

Unpacking the Book

Lesson #18: The Intertestamental Period

I. Introduction

Between the last writings of the Old Testament (Book of Malachi – after 515 BC) and the appearance of Christ, there is a 400 year period of time known as the “silent years.”

Israel was controlled by the Persian Empire from 532-332 BC. During that time, the Jews were allowed to practice their religion as they saw fit.

II. The History of the Intertestamental Period

A. The Greek Period: 323 - 167 BC

1. Alexander the Great (355 – 323 BC)

- a. He was 19 years old when his father Phillip was murdered (336 BC). During the next 13 years, Alexander gained control of Asia Minor, Egypt and Palestine.
- b. As he conquered territory, he introduced Greek ideas and culture (Hellenization). He founded Greek cities and under his rule, the Greek language became universal.
- c. Upon his death (got malaria and died at age of 32), his empire was divided among his generals.
 - 1) Egypt – Ptolmies
 - 2) Syria and the East – Seleucids
 - 3) Macedonia – under Antigonus and Cassander
 - 4) Phrygia & Thrace – under Lysimachus
- d. There were numerous wars between Egypt and Syria with Palestine caught in the middle.

2. The Ptolomies

They were very interested in studying Greek culture in Palestine and Egypt. The Jews fared well under Ptolomy. During this time period many Jews moved to Egypt (Alexandria). Through their influence, we got the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint).

3. Selucids

In 198 BC, Palestine came under the rule of Antiochus III for a short period of time. The Jews were able to maintain their religious life (temple sacrifices, etc.)

But in 175 BC, Antiochus IV took control and the Jews were persecuted. He sold priesthood positions to the highest bidder, plundered the temple and forbid the worship of Yahweh.

B. The Hasmonean Period (The Period of Independence): 167-63 BC

There was significant Jewish resistance to the acts of the “Mad Man.” A Jewish leader named Mattathias and his five sons became known as “The Hammer” (The Maccabees). Under their leadership, Jerusalem was occupied, the Temple was cleansed and rededicated. (Festival of lights – Feast of Hanukkah)

Note that during this period, there were 3 factions of Jews.

1. The Hellenists – deeply impacted by Greek culture
2. The Hasidim (the Pious Ones) – not interested in politics but wanted religious freedom
3. The Maccabees – involved in guerilla warfare

C. The Roman Period 63 BC – 5B

1. Herod (The Great) became governor of Galilee in 39 BC. He was the king who ordered the execution of the babies in Jerusalem (Matt. 2:16-18)
2. At his death his son, Herod Antipas, ruled Galilee and took the title of King. He was reigning when Joseph brought his family home from Egypt (Matt. 2:22) and was responsible for the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29)
3. Herod Agrippa I (Herod Antipas’ nephew) – The king who put James to death in Acts 12:1
4. Herod Agrippa II is the king mentioned in Acts 25 where he hears the defense of Paul.
5. Then came direct rule by Roman procurators (who were under the control of the governor of Syria).

III. The Literature of the Intertestamental Period

A. The Apocrypha

The term literally means “hidden.” It refers to the 70+ books not accepted to be canonical. For Protestants, they are not accepted as God-inspired.

“Apocrypha – books which are not regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, and yet are profitable and good to read.” (Martin Luther)

Examples: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, I and II Maccabees, etc. The Catholic bible includes 13 of these books

Reasons why evangelical Christians have not accepted the Apocrypha books as canonical:

1. They are never quoted in the New Testament. No written claims inspiration.
2. No councils of the entire church (during the first four centuries) favored the Apocrypha books (Catholics recognized them at Council of Trent in 1546 AD).
3. Teaching is unbiblical: Prayers for the dead (II Macc. 12:43-45), salvation by works (Tobit 12:9) etc.
4. They contain geographical, chronological and historical mistakes.

B. The Pseudepigrapha

The term literally means “false writing.” They are attributed to people who lived in another time period. Catholics and Greek Orthodox Church refer to these books as “Deuterocanonical” (a Second Canon). There are a large number of these writings that cover topics that range from apocalyptic to devotional.

A word about apocalyptic literature:

1. Characteristics: mysterious, symbolic, revelatory
2. Themes: human history (this age and the age to come), angels and demons, end times, messianic kingdom, judgment.
3. Biblical examples: Daniel and Revelation
4. Non Canonical examples: I Enoch, II Esdras

C. The Qumran Scrolls (Dead Sea Scrolls)

Written (or copied) between 200 BC and 70 AD

Discovered between 1947 and 1960 in caves along the Western Dead Sea Shore

“Probably the Dead Sea Scrolls have had the greatest biblical impact. They have provided Old Testament manuscripts approximately 1000 years older than our previous oldest manuscript. The Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated that the Old Testament was accurately transmitted during this interval. In addition, they provide a wealth of information on the times leading up to and during the life of Christ.” Dr. Bryant Wood (Associates for Biblical Research)

IV. So What?

Don't miss the significance of the Intertestamental Period. You can compare many of these historical events to things predicted by Daniel (See Chapters 2, 7, 8 & 11).

Remember: 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Between the Testaments

Malachi c. 430 B.C.

THE PERSIAN PERIOD 450-330 B.C.

For about 200 years after Nehemiah's time the Persians controlled Judah, but the Jews were allowed to carry on their religious observances and were not interfered with. During this time Judah was ruled by high priests who were responsible to the Jewish government.

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD 330-166 B.C.

In 333 B.C. the Persian armies stationed in Macedonia were defeated by Alexander the Great. He was convinced that Greek culture was the one force that could unify the world. Alexander permitted the Jews to observe their laws and even granted them exemption from tribute or tax during their sabbath years. When he built Alexandria in Egypt, he encouraged Jews to live there and gave them some of the same privileges he gave his Greek subjects. The Greek conquest prepared the way for the translation of the OT into Greek (Septuagint version) c. 250 B.C.

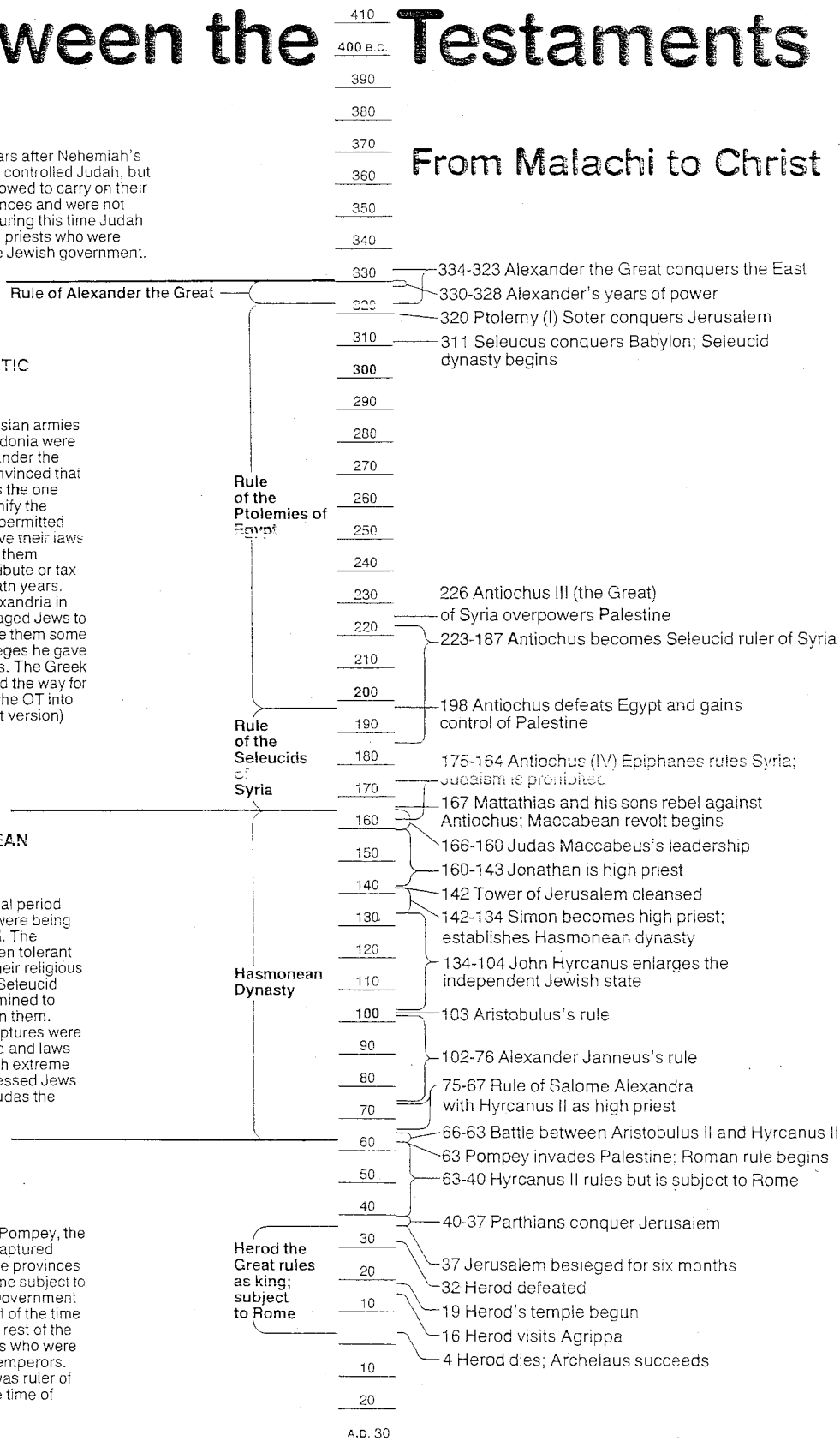
THE HASMONEAN PERIOD 166-63 B.C.

When this historical period began, the Jews were being greatly oppressed. The Ptolemies had been tolerant of the Jews and their religious practices but the Seleucid rulers were determined to force Hellenism on them. Copies of the Scriptures were ordered destroyed and laws were enforced with extreme cruelty. The oppressed Jews revolted, led by Judas the Maccabee.

THE ROMAN PERIOD 63 B.C.

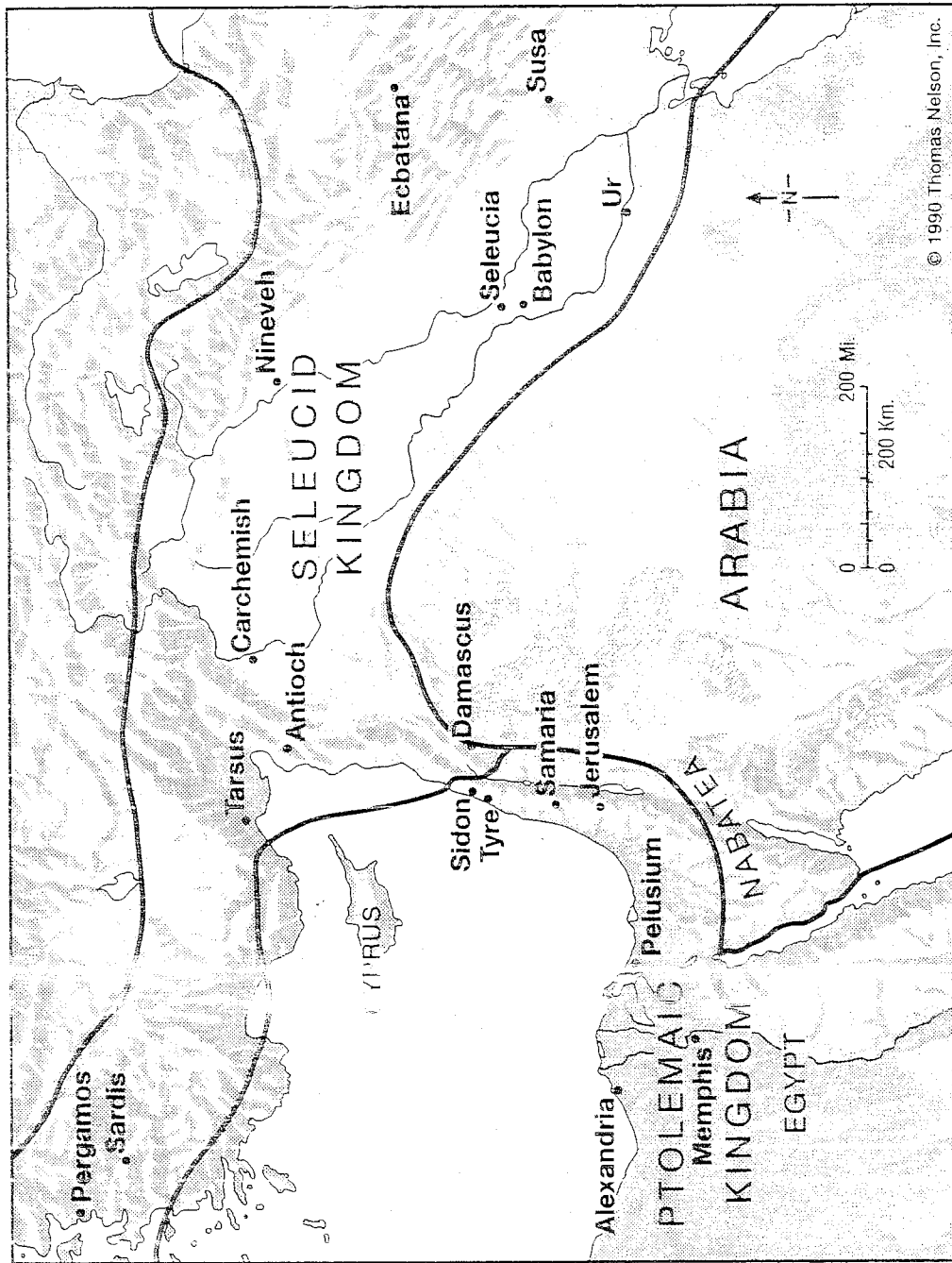
In the year 63 B.C. Pompey, the Roman general, captured Jerusalem, and the provinces of Palestine became subject to Rome. The local government was entrusted part of the time to princes and the rest of the time to procurators who were appointed by the emperors. Herod the Great was ruler of all Palestine at the time of Christ's birth.

From Malachi to Christ



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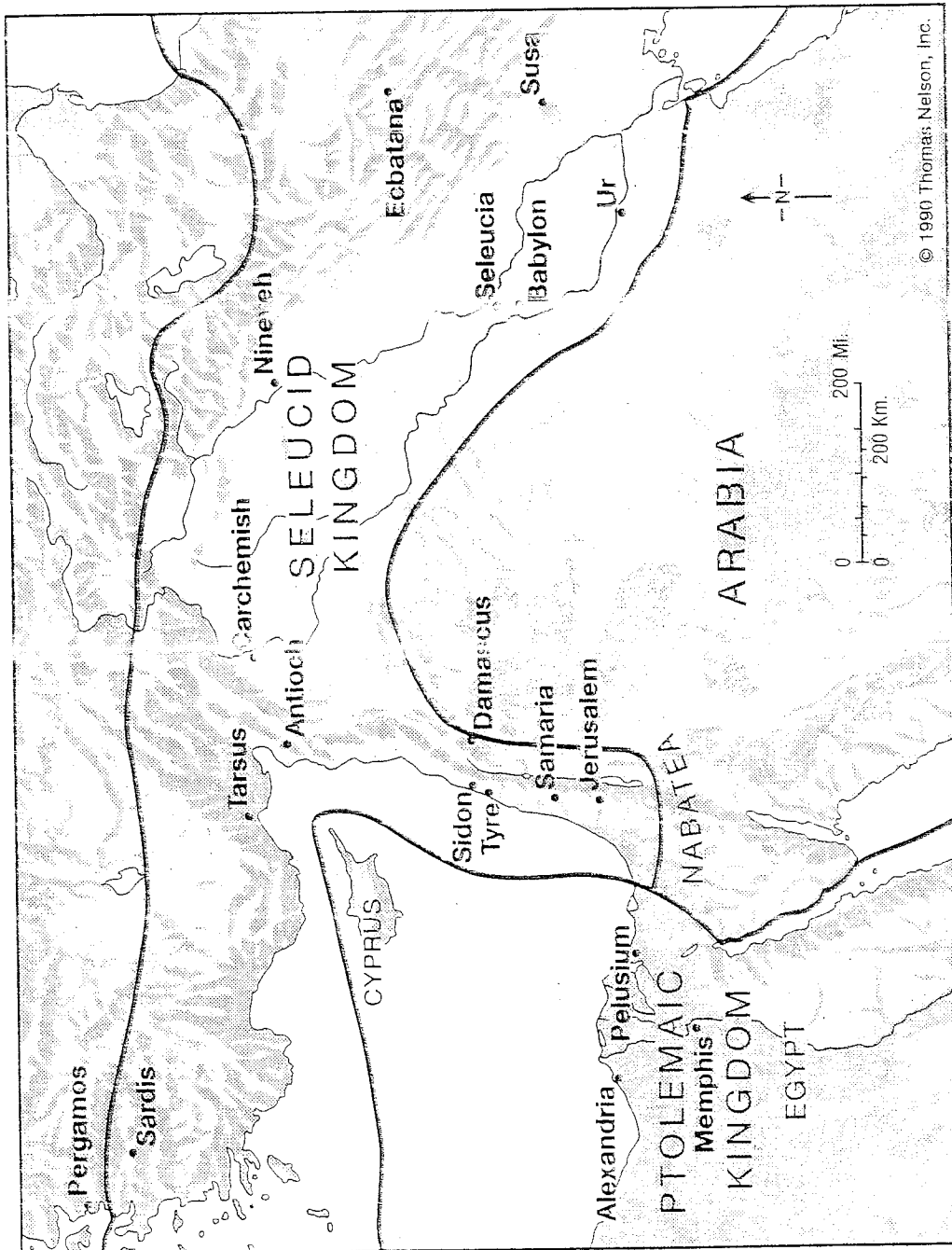
Ptolemaic Control of Palestine



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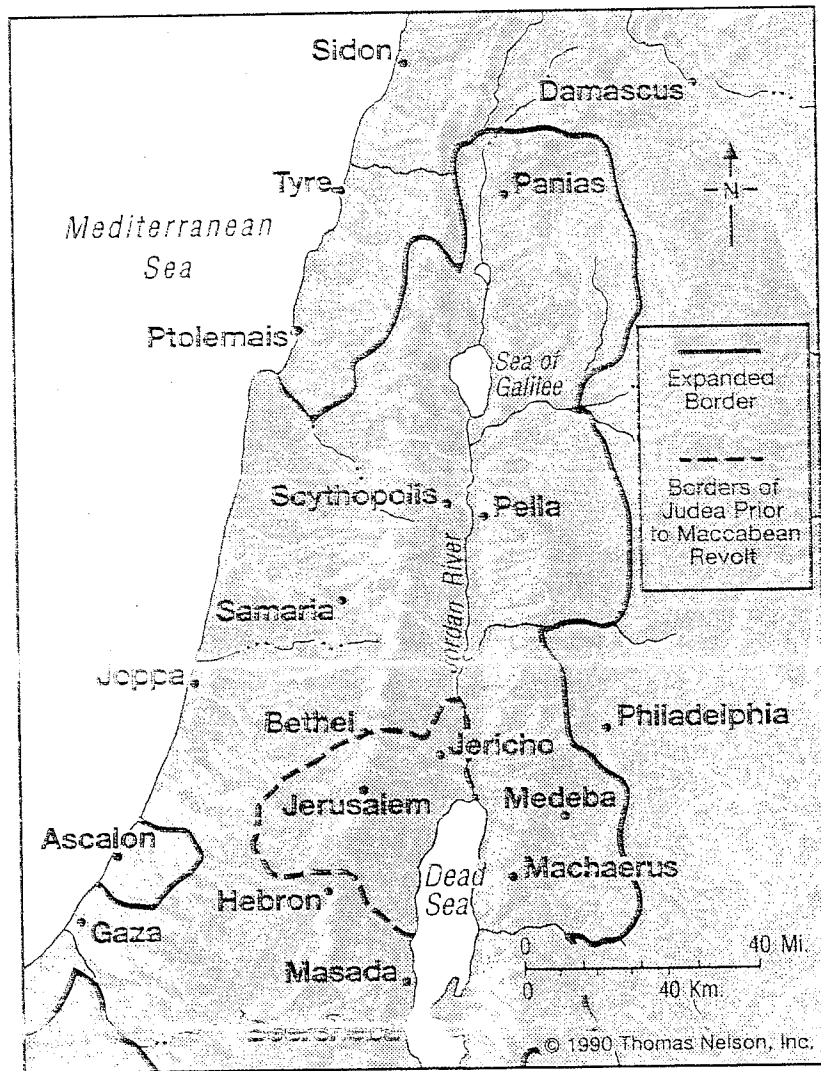
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Seleucid Control of Palestine



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Expansion of Palestine Under the Maccabees



Roman Control of Palestine

