



Conducted by
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***“Can you basically tell me what happened in the so-called
Inter-testamental Period?”***

I am truly grateful for the insertion in the question, of that word 'basically'! It is, as most will agree, a vastly over-worked and frequently superfluously used word these days, but it is entirely appropriate and truly welcome in a question relating to the approximately 400 year period of Bible history which falls between Malachi and Matthew; in other words, in that inter-testamental period to which our questioner refers.

This is the period of Jewish history which is greatly illuminated by a study of the book of Daniel, that fascinating book which introduces us to prophecies relating to world history following the fall of the Babylonian Empire to an alliance of the Medes and Persians.

A few 'basic' details will be useful here.

Although Darius the Mede reigned after the fall of Babylon and the death of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:30), it was the Persians who became the stronger partner in that Medo-Persian alliance (11:2), with the Medes gradually fading into the background.

Daniel 11 then predicts the conflict which history developed between the Persians and the rapidly rising Macedonian, or Greek Empire, of which Alexander the Great was the central figure.

After the early death of Alexander at the age of 33, in the year 323 BC, his empire was broken up into four parts, and, as predicted in Dan. 11:4, the power went, not to his family, but to his many generals who fought among themselves for control of what Alexander had created.

Eventually, two of these rulers remained to face each other. They were Ptolemy, descibed by Daniel as "king of the South" which was Egypt; and Syria, the Kingdom of the North, which was ruled by the Seleucid dynasty, whose kings took the name 'Antiochus' and whom Daniel calls "the king of the North".

Remember, however, that these kingdoms are called "North" and "South" only in relation to Palestine, since this scripture is concerned specifically with the history of Palestine and the Jews.

THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

At first, Judea became part of the kingdom of Ptolemy of Egypt, and, as you will readily see from a map of the Middle East, because of their geographical situation, caught, as they were, between these two warring kingdoms, in the subsequent conflict between Egypt and Syria, the Jews were unfortunately over-run, first by the army of the Syrian ruler, Antiochus, as he made his way south to attack Egypt, and then by Egypt, as Ptolemy struck back.

This spasmodic conflict is described in ch.11, from v.5., and when there was no actual warfare, a state of cold hostility existed between the two kingdoms which continued for just about as long as they both existed.

ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES

The most notorious of these Syrian rulers was named Antiochus 4th, whose reign covered the period 175 to 163 BC, and who, in 169 BC, took to calling himself "Antiochus Epiphanes". His use of the word "Epiphanes" reveals the man's outrageous opinion of himself. In fact, the full title which he assumed was '*Theos Epiphanies*' - '*God Manifest*', because he thought that he was the incarnation of Zeus. The people, however, called him 'Antiochus Epimanes' - a play on words which means 'Antiochus the Madman'. He is referred to in Dan. vv.21-25.

THE ROMAN INFLUENCE

Antiochus eventually managed to enter Egypt, but his triumph was short-lived, because the Romans, who were the emerging power of the age, arrived in Egypt by sea and ordered him to leave. There is a wonderful story which relates that when Antiochus asked Laenas, the Roman legate, how quickly he must make up his mind about leaving, the Roman, unsheathed his sword, drew a circle around Antiochus and told him, in effect, "Before you step out of this circle!" This is predicted in v.30.

THE SLAUGHTER IN JERUSALEM

The Jews, back in Palestine, meanwhile, had heard a report which said that Antiochus was dead and were joyfully celebrating his decease, so, on his way home to Syria, Antiochus, still fuming at the dismissive treatment received at the hands of the Romans, vented his rage on the Jews and the city of Jerusalem, (which he had already captured on two occasions). He was vicious in his vengeance, inflicting punishment on them by sending an army of 22,000, led by Apollonius, one of his generals, with orders to destroy Jerusalem. Appollonius delayed his attack on the city until the day of the Sabbath when he knew the people would be in their synagogues. When he eventually launched his attack not a man was spared. It is reported that the streets ran with blood.

The Syrians then plundered the city and set it on fire. Furthermore, they deliberately defiled the Temple by scattering 'Swine's-flesh soup' throughout the holy place. And, as

if this were not enough, Antiochus offered a sow on the holy altar and erected an altar to Jupiter in the temple courtyard.

THE MACCABEAN PERIOD. 167-164 BC

It was against this man that the family of the Maccabees raised a rebellion which, led by the great Judas Maccabeas, whom history knows as 'Judas the Hammer', eventually secured freedom for the Jews. (Ch. 12; vv. 6-7).

The period during which the Jews suffered under the cruel Syrian oppression, for which Antiochus 4th was responsible, lasted for three and a half years, or 42 months, or 1260 days (12:6-7). This period which, the book of DANIEL, is expressed as 'time, two times and half a time'. Prophetically, 'time' equals one year, 'times' represents two years, and 'half a time' represents six months, making a total of three and a half years.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MODERN JUDAISM

The persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, as predicted by Daniel, and their deliverance through the resistance of the Maccabees, is still celebrated by the Jews as one of the greatest events in their history, whilst Antiochus Epiphanes is still regarded as the very embodiment of the evil one.

At the end of that period, Judas Maccabeas cleansed and re-dedicated the Temple and the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Light, or "Hanukkah", is said to date from that event.

In Jewish history this period is remembered as a time of very real and severe persecution, when the Gentiles oppressed the people of God, but a period which was ended by a great deliverance.

ALLUSIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

It is interesting to notice, also, that in the book of Revelation, this period is used symbolically of a period of persecution or suffering endured by God's new people, the Church, and, again, it represents a period which ends with their vindication and the defeat of their oppressor. As in Daniel, this period is expressed in terms either of 'days' or 'months' or 'years' or 'times', expressions which occur a total of 5 times.

For Example:

1. In Rev. 11:2, we read that the Holy City would be trampled i.e., violently overrun - by the Gentiles for *42 months*, which is three and a half years, or 1260 days, and this is - a clear allusion to Antiochus' persecution of Jerusalem.
2. The same chapter, v.3, mentions *1260 days*, and notice the reference to "sackcloth", the emblem of grief and mourning.
3. Verse 9 speaks of "*three days and a half*", after which God's Witnesses rise again.
4. In ch.12:6 the Church, represented as a radiant woman, is driven into the wilderness by Satan (the Dragon, ch.20:2), where she is nourished by God for *1260 days*.

It is clear that these verses refer to the same period of time, viewed from different angles and which represents a distinct period of oppression suffered by God's people. But, like that time in Jewish inter-testamental history, it is a *limited* period, because God will bring about His people's ultimate deliverance, and, at the same time, the end of the one responsible for their oppression. (Rev. 20:10).

Much more could be said, but the space is not available.

There are, of course, many books which deal in detail with the period and events we have just sketched. May I suggest that a book which is both readable and comprehensive enough to satisfy the majority of students of this period is "Israel and the Nations", by F.F. Bruce, first published in 1963, but still available.

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