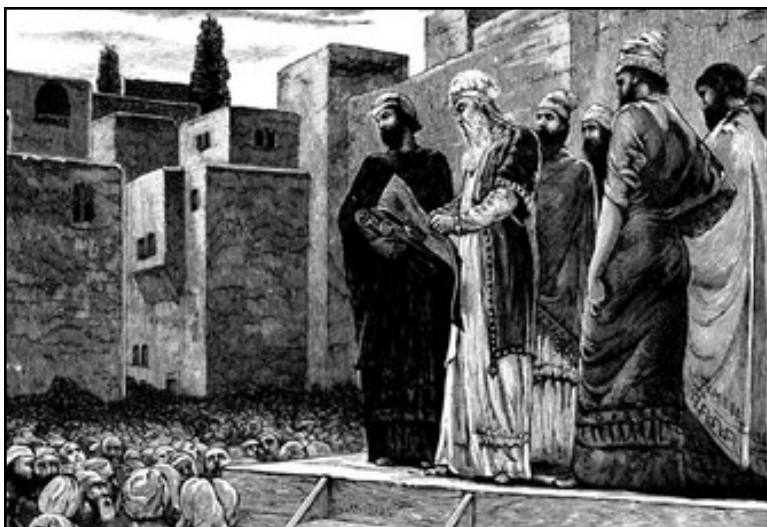
Artaxerxes permitted another company of the captives to return to their homeland along with Ezra in the year 458 B.C., approximately 78 years after the first expedition.

“This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel:

“Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand...

“And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently.... Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?...

“And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them” (Ezra 7).



Ezra's concern was that the people learn and obey God's law.

Ezra was a devout scribe and a preacher of the law to the Jews. He was also a priest, and arrived in Judah at the right time because other leaders, such as Zerubbabel, had passed on, and there was no one to take their places. With money and letters of power, Ezra would undertake to beautify the temple at Jerusalem. This he helped to do, as one of the leaders, but he also did much more. It was he who realized the importance of establishing his people in their spiritual lives and in the divine institutions. This is where reformation had to begin, in order that the Jews be kept pure, because the promised Messiah would soon come through these Jews. Ezra exemplified in his own life the things his people most needed — a heart well-prepared by the law, personal application of the law, and qualifications to teach the law.

Several years later, this same king granted Nehemiah's request, in 445 B.C., to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. *"And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it'"* (Nehemiah 2:5).

Though the temple had been rebuilt, making Jerusalem once again the center of the people's hopes and their religious life, the city walls were broken down, having been reduced to a pile of rubble by Nebuchadnezzar.

Nehemiah was devoted to his country, a true patriot, and skilled in the management of governmental affairs. Like Ezra, he was a reformer, and whatever it took to keep the

Jewish people from losing their identity among the idolatrous nations around them, he would do. And like Ezra, he understood where their true strength lay: not in the physical walls of Jerusalem, but in the spiritual lives of the people.

Nehemiah rallied the people to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem in spite of the opposition of the Samaritans who



Nehemiah surveyed the broken walls in secrecy, by night.

threatened to attack them. The wall was finished in 52 days, with half the men building while the other half defended the construction with swords and spears. It was then dedicated, and Jerusalem was once more safe from attacks.

Afterwards, led by Nehemiah and Ezra, a revival of devotion and worship took place, only to wane again before the prophet Malachi came on

the scene, probably around 430 B.C. His message was a warning to the people of Judah for their corrupt practices, their infidelity to God, and their polluted offerings. He spoke of the coming "*Messenger of the covenant*," promising that God would send Elijah before "*the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*" (Malachi 4:5).

The Old Testament story came to an end, and the beginning of the 400 year period of silence commenced — a silence that was not to be broken until the time of John the Baptist. Persia had been the world power for about a hundred years, and remained so for another hundred after the close of Old Testament history. During this last period of Persian rule, very little is known about Jewish history except that it was evidently a time of peace.

The Sea of Turmoil around Judah During the Silent Era

In Persia, Xerxes II came to the throne, succeeding his father Artaxerxes I (Xerxes II was thought to be Esther's grandson). He reigned only a few weeks, and was assassinated by his half brother, Sogdianus. This half brother was later murdered by Darius II who then took the throne.

Darius II (O'chus) reigned from 423-404 B.C. He was surnamed in Greek "Nothus," which means "bastard." Like Xerxes II, he is also a son of Artaxerxes I. He was a weak king, dominated by his half-sister and wife, and his reign was marked by revolts in Asia Minor and Egypt. There was much discontent caused by his rule. Plotting, scheming, and corruption were widespread. He died of an illness in 404 B.C.

Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) succeeded his father Darius II as king. His surname Mnemon means "mindful." By the time he came to the throne, the power of Athens had been broken in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.). Artaxerxes II rebuilt the royal palace at Susa, effected changes in Persian religion, and restored the worship of early gods.

Next on the Persian throne was Artaxerxes III, the son of Artaxerxes II. He was a cruel ruler who put to death most of his relatives in order to sit more securely on his throne. In one of the wars between Persia and Egypt, Artaxerxes was said to have killed with his bare hands the Apis bull worshiped by the Egyptians. He and his older sons were killed by the king's favorite eunuch, who then raised Artaxerxes' youngest son, Arses, to the throne.

Arses reigned only a short time. The major event during his rule was the invasion of Asia Minor by Philip II of Macedonia, because Arses refused to make amends for his aid to one of the cities Philip was set to conquer. This young king, Arses, also objected to the tyrannical control of Bagoas, the eunuch who had killed his father and brothers. Arses attempted to poison him but, instead, Arses and all his children were killed.

Bagoas gave the throne to Darius III who became the last king of the Achaemenid dynasty, and the last of the Persian kings. Bagoas, who had placed him on the throne, intended to continue his tyrannical rule through the newly appointed king. When Darius declared his own independence, the eunuch attempted to murder him, as he had done with two earlier generations of descendants of Cyrus the Great, but was forced by Darius to drink the poison himself.

Philip ruled in Macedonia from 359-336 B.C. He united the Greek city states under one single authority. He had formed the League of Corinth for the purpose of freeing the

Greek cities that were under Achaemenid rule, and had sent an advance force into Asia Minor, but was killed, probably at the instigation of Darius III. But it is not Philip's name that stands out in the history of Greece. It is his most famous son, Alexander the Great, the founder of the third empire foretold in Daniel's vision.

In the spring of the next year, about 334 B.C., Alexander crossed the Hellespont by a bridge of boats. Because Darius had not made any serious military preparations to resist the invasion, Alexander defeated the Persian army, and by the next year had won most of Asia Minor, as far as Celicia. Darius finally advanced against him, but was defeated in the year 333 B.C. In a cowardly act, Darius fled from the field, abandoning his mother, wife, and children.

Twice Darius sent letters to Alexander, messages of friendship. In one he offered a large ransom for his family: his empire west of the Euphrates River, and the hand of his daughter in return for alliance. Alexander rejected both letters and marched into Mesopotamia. Darius made no attempt to resist his crossing the Euphrates and Tigris.

Darius was defeated in 331 B.C. and turned his chariot and fled, as he had done when he left his family behind, but some of his men fought on. He went toward Bactria, an ancient Greek kingdom of central Asia, was deposed and killed by the Bactrian governor. This brought to an end the Persian Empire, which had lasted from 536-331 B.C.

When Alexander came to the throne after his father's death, his first target was Egypt. At the age of about 25, he

marched south with a force of 57,000 men, and with a fleet of 160 ships offshore. He was held up on occasions — once at Tyre. This is where he built the massive structure in the sea, out to the island city, and the huge siege towers on shore. After all the preparation, the fate of Tyre was sealed — a city that had been thought to be secure.

Alexander's second delay was at Gaza. He was trying to open up a way to the Nile and to Egypt. A determined Persian governor resisted him for three months. When Gaza finally fell, it suffered the same fate as Tyre.

The sieges of these two cities raised Alexander's status to a new plane. He became the undefeated and undefeatable conqueror. In Egypt he founded Alexandria, which was to be the chief city of the new era. It quickly became the cen-



The Empire of Alexander the Great.

ter of intellectual life, and the best minds were attracted to it. The Egyptians welcomed Alexander as a deliverer because they had hated their harsh Persian rulers.

It was in his new city that Alexander gave instructions which would be of the highest significance to the Jews. He assured the children of the dispersion, who had settled in Egypt, that they would have the same rights as his own countrymen. This had much to do with Alexandria becoming one of the mighty places of Jewish life and culture in succeeding years.

On his last journey of war — one of the greatest and most successful military expeditions known in history — Alexander marched again through Palestine. On the road before him, every country in the ancient East fell to his might. He crossed the Indus and marched as lord through the part of India now called the Punjab.

On the way back to Greece, Alexander was attacked by a fever and died in Babylon at the age of 33 in the year 323 B.C.

Alexander had brought the East and West into close contact with each other. He took every opportunity to spread the Greek language and Greek civilization. Greek cities and colonies were founded everywhere, and the Greek tongue became the universal speech of both government and literature. He opened up roads enabling peoples from different cultures and countries to become acquainted with knowledge and economic products from remote places.

After Alexander's sudden death, his vast empire was left without a ruler. His four generals began a struggle among themselves for control. No one was able to establish supremacy so the empire was divided into four parts, under the shared authority of the generals who were known as the Diadochi. Within a short time, they had murdered Alexander's family: his half-brother, his mother, his widow, and his son who had been born after Alexander's death.

The generals vied for power for twenty years before they came to some measure of order after the division of the empire. Egypt was ruled by Ptolemy, Babylonia by Seleucus, Antipater was over Macedonia and Greece, and Thrace was controlled by Lysimachus. The fighting continued until two major powers emerged from the four — the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria. The kingdom of the Seleucids extended from Thrace through Asia Minor and Syria to the borders of India. Antioch, in the north of Syria, was the capital. The Ptolemies on the Nile had Alexandria as the capital. This part of the empire was ruled by a dynasty whose last representative was Cleopatra.

Under the Ptolemies the Jews in Egypt decided to translate the Hebrew Scriptures. The rising generation no longer knew Hebrew as their mother tongue, making it difficult for them to follow the sacred text in the services of the synagogue. About 250 B.C. the Torah was translated into Greek. Seventy (or some say, seventy-two) scribes worked out at sea, on the Island of Pharos off the coast from Alexandria, at the foot of one of the Seven Wonders of the World. This Greek transla-



An artist's rendering of the Lighthouse of Pharos, on the island on which the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek, becoming the "Septuagint".

tion of the Bible became known as the "Septuagint," meaning "the Seventy," and was the most noteworthy event for the Jews of the period.

In Palestine, high priests succeeded each other in the temple: Manasses, Onias, Simon II. Though there was no prophet from God during this time, and therefore no inspired spoken or written message, numerous uninspired books were penned. The book of Tobit, which came to be part of the Apocrypha,

was a story of the Jews in Ninevah after they had been taken into Assyrian captivity. Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremy, the Prayer of Azariah, and I, II, III, and IV Maccabees were also written during the four hundred years of silence on the part of God.

Judah's attachment to the kingdom of the Ptolemies lasted more than a hundred years. Then the Seleucids of Antioch

forced their way southward. For a long time they had been striving to expand. At the Jordan they won a battle against Ptolemy V. Antiochus III took over Palestine in 195 B.C., and Judah once more came under a new power.

Antiochus Epiphanes IV intended to continue Alexander's Hellenization of the part of the world under his control. In Palestine, he tried to replace Jewish customs and religious practices with Greek gods and culture. He built a place of exercise where participants played naked in the games. This became a real problem for the Jews, and a great temptation, as nakedness became common in sports arenas which had been built all over the country. The Jews firmly believed in the corruption of human nature from youth onward and in the sinfulness of the lusts of the body.

Pushing to the limit, in 170 B.C. Antiochus made a law which required all citizens to pay homage to him as the senior god of the Seleucids. When the Jews revolted, he plundered and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem in 168 B.C., offering unclean sacrifices on the altar, and dedicating the temple itself to Jupiter Olympius. He erected a statue of that "god" in the temple and stole the temple treasures. In response to resistance to his edicts, he sent an armed force to Jerusalem, and when they had taken the spoils of the city, he set it on fire, pulling down the houses and walls on every side, and taking the women and children captive.

The Maccabees

In the face of such merciless persecution of the Jews, some of the people responded with fear and weakness, but many chose to die rather than be defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes' demands. One faithful old man, along with his five sons, became the nation's heroes by resisting Antiochus. They were the Maccabees.



Mattathias blessing his sons.

Mattathias and his sons refused to obey the order of Antiochus to “forsake the law.” When the old priest saw one of his countrymen offering a sacrifice, he ran and slew him upon the altar, and pulled the altar down. From this act came open resistance and a life-and-death struggle for religious freedom, known as the Wars of the Maccabees. The Maccabee family escaped into the mountains and gathered with them a band of Jews who shared their beliefs and waged bitter warfare against Antiochus. This war of independence lasted 30 years altogether.

After the death of their courageous father, Judas Maccabee became the leader, and their successes began. Judas liberated Jerusalem in 164 B.C. and restored the old order in the temple. The altar was rebuilt and sacrifices to God were offered as in former times. The decrees of Antiochus were repealed, liberty of worship was guaranteed, and the religious community at Jerusalem was once more recognized. The aims of the Jewish rebellion had been achieved, but the Maccabees were not content with that; they wanted political freedom, as well as the freedom of religion. So the successors of Judas, his brothers Jonathan and Simon, began the struggle anew. It ended in 142 B.C. under Simon, with Syria granting them the political independence they desired.

The Maccabees served as both high priests and kings in Judea. John Hyrcanus, Simon’s son, succeeded him with the title of king. The line of Hasmonean priest-rulers was thus established, and they governed an independent nation

for a hundred years. As time went on, the Selucids became less and less formidable enemies. Through continued fighting, Judah's borders were extended, and under Alexander Jannaeus in 103-76 B.C. they recaptured almost all of the area previously occupied by the kings of Israel and Judah.

Rome — the Fourth World Empire

The Selucids had lacked the strength to cope with the Maccabees but Rome, having overthrown Hannibal of Carthage, expanded its authority beyond Greece and into Asia Minor. She was marching with her legions down the road of history — fulfilling Daniel's prophecy concerning the fourth world empire, the one that would be in power when the Spiritual Kingdom would come on the scene.

Palestine had known peace for awhile, until Pompey, the Roman general, marched through the kingdom of the Seleucids into Palestine. After a three-month siege, the armies entered Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and Judea became a Roman province.

With this event, the political independence of Israel came to a sudden end. Civil disorder and military weakness under the Hasmoneans contributed to the Roman takeover. Palestine had been the scene of a bitter struggle for many years. The Jews had fought for their faith, and foreign rulers had tried to impose pagan ideas and ceremonies on them. Though now a conquered people, the Jews would continue their struggle in defiant hearts and occasional sporadic violence.

Pompey, after capturing Jerusalem, levied an annual tribute, and installed Hyrcanus (Maccabee) as high priest.

He made Antipater the Idumean the actual ruler of the country. Antipater was a descendant of Esau and gained much influence in Judea at this time. In the Roman view, Palestine was now part of the new Roman province of Syria to the north, and would therefore come under the final control and jurisdiction of the Roman officials heading the military and the government.

There were two great rivals for power in the Roman world at this time — Pompey and Julius Caesar. Pompey's wife was Caesar's daughter. The rivalry did not end, but peace was kept as long as Pompey's wife lived. After her death, the two men became open enemies, and in 49 B.C. war broke out between them. Antipater and Hyrcanus, having been appointed by Pompey, were in some difficulty when Caesar won and Pompey escaped to Egypt where he was assassinated.

Julius Caesar was a Roman statesman and one of the most famous military commanders in world history. Pompey had been champion of the senatorial party. Caesar had led the people against the senate, and his popularity had grown as the leader. Upon returning to Rome, he exercised the dictatorial powers granted him but refused the title of king, preferring to remain only consul, dictator, and general. However, there was growing concern in the senate that he would assume sole power, so two of the senators, Brutus and Cassius, assassinated him. Both of these men were eventually defeated by a combination of the forces of Octavian, Caesar's nephew, and of Marc Antony, Caesar's friend.

Antony took Syria, and Antipater became his faithful subject. In a twisted and very involved history, Octavian and Antony became enemies and went to war with each other. In the struggle, Antony was defeated and committed suicide. Octavian took the title of Augustus Caesar, and became the undisputed ruler of the Roman Empire.

Judea Under Rome

Antipater, being a descendant of the Edomites, and not a Jew, had had no popular support when Palestine had been entrusted to him. But he was a shrewd manipulator and managed to use his power to secure his position. He began the Herodian dynasty which appears throughout the New Testament.

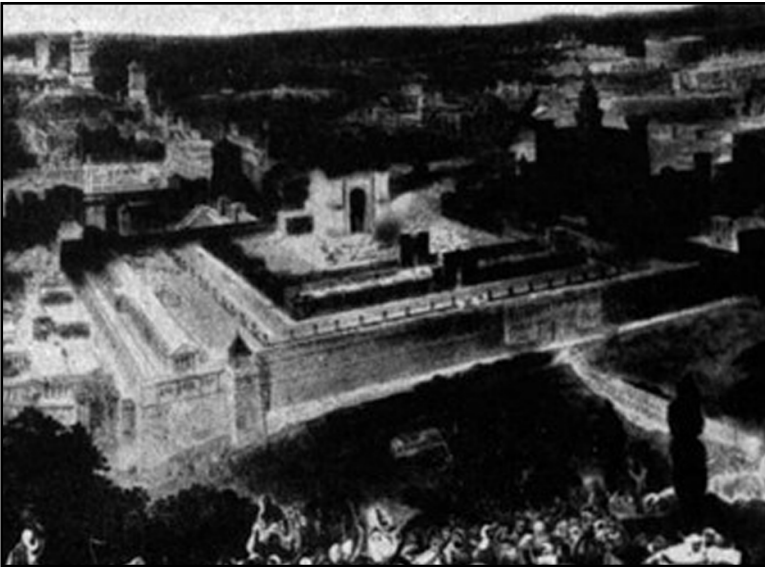
The fact that Antipater and his son, Herod the Great, were able to maintain their position and power in Palestine says much for their political skill. It also shows that they were strong rulers, even though unpopular, since they were able to keep Palestine at peace. Not only did Antipater survive the various changes of authority in Rome, but he was also able to pass on his territory to his sons. Herod was given Galilee, and ruled so successfully that with the approval of Rome he became king of all of Palestine. This was in 37 B.C. He ruled from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C., to the end of the “silent era.”

Herod was a highly ambitious man. He had courage — or perhaps it was ruthlessness in response to the threat of real or supposed competition. He had brought upon himself the hatred of the Jews by introducing Grecian races and other customs into Jerusalem, and by his unswerving loyal-

ty to Rome. In an effort to break down Jewish hatred and opposition, he rebuilt the Temple and the Temple Mount, which helped, in the hearts of some, to atone for his actions. He made the temple larger than Solomon's and richer than the one Zerubbabel built. The work began about 20 B.C. and consumed forty years in the building. Arrangements were made for specially trained priests to do the construction so that the sacred areas would not be profaned.

Herod had a good working arrangement with the more aristocratic Jews — the Sadducees. It was from this group that he selected his leading officials. He had a different feeling, an intrigue, perhaps almost a fondness, for the unworldly Essenes who lived simple, aesthetic lives. (The Dead Sea Scrolls were written by members of this sect). But with the puritanical Pharisees he had little in common.

In spite of Herod's good points as a ruler — his professed protection of the Jewish faith, his huge building schemes of aqueducts, baths, gyms, fountains, and even cities, his energy, foresight, and courage — he was never accepted by the Jews as a Jewish king. The fact was that he was not a Jew, but an Edomite. His attitude toward religion was indifference. Anything could be accepted as long as it did not endanger the state and its relationship with Rome. His greed led to heavy taxation. His cruelties were excessive, even to the point of brutally murdering his own family members when he perceived them to be a threat to his authority.



An artist's conception of Herod's temple, as it would have looked in Jesus' time.

At Herod's death, Palestine was divided up among three of his sons. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee, Philip the area east and northeast of Galilee, and Archelaus, Judea and Samaria. Archelaus was deposed in A.D. 6 by Augustus because of complaints by the Jews and banished to Gaul, and his territory came under a number of acting governors. Herod had achieved much during his reign, but he was so unpopular that, after his death, leading Jews petitioned the Emperor Augustus to rid them of the whole Herodian dynasty and send them a Roman governor instead. Their attempt turned out to be unsuccessful.

The Dawning of the Day of the Lord

In the reign of Augustus Caesar, suddenly the silence of heaven came to an end. The specific preparation that had been underway for hundreds of years was complete. The world stage was set for the long-awaited Spiritual Kingdom.

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias.... Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

“But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

“He will also go before Him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:5,11-17).

John was born — no ordinary child, but a relative of the coming Messiah.

God's spokesman was heard again, this time by a young unmarried woman in a small Galilean town:

"Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

"And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!'

"But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end'" (Luke 1:26-33).

Herod was the king in those days; Herod, who had publicly executed his favorite wife; Herod who had killed his own sons to prevent them from threatening his seat on the throne; Herod who would stop at nothing to remove any competition.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from

the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.'

"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

"So they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel."'

"Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.'

"When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divine-

ly warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’

“When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’

“Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.’

“But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child’s life are dead’” (Matthew 2:1-20).

When John the Baptist grew up, his early years were spent in seclusion in the wilderness, and there, near the Jordan,



he began his preaching as the forerunner of Jesus. This preaching was designed to prepare the hearts of the people for the acceptance of the Christ who was about to begin His work of salvation. Later John would be beheaded by Herod Antipas whose behavior he had publicly condemned for taking his brother's wife.

***What must it have been for Mary
to nurture and protect the
Son of God!***

The history of Jesus, of course, we know. He lived and died and lives

again, for the preservation of the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

God's purposes, bringing all things to "*the fullness of the time*" (Galatians 4:4) are very clearly seen throughout this long period of history. He had set the stage for the coming of Jesus, and also for the spread of the gospel. We have seen how the Babylonian Empire gave way to the Persian Empire, and then how that power fell to the strength of Alexander's dominion.

We observed the Jews in Palestine as they passed through terrible, perilous times, times of exile and disper-

sion, times of returning again and rebuilding their homeland. Established in their religious institutions, they came at last under Roman rule — the fourth world power. A great network of new roads now united the civilized world, with its focus in Rome. Communication from one part of the empire to another was easier than ever before. Latin and Greek became



Preparation had been made for this day...

official languages, with Greek spoken everywhere in the East. It was already the language of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, and now was to become the natural vehicle of the New Testament.

Among the Jews, as this history had unfolded, there had been a growing expectation of the promised Messiah. Meanwhile the various communities of the

scattered Jews were in centers throughout the Empire. How fitting, that through the providence of God these people would provide a ready-made audience for the future preaching of Paul and other Christians as they traveled throughout the world, preaching the Gospel of Christ!

At no other time before, nor since, have all these circumstances blended as they did at that particular time. History had moved as God had planned, and God was ready to step into that history with the greatest of all events! So in the reign of the first monarch of the Roman Empire, Augustus Caesar, when all the world was at peace, God did just that. The Edenic promise of the seed of the woman is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world!



"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11)

The Crack of Doom

He will come
 as a thief in the night —
With no warning sign at all

And what a
 frightening sight to see
When the stars begin to fall!

Hordes will scream
 for the rocks and mountains
To come tumbling down on them

So they can
 hide from an all-wise God
And the wrath He brings with Him!

Louise Buffington