

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

BIBLICAL TRUTH CONCERNING THE STATE OF ISRAEL

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PART 6: WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

Very few Christians have tried to understand how Jews view themselves, how they think, what is motivating them, and most of all, how they view the physical land of Israel and the Messiah. It is impossible to cover these subjects in a short sermon but I will give you a glimpse that will help anyone who so wishes to do a deeper study on the subject.

“...The northerners called themselves Israelites, and the southerners Judeans. Subsequently, both kingdoms were destroyed, but only the Judeans succeeded in re-establishing themselves in the old land, whereas the Israelites never restored their kingdom. Only the Judeans, therefore, played a part in later history. The word ‘Jew’ is a modification of the word ‘Judean.’ The Jews are the last remnant of the Hebrews and the Israelites, and rightfully took over whatever hopes, tasks and glories the larger group had developed...

A second reason for confining this book to the history of the Jews is that very few people know much about the history of the successors of the Hebrews. Little is to be found in modern historical writings about the Jews in connection with the Greeks, the Romans, the Middle Ages and Modern Times...”¹

This quote brings out the central teaching and thinking from the rabbinical leadership of American Jews 62 years ago, just one year prior to the establishment of the political state of Israel in 1948. The Jewish leaders did not acknowledge the story of “the Hebrews” is a story of men (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua and the prophets of old) having a personal revelation from God. They were men who were called by the living God to serve and do His bidding on the earth.

In 1947 the Jewish leadership had gathered their people around a common history, religion, rituals and the dream of once again establishing an earthly kingdom in the land of Canaan with Jerusalem as its capitol.

Let us now look at the history of the Jews who lived in Judea from the time of the return from Babylon to the birth of Jesus:

THE MACCABEAN ERA (200-150 B.C.)

Around 198 B.C. Antiochus III started his military campaign to wrestle control of Palestine from Egypt. But as he started to assert control over Palestine he

¹ Solomon Grayzel, A HISTORY OF THE JEWS, 1947, pp.6-7



encountered more and more resistance from the Jewish people living there. A priest by the name of Mattathias from the village of Modin refused to bow down and worship like the Syrians and an armed rebellion was born. In 167 B.C. Mattathias died and was replaced by his son Judah, who had taken the name Maccabee.

During the Maccabean era, the land of Judea was tossed to and fro by the wars between the remnants of the Greek Empire, Syria and Egypt. Armies would roll back and forth over Judea as the Syrians were successful and other times it was the Egyptians. For a detailed study of this period, see my booklet of compiled sermon outlines entitled, "**Teaching Series on the Prophet Daniel.**"

There were basically four different factions of Jews during this time: Hellenized Jews lining up with Syria; Jews aligning themselves with Egypt; Jews looking to Rome for help; and the Hasidim movement led by the Maccabeans, also known as the Hasmonean family.

The bloody fighting led by the Maccabeans ended in 150 B.C., and for the next ten years, Jonathan became a political leader and the high priest of the temple in Jerusalem.

SEMI-INDEPENDENCE OF JUDEA

From approximately 140 B.C. to 63 B.C. Judea was a semi-independent province of Syria. Both Syria and Egypt were feeling the impact of the Roman Empire which was expanding eastward and weakening the grip that Syria had on Judea. John Hyrcan was the first of the Jewish leaders to take the title "king." His council was called "The Sanhedrin."

It was during this time that two political parties developed in Judea, both of which are mentioned in the New Testament.

THE PHARISEES

This was a party formed by the Scribes with the political platform that there should be no expansion of new territory and a strict observance of Biblical and Talmudic laws.

THE SADDUCEES

This was a party of secular Jews who supported the king, made up the political leadership of that day and held government offices. Originally they descended from the priestly families but they developed strong political ambitions to conquer more territories and rebuild the Kingdom of Judah.

EXPANSION OF JUDAH

The descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob lived in an area south of Jerusalem that stretched into the desert known as Idumea. It was never part of Israel and there were many wars between Edom and Israel for centuries. King Hyrcan conquered Edom and forced the Edomites to convert to Judaism or die. In time the children of these Edomites became strong followers of Judaism and

the rejected bloodline of Esau became full blooded Jews through forced conversion.

King Hyrcan also turned west and expanded his kingdom to encompass the entire coastline of the Mediterranean Sea with its different seaports, in order to get control of commerce from the west.

It is interesting to note now, that the people living here were non-Jewish, including Palestinians. These conquered people were encouraged to embrace Judaism and by the second generation they were hard core Jews.

We have now established a historical fact taken from Jewish and other historical records that many people living in Judea at the time of Christ were heathens, who had converted to Judaism. The land of Israel was given to the blood descendants of Abraham, not to the heathens. Thus we can see that King Hyrcan was building a kingdom outside the will of God.

POLITICS AND MURDER

John Hyrcan died in 104 B.C. and his son Aristobulus reigned for one year. His first order of business as king was to arrest three of his brothers and send them to prison to safeguard his position. He starved two of them to death and a few months later he had the third brother murdered in the palace. Aristobulus died of alcohol abuse and disease.

A surviving brother, Alexander Jannai became king and ruled for 15 years and continued the wars to increase the territory of Judah.

In 89 B.C. King Jannai waged war against the Arabs in the south and his army was mostly destroyed. The Pharisees organized an uprising against him when he returned in a weakened condition and his soldiers killed scores of civilians in retaliation.

The Pharisees played dirty politics and requested that the Syrian king come and help them to dispose of Jannai. Thousands of soldiers from the Pharisaic party joined the Syrians and King Jannai was defeated and forced to flee into the hillsides.

Some of the Pharisee soldiers realized that the Syrians had come to stay and thousands of them left the Syrian army and joined forces with King Jannai and their combined force defeated the Syrians and the Pharisee soldiers who were still with them.

King Jannai took revenge upon the Pharisees during a banquet at the palace for the Sadducees when he had 800 Pharisees crucified while his guests ate and drank and watched their archenemies killed.

King Jannai on his death bed appointed his wife, Salome Alexandra, to be ruling Judea as queen in 76 B.C. She dismissed all political leaders from the Sadducee party and replaced them with Pharisees. During her nine year rule, the Pharisees took revenge on the Sadducees and the hate between these two groups grew in

intensity. Having this knowledge will help you understand the times during which Jesus lived in Israel.

When the Salome died, her oldest son Hyrcan was crowned as king and took the name Hyrcan II. But his brother Aristobulus with the help of the Sadducees raised an army and marched on Jerusalem. Hyrcan II was forced to abdicate the throne. Aristobulus not only became king but also served as high priest; he took the name Aristobulus II.

THE ROMAN ERA

Even though Hyrcan II had abdicated, and that Aristobulus' oldest son had married Hyrcan's daughter, Alexandra, there was still bad blood between the two brothers.

Living in Jerusalem at this time

There was an Idumean by the name of Antipater living in Jerusalem who was the son of a noble family from the old kingdom of Edom with connections to the Arabs in Idumea who hated the Jews. Antipater approached Hyrcan II and told him that he would raise an army to overthrow Aristobulus II and restore the kingdom to Hyrcan II for a price.

Hyrcan II bought into Antipater's scheme and Aristobulus II was forced to flee to Jerusalem for refuge. Both sides prepared for a long siege and appealed to Rome for help, not knowing that Rome wasn't interested in either one of the brothers, but they wanted to make Judea a Roman province ruled from Damascus in Syria.

The Roman general Pompey was in charge of the East received a request from both brothers for help. Aristobulus II sent him a vine made of pure gold from the Temple while Antipater negotiated for Hyrcan. Antipater told the general that if he would support Hyrcan, Judah would be turned into a Roman province.

But there was also a third party sent to Pompey from Judah, a delegation of Pharisees, who pleaded with the general to get rid of both brothers and allow Judea to go back to be ruled by a high priest.

While Pompey told the three delegations that he would consider the different requests, he ordered his army to march into Judea. Aristobulus II realized that he had been lured into a trap and fled to Jerusalem, where he fortified himself with his troops. The Roman army encircled Jerusalem and started a siege.

Aristobulus II realized that he could not fight the Romans and wanted to surrender but the Sadducee leadership refused to surrender and open the gates to the city. A fight broke out inside the Jerusalem with the Pharisees fighting the Sadducees and the Aristobulus II fled into the Temple grounds. The Romans breached the city walls and entered the city and then stormed the Temple. They showed no mercy and some 12,000 Jews died that day, including the priests officiating at the temple. Pompey went into the temple and desecrated the holy of holies.

Pompey completely dismissed the Pharisees and told Hyrcan II that he would no longer be a king but he could rule Judea as a Roman province and share power with Antipater who later used this occasion to usurp power and become the founder of the Herod family that ruled Judea at the time of Christ.

Even though Hyrcan II was no longer a king, but an “ethnarch,” (“tetrarch in the King James Bible, meaning ruler of people) he also held the office as high priest. Antipater and his two sons, Phasael and Herod were the real rulers. Phasael was the governor of Jerusalem and Herod was the governor over Galilee.

Aristobulus and his two sons were taken to Rome, where they marched in the victory parade for General Pompey when he returned to celebrate his conquest of Judea and Syria.

REBELLION AGAINST ROME

A revolt broke out when it became clear to the population in Judea that they had been betrayed and were now Roman taxpayers. The Romans were ruthless in putting down this rebellion and Antipater and his sons showed no mercy but executed as many Jewish rebels as they could.

Later there was a civil war in Rome when Julius Caesar and Pompey fought to see who would be the next emperor. Antipater lined up with Pompey, and in order to weaken Pompey in the East, Julius Caesar released Aristobulus and gave him money to start a rebellion against Pompey and Antipater in Judea.

Since all political leaders rely upon intelligence services, Antipater found out the plan and made an arrangement to have Aristobulus murdered with poison in Greece en route to Judea. His son Alexander was also executed.

When Pompey lost the fight, Antipater and Hyrcan switched sides and were given jurisdiction over Jews living outside Judea as a reward.

Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 B.C. and a new civil war broke out in Rome. Brutus and Cassius contended with Octavius, who became the next ruler of Rome and was known as Augustus Caesar (63 B.C to 14 A.D.) This was the Roman Emperor that ruled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Antipater had joined the losing party again, but as a good politician with no scruples, he went with a recommendation from Hyrcan II to meet the new ruler as a delegation of Jews asked the Romans to remove Antipater from power. Dirty politics prevailed and Antipater and his sons were once again reinstated while part of the Jewish delegation was executed.

MORE BLOODSHED

Once civil war was over in the Roman Empire, it took a number of years before Octavius had consolidated all power into his own hand. For a time he had to share power with two other men and it made the Roman occupation in the East very weak.

The last son of Aristobulus II, Antigonus, had fled to the Old Persian Empire, which had a large Jewish population. When he realized that the political and military situation had deteriorated for the Romans in Judea, he enlisted the political leadership in the Persian Empire to send an army to invade Judea and drive out the Romans.

The Roman garrison in Judea was defeated and Antigonus lured Hyrcan II and Phasaël into his camp to deal with them. When Phasaël realized the situation, he committed suicide and Antigonus cut off the lobe of one ear from his uncle Hyrcan, which forever disqualified him from being a high priest since a high priest could not have any deformities. Hyrcan was then taken east by the Persian army.

It was 40 B.C. when Antigonus entered Jerusalem and proclaimed himself as king over Judea and high priest. He took the name of Mattathias and reigned for two years.

HEROD'S COMEBACK

When Antigonus invited Hyrcan II and Phasaël to a peace conference, Herod refused to go and took his entire family south into the Negev desert. He left his family there in a fortress and traveled to Egypt to see the Roman ruler Antony. But he had left for Rome and Herod took a ship that brought him to Rome.

Herod was well received by Octavian and Antony and they agreed to make him king over Judea. He was confirmed by the Roman Senate and orders were given to the Roman military leadership in Syria to send an army to Judea and take control. Jerusalem was besieged for three months, and when the Roman army took it, there was a great slaughter of Jewish people.

Herod begged the Romans to stop killing Jews in order to have some left over to rule. However, Herod did request for Antigonus to be executed.

THE REIGN OF HEROD

The reign of Herod began in 37 B.C. and would last until 4 B.C. Since the people who later would change calendars made mistakes, there is a discrepancy of some seven years, and therefore Jesus was really born in 7 B.C.

King Herod became known as "Herod the Great" but there was nothing great about this man, he was a murderer, thief, and a hater of God.

One of Herod's first acts as king was to murder 40 of the most prominent Sadducees and take possession of their estates and wealth. He used this money to pay bribes to Roman officers and soldiers who had done the killing for him. He had a mercenary force protecting him that consisted of Jews from abroad since he did not trust the Jews from Judea.

Herod was paranoid and went to any length to protect his power as king. No one in his family was safe as he murdered his own wife Mariamne, two of their sons, a brother-in-law, Hyrcan II, and many more.

He stripped the Sanhedrin of all political power and both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were removed from political power and reduced to “religious” parties.

As a result of this brutal oppression, an underground party of rebellion came into being known as the “Zealots.”

When Herod was confronted by the fact that the Jewish Messiah had been born in Bethlehem, he ordered the murder of all male children two years and younger.

“Herod endowed his realm with massive fortresses and splendid cities, of which the two greatest were new, and largely pagan, foundations: the port of Caesarea Palaestinae on the coast between Joppa (Jaffa) and Haifa, which was afterward to become the capital of Roman Palestine; and Sebaste on the long-desolate site of ancient Samaria. In Jerusalem he built the fortress of Antonia, portions of which may still be seen beneath the convents on the Via Dolorosa, and a magnificent palace (of which part survives in the citadel). His most grandiose creation was the Temple, which he wholly rebuilt. The great outer court, 35 acres (14 hectares) in extent, is still visible as Al-Ḥaram ash-Sharīf. He also embellished foreign cities—Beirut, Damascus, Antioch, Rhodes—and many towns. Herod patronized the Olympic Games, whose president he became. In his own kingdom he could not give full rein to his love of magnificence, for fear of offending the Pharisees, the leading faction of Judaism, with whom he was always in conflict because they regarded him as a foreigner. Herod undoubtedly saw himself not merely as the patron of grateful pagans but also as the protector of Jewry outside of Palestine, whose Gentile hosts he did all in his power to conciliate.

Unfortunately, there was a dark and cruel streak in Herod's character that showed itself increasingly as he grew older. His mental instability, moreover, was fed by the intrigue and deception that went on within his own family. Despite his affection for Mariamne, he was prone to violent attacks of jealousy; his sister Salome (not to be confused with her great-niece, Herodias' daughter Salome) made good use of his natural suspicions and poisoned his mind against his wife in order to wreck the union. In the end Herod murdered Mariamne, her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother, a woman of the vilest stamp who had often aided his sister Salome's schemes. Besides Doris and Mariamne, Herod had eight other wives and had children by six of them. He had 14 children.

In his last years Herod suffered from arteriosclerosis. He had to repress a revolt, became involved in a quarrel with his Nabataean neighbours, and finally lost the favour of Augustus. He was in great pain and in mental and physical disorder. He altered his will three times and finally disinherited and killed his firstborn, Antipater. The slaying, shortly before his death, of the infants of Bethlehem was wholly consistent with the disarray into which

he had fallen. After an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, Herod died. His final testament provided that, subject to Augustus' sanction, his realm would be divided among his sons: Archelaus should be king of Judaea and Samaria, with Philip and Antipas sharing the remainder as tetrarchs.”²

THE MESSIAH IS COMING

After more than 400 years of political instability, infighting, rebellion, wars and no central leadership but scribes and rabbis who fought among themselves, the people living in Judea were totally disillusioned. Their faith in God was gone but still lived in a religious system where the Pharisees believed in a life after death while the Sadducees stated that there is no life after death and there are no judgments by God. They had a new temple with daily sacrifices but there was no power or hope, just an old religious system governed by the Talmud and the Cabbala.

JESUS FINALLY ARRIVED

He was not born in Herod's palace or to one of the prominent Jewish leaders but to a virgin who was engaged to a simple carpenter from Galilee. He was born in a stable; no wonder the Jews had a hard time to accepting Him as the Messiah. **Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38**

JOHN THE BAPTIST

The Jewish people who were clinging to the prophecies of the Old Testament knew that God would send a messenger to prepare them prior to the coming of the Messiah. **Malachi 4:1-6**

After being silent for more than 400 years, God spoke to a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth. **Luke 1:5-25**

God didn't ask the Jews for permission to send the Messiah nor did He consult with the religious leaders or the political leaders; instead, everybody was simply informed that this is what is happening with the option to accept or reject God's offer!

SUPERNATURAL EVENTS

God would not allow the Jewish people to claim ignorance and the birth of the Messiah was heralded in such a way that people could not deny that something supernatural had taken place. **Luke 2:1-20**

It was heralded in the temple. **Luke 2:22-39**

It was made known to King Herod and all the political leaders in the palace. **Matthew 2:1-17**

² Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008

Twelve years after his birth, Jesus made a visit to the temple as a child and astonished the religious leaders of the day. **Luke 2:42-52**

The Jews living at the time of Jesus were looking for a Messiah that would have supernatural power, who would rally the Jewish people to drive out the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom as in the days of King David. Jesus did not fit their preconceived ideas for the Messiah.

PREPARING THE WAY

Some 30 years after the birth of Jesus, his cousin, John, began laying the groundwork for Jesus and caused quite a stir in Judea. **Matthew 3:1-12**

You can see the mindset of the people when they asked if John the Baptist was the Messiah. **Luke 3:1-15**

When John introduced the term, “the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire,” the people had no clue what he was talking about. **Luke 3:16-18**

SUMMARY

The family of Herod, blood descendants of Esau, rejected the thought of a divine Messiah. Any Jew claiming to be the Messiah was hunted down and killed.

The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the dead and therefore a Messiah was useless to them unless he became a temporary earthly ruler and kicked out the Romans.

The Pharisees believed in life after death and a Messiah to them meant two things: a man who would drive out the Romans and establish a holy Jewish kingdom on this earth and making them ruling with the Messiah.

The common people were confused and didn't understand that someone must die for their sins and of the need to repent and live a holy life. They were like sheep without a shepherd. **Matthew 9:35-38**

WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?

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?