

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE ORIGIN STORY OF JESUS

RLJ-1889

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DECEMBER 4, 2022

PART 89: THE END OF PERSIAN RULE

We are now going to study what happened to the Jews after the death of Nehemiah. We are not given the year in which he died, but we do know that he arrived in Jerusalem in 384 B.C. and that he stayed there for 12 years. He went back to Persia in 372 B.C. and continued his job as a cup bearer for king Artaxerxes II. The Bible does not tell us when Nehemiah came back a second time or how long he stayed, before he returned back to Persia. The province of Judah and its capital Jerusalem continued to prosper under its priestly leadership to 331 B.C., when Alexander the Great took control of Persia.

Here are my sources for this historical research from 331 B.C. to the time of the incarnation of Jesus in Bethlehem:

1. A HISTORY OF THE JEWS, Solomon Grayzel, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1948
2. THE COMPLETE WORKS OF FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, Flavius Josephus, translated by William Whiston, Attic Books, 2008

JEWS IN EGYPT

I have previously covered the invasion of Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonians, first in 597 B.C. and the final destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. A very old papyrus scroll in Egypt was discovered in 1944 dating back to the time of the Babylonian Empire. The person(s) responsible for this scroll around 600 B.C. recorded that when the Babylonians invaded Egypt in 568 B.C., thousands of Jewish men were recruited as mercenaries to protect Egypt from attacks by the Ethiopians. Their base of operation was Elephantine Island at Egypt's southern border, close to the modern city of Aswan. From 525-404 B.C., Egypt became a Persian province and more Jewish mercenaries were hired and stationed in different garrisons.

Mercenaries were paid with land grants, giving them incentive to defend their homes and property. The Jews were allowed to build a temple on Elephantine Island which was destroyed in 410 B.C. because Egyptian priests did not want competition from the Jews. Jews in Judah and Babylon responded to this act of aggression and sent rabbis to teach the Egyptian Jews the proper way to serve God and to keep the traditions.

GOVERNMENT IN JUDAH

During the remaining years under the Persian government, Judah was more of a theocracy. The high priest ruled but he did not have unlimited power like the previous kings.

A Persian government official made sure the Jews did not do anything unlawful and that taxes were collected and sent to the king.



There was also a council consisting of wealthy Jewish businessmen, landowners, and from men from prominent priestly families. They were not elected but were appointed by a leadership of the priests and the wealthy Jews.

The council ensured that the high priest always ruled in their favor. The poor Jews had no voice in government; their job was to work for the wealthy and pay taxes.

The consensus among the upper echelon was that there was no longer a need for prophets since the Old Testament books were freely available. This outlook freed them from scrutiny and allowed them to mistreat their workers.

Compare this to the lie taught in Baptist churches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer needed because we have the Bible.

1 Corinthians 8-13

The scribes were created to justify the belief that prophets were no longer needed. These men were educated and their assignment was to read the Old Testament books to the people since most of the common people could not read, effectively setting up a way to manipulate the people.

The scribes introduced a new alphabet. Up to the time of the Babylonian captivity, the ancient Hebrew text was used for all Old Testament books. While in Babylon, the Scribes learned the Assyrian alphabet which featured a simpler character set.

There were no print presses at this time and all books had to be copied by hand. Everything was written on scrolls that were rolled back and forth.

According to Solomon Grayzel, the common people who knew how to read and write continued to use the Hebrew alphabet, which in the long run prevailed after a few centuries.¹

The high priest and the council recognized the Jewish community would cease to exist unless the common people were educated. Thus, the scribes became an influential class as they taught adults and children the Old Testament. They also created literature and new laws were crafted based upon the Old Testament writings.

It was also emphasized that true religion demands responsibility of each person.

EXPULSION OF ALL PAGANS

During this time there was a heated debate among the Jews about what to do with the pagans living among them. There was a faction that wanted to cleanse the area and forbid marriages with pagans. The high priest and the council came up with the compromise that a Jew could marry a pagan if they converted to Judaism. They based this on Ruth's (Moabite) marriage to Boaz after she converted to the Jewish faith.

By the time the Persian kingdom ceased to exist in 322 B.C., the Jews had expanded beyond Judah and controlled more land. The other different people groups more or less lost their identity since they did not have a monotheistic religion whereas the Jews were able to hold on to their identity through their written literature, which included the Old Testament.

¹ A HISTORY OF THE JEWS, Solomon Grayzel, p.37

The Samaritans were the only other group that did not lose their identity. They also followed the Old Testament and worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but were not accepted as a part of Abraham's seed.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Alexander the Great decided to go to war with Persia in 334 B.C. The Battle of Granicus was the first clash that took place just across the Aegean Sea in Asia Minor. The Persians were defeated and the two armies met again at Issus in 333 B.C, located at the Mediterranean Sea on what is today the border between Turkey and Lebanon. The Persian army was defeated again and King Darius III fled homeward. Alexander decided to go south instead of pursuing the Persian army and arrived at the city of Tyre.

The city was located on the shoreline of Lebanon, but the capital also was part of an island offshore. It took Alexander a year to build a causeway to the island and neutralize its navy.

As a presumptuous dictator, he sent messengers to the Samaritans and to Judah with a request for soldiers and supplies. He had no legal right to do this, nevertheless, he demanded that small nations and provinces side with him under the threat of conquering them.

Samaria was a Persian province and the governor broke ties with Persia and agreed to supply the Greek army with soldiers and supplies. The high priest in Judah and the council decided to remain loyal to Persia. This did not set well with Alexander and he decided to punish the Jews.

Once Tyre was defeated, Alexander moved his army south, and successfully besieged the city of Gaza in 331 B.C. Then Alexander turned northeast towards Jerusalem. Here is the account of Flavius Josephus:

“And Jaddus the high-priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet the Macedonians, since the king was displeased at his foregoing disobedience. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifice to God, whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them; whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest should appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in the habits proper to their order, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent...And when Jaddus understood that Alexander was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens.

After literally throwing open the doors of Jerusalem and taking pains to be as friendly and non-threatening as possible, Jaddus the High Priest and a large

column of prominent citizens went out to meet the army of Alexander. Alexander's forces were accompanied by his new Samaritan allies who may have hoped that Alexander would punish the city for its initial recalcitrance. They may have even have hoped that they would be allowed to plunder Jerusalem."

REACTION BY ALEXANDER

Something unexpected occurs when Alexander sees Jaddus dressed in the robes of the High Priest and a turban adorned with a gold plate engraved with the Hebrew name of God (the four Hebrew consonants "YHWH" commonly rendered in English as "Jehovah"). He approached the high priest and stated that he had seen Jaddus in a dream in which the high priest assured him victory over the Persians. Alexander is subsequently taken into Jerusalem where he offers a sacrifice at the temple.

Josephus offers another important detail about Alexander's brief visit to Jerusalem. While in the city, a scroll is brought to Alexander:

"And when the Book of Daniel was showed him wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present." ²

There is no doubt that Alexander identified himself with the goat who tramples the Persian empire. **Daniel 8:19-21**

The Jews and the Samaritans were granted the same rights they enjoyed under Persian rule. According to the Talmud, many of the boys born in Jerusalem that year were named Alexander in honor of the pagan conqueror. After a short stay, Alexander and his army traveled to Egypt and then eventually swung back northeast deep into Persia, never to return to Jerusalem.

God honored the word to the prophet Malachi; without him the Jews would have ceased to exist as a national entity. **Malachi 3:6**

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?

² THE COMPLETE WORKS OF FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, Flavius Josephus, pp.284-285