

## History & Chronology of Israel during the Time of Philip of Macedon Until The First Century<sup>1</sup>

This material is taken from Ben Witherington's *New Testament History, A Narrative Account*. The time it deals with is essentially from the time between the last books of the Old Testament to the time of Christ's birth. For the student of the New Testament, if this history is not known, and few know it, the New Testament seems to pop up out of a vacuum. Having at least a smattering of information from this period gives the student a much broader view of the opening events of the gospels and the birth of Christ. Our Lord was born into a world of intrigue, wars, coups, assassinations, and infighting between family members scrambling for power. The overriding event throughout this period was the Hellenization of the Mediterranean world. This started with Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great and was still developing and impacting all cultures 400 years later at the beginning of the Christian era.

- 356 B.C. 1. Alexander the Great is born to Philip II and Pella.
- 346 B.C. 2. Isocrates published his *Address* to Philip calling on all Hellenes to go against Persia and convert it to the Hellenist culture.
- 338 B.C. 3. This was the motivating factor that became the dream of Philip and then his son, Alexander the Great.
- 337 B.C. 4. Philip sent for a boyhood friend who had studied at the feet of Plato to come and be the tutor of his son Alexander. His name was Aristotle.
- 334 B.C. 5. Aristotle taught Alexander medicine, biology, geometry, astronomy, and rhetoric. (Practicing presenting the argument from either side with equal power.)
- 332 B.C. 6. During this period Darius the Persian leader had 15,000 mercenaries on this payroll.
- 332 B.C. 7. One of Philip's bodyguards stabbed, assassinates, Philip and it is speculated that Pella and Alexander were behind this—but never proven. It seemed that Philip was about to replace Alexander as the heir to his throne.
- 332 B.C. 8. Alexander consolidates his rule and continues the goal of conquering Persia.
- 332 B.C. 9. Alexander conquers Tyre and proceeds down the coast. Only Gaza offered resistance.
- 332 B.C. 10. Legendary accounts have his going to Jerusalem and offering sacrifices to Jehovah in the Temple—to the Jewish God.
- 332 B.C. 11. There seems to be no conflict between Alexander's army and the Jewish leaders. This was due to Alexander replacing the Persian ruling system that dated back to the Babylonian exile and remained until Persia conquered Babylon and assumed rule over Israel by default.
- 332 B.C. 12. Alexander left the Persian governing system in place with the "farming out" of the gathering of taxes.
- 332 B.C. 13. Alexander then proceeded to Egypt where he was crowned Pharaoh in November 332 B.C.
- 332 B.C. 14. His first royal act, promoted by a dream, was the planning of a great city—Alexandria.

<sup>1</sup>Witherington, Ben III, *New Testament History*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003, pp 29-48.

### **During the last decade of his life—333-323 B.C.**

- 333 to  
323 B.C.
1. Alexander conquered the entire region surrounding Israel.
  2. The Hellenizing influence on the region was not limited to the Time of his conquest—it continued during the Ptolemies & Seleucids.
  3. Alexander’s true genius was a field commander. The Hellenizing came from his successors.
  4. Many of the Jews during this period (332-67 B.C.) came to believe the claim that Greek culture and language was superior.
    - a. They adapted the learning practices
    - b. Embraced views about physical education to the extent that they would build gyms in Israel.
    - c. Accepted Greek ideas about democracy.

337-167  
B.C.

### **Alexander’s Successors**

1. Ptolemy—Rather than fight over the whole empire he sought to gain control over the most valuable section—Egypt.
2. He was first content with the title of Satrap which was a Persian title for governor.
3. He was challenged by Perdicces but retained rule.
4. Ptolemy assumed the title of “King.”
5. All future successors were to assume the name of Ptolemy—the Ptolemaic Dynasty.
6. Ptolemy II & III took dominion over Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and many of the Aegean isles and part of Asia Minor and Israel.
7. Through commerce more than military force Egypt under the Ptolemies had considerable influence over what transpired in Israel.
8. Toward the end of the Ptolemaic period there was still an imposing figure of Cleopatra VII.
9. Her downfall was her desire to become queen of the Mediterranean world which lead first to the courting of Julius Caesar and then to Marc Antony.
10. When both died Octavian (Augustus) could not be enticed.
11. She sealed her fate and the Ptolemaic dynasty by taking her own life.
12. This essentially handed Egypt over to Rome.

331 B.C.  
305 B.C.

### **Seleucid Dynasty**

1. The other dynasty was the Seleucid which ruled Asia Minor and east into Persia.
2. This Kingdom had two capitals and one of them was Antioch in Syria.
3. The empire remained in the Greek culture.
4. But their rulers became “gods” to be worshipped in the empire.
5. The major rulers were;

361-274  
B.C.

312-280  
B.C.

a. Seleucus I

280-261  
B.C.

b. Antiochus I

- 223-187 B.C. c. Antiochus II & III
- 175-162 B.C. d. Antiochus IV –Most notoriously known from the Jewish point of view. He referred to himself as “Epiphanies” (God manifest).
6. Seleucus began to develop cities in Asia Minor and settled Jews in these cities promising them citizenship.
  7. The Hellenized Jews were especially good at spreading the Hellenistic culture.
  8. It was in Antioch that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians first assembled together. Gal1-2.
  9. It was at Antioch that disciples were first called Christians. Act 11:26.
- 250 B.C. 10. Seleucids lost control of their territory east of the Euphrates and so concentrated all the more on the Land of Syria and Asia Minor.
- 198 B.C. 11. Seleucid interred more into the local government in Israel.
- 190 B.C. 12. Seleucids won a decisive victory over Ptolemaic forces at Paneion (Caesarea Philippi) and governed Israel for the next 50 years.
- 171 B.C. 13. Seleucids suffered a crushing defeat at the battle of Magnesia to Rome.  
 14. The terms of the peace was a heavy tax paid 12 times a year to Rome.  
 15. Antiochus IV started taking bribes from those who wanted to be High Priest. They were still of the Zadokite priest line at this time.  
 16. Menelaus, not a Zadokite, offered a bigger bribe and was made High Priest.

### **Antiochus Tries to Annex Egypt**

1. Antiochus attempts to annex Egypt and is defeated. Rome helped to defeat him.
  2. This seeming weakness caused Israel to try and reinstate the Zadokite priest and Antiochus had no pity. He came down on Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, the city walls, and other parts of the infrastructure of the city.
- 167-164 B.C. 3. Jerusalem & the Jews endured the darkest days of their history during this period.  
 4. Olympian Zeus was installed as the god of the Temple.  
 5. The period was called “abomination of desolation.” (appalling sacrifice) Dan 11:21, Mark 13:14, I Macc. 1:54  
 6. Many Jews rebelled and paid for this with their lives.

### **The Rise of the Hasmoneans**

1. The elder Mattathias Heshmon refused to offer sacrifices prescribed by Antiochus IV.
  2. He killed a Jew and an officer on the spot who were taking such sacrifices in the town of Modein.
  3. Mattathias fled to the hills but soon died from old age.
  4. His five sons, and particular his son Judas, would lead the rebellion against Antiochus.
  5. Judas’ guerilla tactics proved so successful Antiochus attempted to come to terms with him.
- 166-165 B.C. 6. Judas was to take the name Maccabeus (Hammer)  
 7. In December of 165 B.C. Judas lead his army into Jerusalem and purified the temple.

- 163 B.C. 8. The ban on the worship of Jehovah was rescinded and traditional worship was resumed in 163 B.C.
9. The purification of the Temple is celebrated today by the feast of Hanukkah (Dedication).
10. The Maccabees were concerned that the restoration was being felt by the Jews in Galilee and Gilead.
11. But the end result was to lead the Jews of Galilee into Judea and settle them there. I Macc. 5:23
12. The struggle for religious freedom led to the struggle for political freedom and this lasted for the next 20 years.
- 161 B.C. 13. Judas won a major victory in Beth Haran northwest of Jerusalem in 161 B.C. but lost his life soon thereafter in a battle by Elasa.
14. The youngest brother, Jonathan, assumed command and succeeded Judas.
- 161-158 B.C. 15. He played this role for the next three years.
- 152 B.C. 16. In 157 Seleucids made peace with Jonathan in 152 B.C. and Jonathan was named High Priest and administrator of Judea.
- 143 B.C. 17. Due to political struggles from within, a subordinate took Jonathan prisoner and he was executed near Beth Shean.
18. Simon the second son of Mattathias negotiated a full peace making Judea politically independent. He was the only brother of the five to survive at this point.
19. All seemed well until Simon's son-in-law assassinated him six years later.

### **John Hyrcanus**

- 134-104 B.C. 1. Simon's youngest son, John Hyrcanus established his own rule and lasted for 30 years.
2. If Judas has been like David to his people, it was said that John Hyrcanus was like Solomon for he freed Judea of all remnants of the Seleucid.
3. John Hyrcanus never claimed himself King but coins were struck with his name on them.
4. John had a definite affinity to Hellenistic culture and even changed the name of his son to Aristobulus I—Hebrew to Greek.
5. His desire for some Greek ideas antagonized the more traditional Jews and a new party developed to keep the purity of the Jewish culture.
- 103-76 B.C. 6. They were given the name in derision "the separatists"—or Pharisees.
7. Aristobulus' brother, Alexander Jannaeus (Greek Name) became High Priest and ruler.
8. He followed the expansionistic practice of his father and even surpassed the borders of Solomon.
9. He lost his life in battle and his wife, Salome, the widow of Aristobulus, succeeded him as ruler and won the support of the Pharisees.
10. Salome died of natural causes just before civil war broke out between her two sons, Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II.
11. She had appointed Hyrcanus II as High Priest and tried to make him ruler.

- 67-63 B.C.
12. Aristobulus II seized the government and forced his brother into the High Priest role only and he, Aristobulus II would be ruler.
  13. Civil war broke out between the two men—brothers.
  14. Hyrcanus II enlisted Pompey of Rome.
  15. Pompey captured Jerusalem, exiled Aristobulus II while reconfirming Hyrcanus II as High Priest.
  16. Pompey did not restore Hyrcanus II to political power and reduced the size of the Kingdom.

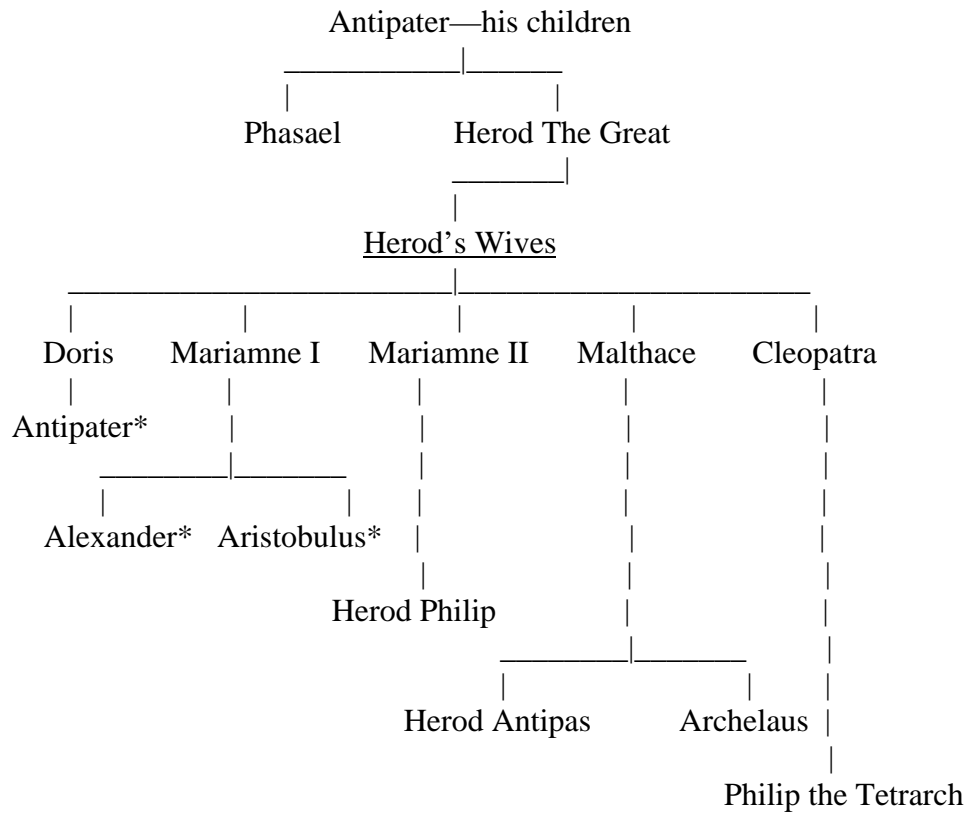
### **Rome Enters Judean History and Remains in it from this point forward.**

- 48 B.C.
1. Pompey dies in 40 B.C. and Hyrcanus seeks the help of Julius Caesar who made Antipater ruler and Hyrcanus II the high priest.
- 44 B.C.
2. Julius Caesar is assassinated which leads to a further coup in Judea.
  3. Antipater was killed and Hyrcanus II is captured by the son of Aristobulus II.
  4. Antigonus—the last of the Hasmonean line is made ruler
- 40 B.C.
5. Antigonus proclaimed himself King of Judea but the Roman senate was not pleased with his power takeover.
- 39 B.C.
6. In 39 B.C. Idumean Herod the Great was proclaimed by the senate King of Judea.
- 39-37 B.C.
7. Herod had to unseat Antigonus which led to further war.
  8. In 37 B.C. Antigonus was captured and put to death.
  9. Herod brought back the elderly Hyrcanus II as High Priest.
- 30 B.C.
10. Hyrcanus II then was under suspicion of Herod and accused of conspiracy and was executed in 30 B.C.

### **In Summation Israel became partially Hellenized**

1. Ruled first by Alexander's successors
2. Briefly by Jews
3. Finally came to be a province and ultimately ruled by an appointed King, then procurators or prefects.

# Herod the Great's Family Tree



\* The Asterisks indicate execution by Herod the Great, their father. The quip of the Greeks under Antipater was, "I would rather be one of Anitpater's pigs than one of his children."