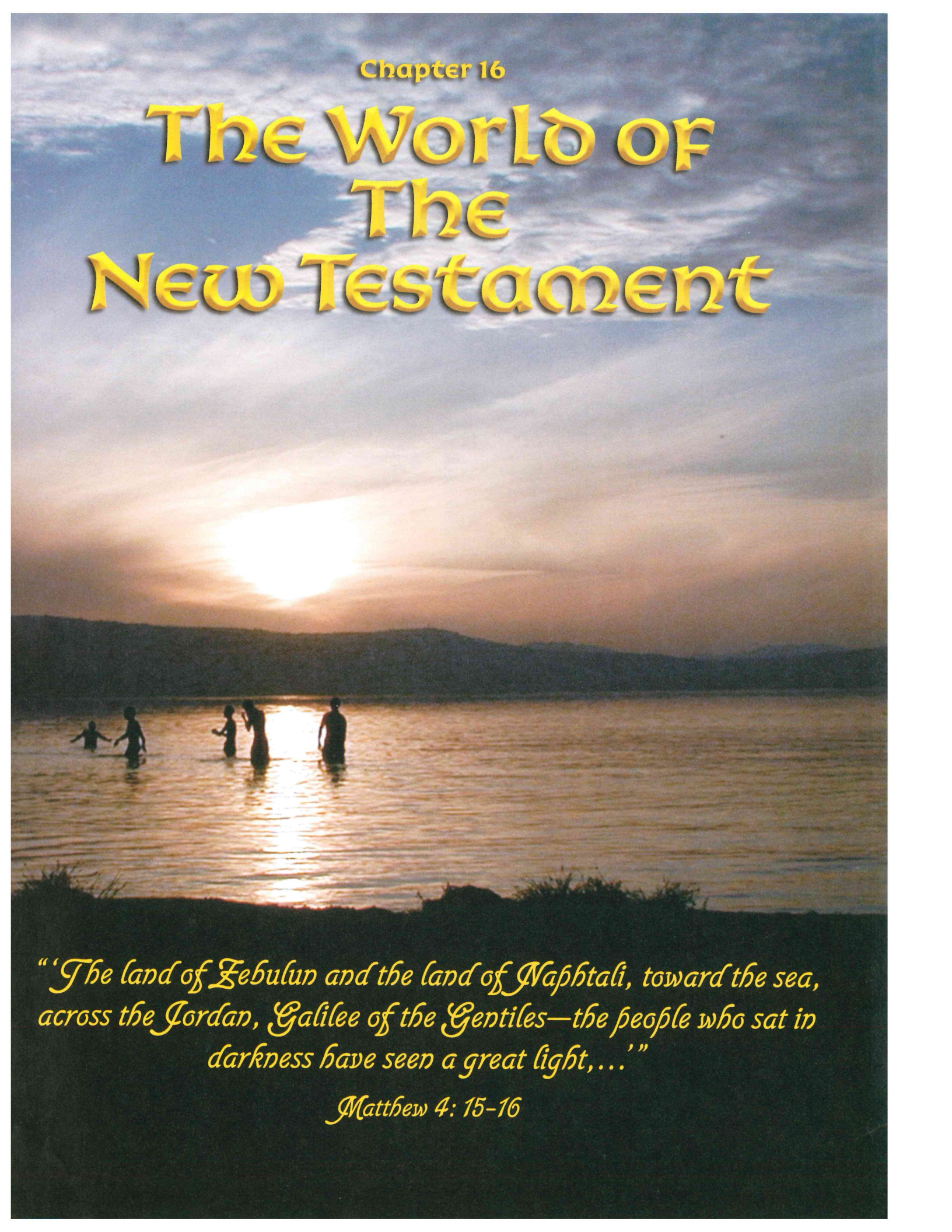


Chapter 16

# The World of The New Testament

A photograph of a sunset over a large body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and reflecting on the water. Several people are silhouetted against the water, standing in the shallow part. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

*“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea,  
across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in  
darkness have seen a great light,...”*

*Matthew 4: 15-16*

Chapter 16

# The World of The New Testament



**Read**

**Matthew**  
23:1 - 39

**Acts**  
23:6 - 10

**Isaiah**  
9:1 - 7

The amazing successes of the Maccabees revealed the power of God. Once again there was an independent Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Temple had been purified, and the worship of the True God could go on again as it was prescribed in the Law of Moses. The high priest was also the secular ruler of his people, so once again the state and the church became one.

## The Prophecies Fulfilled?

When John Hyrcanus became high priest, he decided to take the next step. He would purify the whole country of pagan influences. He gave everyone in the country a choice: be circumcised or leave. Being circumcised, of course, meant taking on the whole Law of Moses, with all its rituals and requirements. The country was “Judaized”—made Jewish—almost overnight. To

110 B.C.	80 B.C.	50 B.C.	20 B.C.	1 B.C.
Alexander Jannaeus is king and high priest 103-76	Salome Alexander is queen 76-67; Her son succeeds her 67-63	63 Pompey captures Jerusalem; Judea becomes a subject of Rome	Herod “The Great” is King of Judea 37-4	
106 John Hyrcanus dies; leaves priesthood to son Aristobulus I and government to his wife; Aristobulus kills his mother; he reigns as king 104-103		63-40 Hyrcanus II is high priest and national leader; 47 Herod is appointed governor of Galilee by Marc Antony	40 Antigonus II seizes Judea with Parthian help; Herod escapes to Rome and is named King of Judea by Augustus	20-18 Herod Rebuilds the Temple
107 John Hyrcanus destroys the city of Samaria and the Samaritan Temple on Mt. Gerizim			40-37 Herod retakes Palestine and Jerusalem with Roman Troops	

make sure God was worshiped in the right way, Hyrcanus also destroyed the temple of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim—an act that earned the undying hatred of the Samaritans.

As a military leader, Hyrcanus conquered almost all the territories that had belonged to the Davidic kingdom. The amazing restoration was continuing: now Israel's territory was intact again. It looked as though all the promises of the prophets were coming true.

There was only one more logical step, and the successor of Hyrcanus took it. In the year 106 B.C., John Hyrcanus died, and Aristobulus assumed the office of high priest. Then he did what many people had been waiting for: he proclaimed himself king.

Now, it seemed, the promises of the prophets had been fulfilled. Israel was whole again, and a king reigned in Jerusalem.

But one thing was completely wrong. It was not a king of the line of David: Aristobulus and his successors were Levites. The prophets had all promised that the Lord's Anointed would be from the tribe of Judah and the descendants of David.

The united Israel was no easier to maintain than it had been in Rehoboam's time. Within a very short time, Israel became deeply divided between two powerful parties that had grown up: the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

## The Pharisees

**H**ow could the Jews be faithful to God when Judea was a small province of a huge pagan empire? There was more than one way to answer that question. One group of prominent scholars decided that the best way to stay faithful was to build a wall around themselves and keep out the Gentiles. They were called "the separated," which is "Perushim" in Hebrew, from which we get "Pharisees."

For the Pharisees, the only way for Jews to be faithful was to keep themselves pure. The Law alone wasn't enough: the Pharisees taught that even ordinary Jewish families should imitate the complicated and ritualistic purity of the priests in Jerusalem. They legislated more and more customs and oral traditions, adding rituals like cleansing their hands before meals. (They washed their hands not to get rid of dirt, but to get rid of any chance of ritual defilement.)

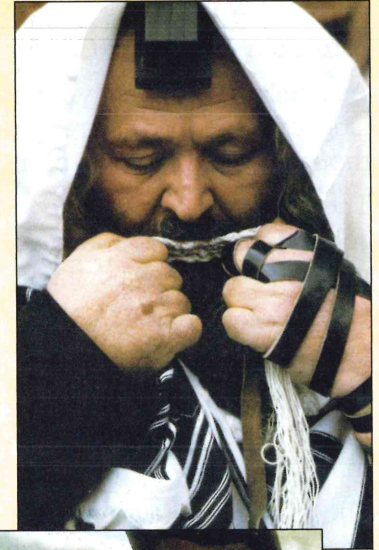
Of course, the Pharisees refused to associate with Gentiles. Even entering a Gentile's house would defile a Jew, they taught. To distinguish themselves from Gentiles, they emphasized and exaggerated their distinctly Jewish customs.

There were good reasons for the Pharisees to believe what they believed. Anyone who knew the history of Israel could see how associating with pagans had led to trouble. But the Pharisees made the Law an intolerable burden. As time went on, they emphasized the external signs of separation more and more. Among them there were those who exaggerated the details of Jewish national dress, wearing big phylacteries (boxes with verses of Scripture that pious Jews wore when praying) and conspicuous fringes (the fringes that the law of Moses commands in Nm 15:38). They made sure everyone was keeping the Sabbath by the strictest possible interpretation. They also enforced a strict interpretation of the dietary laws. At the same time, though, they were perfectly capable of evading the spirit of the law when it suited them, inventing interpretations that helped them cheat the poor or even their own parents.

**They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. (Jesus Christ in Mt 23: 4-7)**

## Judaism In New Testament Times

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, "The Jews... had three philosophies... that of the Essenes, that of the Sadducees, and thirdly, that of the group called the Pharisees" (*Jewish Antiquities* XVIII,11).



The Pharisees emphasized the external signs of separation from the Gentiles. Among them were those who exaggerated the details of Jewish national dress, wearing phylacteries (boxes containing verses of Scripture) on their foreheads and fringes that the law of Moses commands in Nm 15: 38.

The Pharisees were the forerunners of the rabbis. By applying written Torah to daily life, the Pharisees made practicing the faith possible in places far from the city.

The Sadducees were the party of political power. First under the Maccabees, then under the Romans. A council called the Sanhedrin made decisions regarding the day-to-day governing of Judah. While the Pharisees had some position in the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees were its dominant membership.

A group of religious Judeans protested the combining of the kingship and the high priesthood by the Maccabees. They believed that the Temple under the Sadducees had become hopelessly corrupt, so they moved out of Jerusalem and established a small community at Qumran, in the desert beside the Dead Sea. Their writings (the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the 1940's) reveal a community that saw themselves as pure and righteous, in comparison to the tainted Sadducees and (probably) the Pharisees. There is a theory that St. John the Baptist was an Essene.

A group known as Zealots also functioned in the first century A.D. in Judea. They may have ignited the uprising of 66 A.D. similar to the Maccabee's revolution some 230 years earlier.

By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were a very powerful sect. Many of the Jews accepted that the Pharisees were as righteous as they claimed to be. But many of the poor resented the heavy burdens of ritual that the Pharisees laid on them.

The Pharisees had come up with a successful answer to the question of how the Jewish religion could survive in a Gentile empire, but it was an answer that depended on rejecting the Gentiles completely. They had to forget or reject the promise of the Davidic covenant and of the prophets: that Jerusalem would be a center of worship for all nations, not just the Jews. When Jesus came and began to fulfill that promise by drawing the Gentiles to God, the Pharisees immediately recognized that he was preaching a religion that was inclusive, not exclusive. They hated him for that.

### The Sadducees

On the other side of almost every question were the Sadducees. They were the heirs of Zadok, Solomon's priest, who were supposed to have been the priests forever in Jerusalem. They thought that the best way for the Jewish religion to survive was by cooperating with the Gentiles. Although the Pharisees were revered by the Jewish public, the Sadducees were the ones who had the most power in the government. Naturally, the Pharisees hated them.

The Sadducees had very different ideas of religion from the Pharisees. For the Sadducees, only the books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—were canonical Scripture. They did not believe in any life after death, or in any kind of resurrection from the dead. They did not believe in angels or spirits. Since they rejected everything except the Torah, the Sadducees naturally rejected all the Pharisees' traditional interpretations of and additions to the Law.

*The Pharisees and many of the Lord's contemporaries hoped for the resurrection. Jesus teaches it firmly. To the Sadducees who deny it he answers, "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mk 12: 24; cf. Jn 11: 24; Acts 23: 6). Faith in the resurrection rests on faith in God who "is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Mk 12: 27). (CCC 993)*

### After The Maccabees

The freedom gained under the Maccabees could not last forever. Even if Israel had been united, the great empires of the world would hardly have left such a strategically important place alone. But Israel was not united. It was split into warring parties, and the internal dissent was a wedge that outsiders were very willing to make use of.

Even the kings contributed to the disunity. More than once the throne was disputed by rival family members, which again led to civil war and chaos.

So when Rome, the new superpower in the Mediterranean, expanded into Palestine, Judea fell without much of a fight. At first the Jewish kings kept their throne as Roman tributaries. But in the year 40 B.C., an ambitious and ruthless thug, Herod the Great, managed to persuade the Romans to give him the throne of Judea. He established himself on the throne by besieging Jerusalem (with a Roman army of 60,000 to back him up) and massacring many of the residents. That set the tone for his long reign, a bloody tyranny that would inflame the anti-Roman hatred of much of the population.



The Ark of the Covenant image carved on a stone from an ancient synagogue in Capernaum.

## Herod The Great

By almost any standard, Herod was insane. He murdered three of his own sons in such horrible ways that one Roman general said he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son. But Herod was a crafty lunatic who knew how to grasp power and keep it. And the Romans cared little for how many people he murdered, as long as he kept the tribute flowing into Rome on schedule. Just to make sure, though, Herod sent lavish gifts to prominent Romans to keep himself in favor with them.

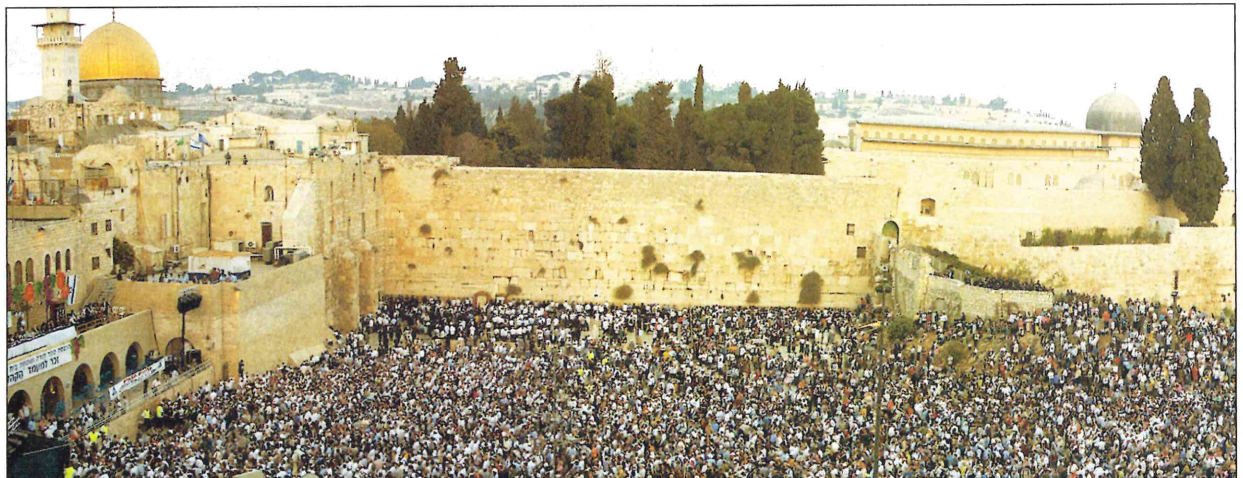
Herod was not even Jewish, but he did his best to look like a Davidic king. Although he was an Edomite, he spread the story that he was actually a Jew returned from the Exile. He rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem on a magnificent scale. He had multiple wives, just like Solomon. He also was careful to subsidize the Temple priests generously, which meant that most of the influential priests supported him.

Herod might have been ruthless, but he knew how to spend money. He was a talented architect (or he took credit for the work of other talented architects) who built magnificent palaces, fortresses, and public buildings all over his kingdom.

His greatest work was his new Temple, which by all accounts was more glorious even than Solomon's. It was such a spectacle that pilgrims came from all over the known world just to see it. (In Acts 8, for example, we read of a wealthy court official who had come all the way from Ethiopia.) While they were there, they spent their money in Jerusalem, which helped keep the economy healthy.

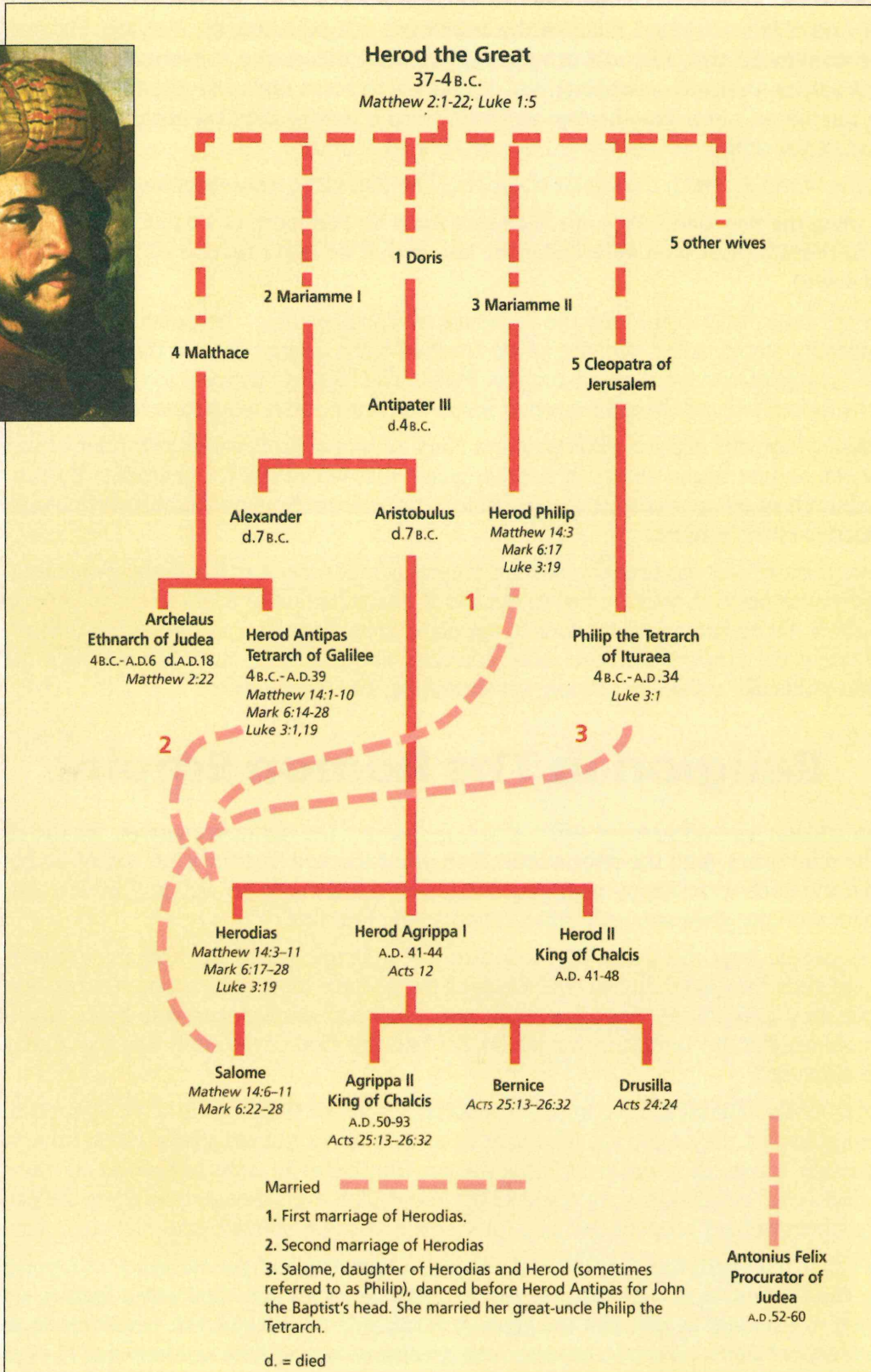
In fact, the combination of Roman peace, worldwide trade, and Herod's expensive building programs brought on an economic boom like nothing Israel had seen before. It must have seemed to many Jews that the prophets' promises had finally been fulfilled. Herod was a bloody tyrant, but when had God insisted on perfection? Even David was an adulterer. Israel was united and rich, the Temple was more glorious than ever, and people from all the nations were coming to see Jerusalem. Perhaps Herod was the promised Messiah. He would be known as Herod "the Great"—not because he was universally admired, but because his reign was so prosperous in comparison with the reigns of his successors.

When Herod the Great died, the Romans split his kingdom four ways among his surviving sons. In Greek, the split kingdom was called the "Tetrarchy," which means "rule of four." Herod Antipas, one of Herod the Great's sons, ruled over Galilee during the ministry of Jesus Christ.



Worshippers at the Western Wall, also called the Wailing Wall, a surviving outer courtyard wall of Herod's Temple. The Western Wall continues to have a powerful hold on the devotion of Jews from all over the world. For centuries, millions have come as tourists and pilgrims to touch the Wall with their hands, leave written prayers in its crevices, and feel the sanctity that emanates from it.

## The Herods' Family Tree



## When The Time Had Fully Come

**B**y the end of Herod's reign, many of the Jews were still expecting the Messiah, but many others were convinced that Herod's temple represented the divine fulfillment of prophecy. The squabbling parties were still squabbling, and occasional terrorist raids disrupted the tranquility of the province, but Herod's iron fist—backed up by Rome, the world's greatest power—managed to keep order most of the time.

This was the world in which the Christ was born. The Messiah came, signifying the fullness of time.

**But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.  
(Gal 4: 4-5)**

Why had the time “fully come” for the Incarnation? For one thing, the political state of the world was remarkably stable. After decades of destructive wars, a large part of the civilized world was under the control of one great world-empire: Rome. The “Roman peace” (*pax Romana* in Latin, the language of Rome) was just beginning when Jesus was born, and it would last for hundreds of years.

When Caesar Augustus defeated Pompey and Mark Anthony, he became sole ruler of most of the known world, and he began an era of relative peace that would last for centuries. By the time the Christian Church began to spread, it was possible to travel from Britain to Arabia without ever leaving the boundaries of the Empire.

In many ways travel was easier in the Roman Empire at that time than it is in the same area now. We can get from one place to another faster; but the Romans had no borders to cross, no checkpoints to worry about, no currency conversions to calculate. From Spain to Palestine, from Britain to Africa, it was all one great Empire, with the same currency and the same laws. But although the Roman Empire was politically stable, its religion was crumbling into irrelevance.

## Religion In The Roman Empire

**R**oman religion was very businesslike. If you performed the right ceremonies, for the right gods, at the right times, with the right words, then you expected that the gods would be happy with you. And if the gods were happy with you, then everything would go well in your life. Any deeper involvement with the gods was only superstition to the Romans.

As long as people kept the peace and followed a few simple rules, the Romans allowed them to worship any gods they liked. In fact, the Romans themselves often paid tribute to the local gods of the people they conquered. Augustus, who was emperor when Jesus was born, had sacrifices offered for himself at the Temple in Jerusalem. For him, the God of the Jews was just one more local god to be appeased.

Many philosophers did not believe in the traditional Roman or Greek gods at all. Some thought that there were gods, but they were too far above us to care about human affairs. Many others believed in a single first cause: they came to monotheism (the belief in only one God) by pure reason. Without God's own revelation, they could never know God, even though they knew he existed. But the philosophers helped prepare the way for God's revelation when it came through Jesus Christ.

**Man's faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God. But for man to be able to enter into real intimacy with him, God willed both to reveal himself to man and to give him the grace of being able to welcome this revelation in faith. The proofs of God's existence, however, can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason. (CCC 35)**



## Herod's Sons Inherit His Kingdom: The "Tetrarchy"



The Arbel Cliff, the Plain of Gennesaret and the Sea of Galilee.

The Arbel Cliff rises 1,300 feet above the Valley of the Doves, a major passageway of the times. From the cliff, the whole Sea of Galilee is visible, the north shore of which was the center of Jesus' ministry.

Of all the areas surrounding the Sea of Galilee, the small Plain of Gennesaret is the most fertile. The plain is referred to by name in Mt 14: 34 and Mk 6: 53.

All over the Empire, people were searching for answers to the most important questions: How can I have eternal life? How can I be free from sin? How can I know God? These were questions for which Roman religion had no answers.

So people turned to other religions, especially to religions from the East. The city of Rome itself was soon cluttered with temples to foreign gods. Isis came from Egypt, Mithra from Persia, and even the God of Abraham from Palestine.

Many educated Romans looked down on all these new religions as superstitious nonsense. “*Credat Judaeus*”—“A Jew might believe it”—was how the poet Horace described something he thought was entirely unbelievable. But most educated Romans did not believe in the Roman gods, either. And even educated Romans had an inborn need to know God.

## The Spread Of The Jewish Religion

- **Jewish neighborhoods appeared in every town of the Roman Empire.**
- **The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, the common language of the eastern Empire.**
- **Our Liturgy of the Word comes from the ancient synagogue liturgy.**

**T**he dispersion of the Jews also prepared the way for the coming of the Christ. Remember that only a small remnant had come back to Jerusalem after the Exile. Many of the Jews were doing very well in Babylon or in Egypt. They saw no reason to abandon their homes and businesses to go back to the home of their ancestors. They stayed. Later, when Alexander conquered the East, they spread all over his empire. Alexandria in Egypt became second only to Jerusalem as a center of Jewish culture.

When the Romans took over, Jewish merchants continued to settle everywhere, until there was hardly a town in the Roman Empire without a Jewish neighborhood. One historian calculates that Jews made up 7% of the population of the Empire—a very significant minority. We know that, at the time of Christ, the city of Rome itself had about 10,000 Jewish men, not counting women and children. Alexandria, the second city of the Empire, was probably at least a quarter Jewish.

Even though some of these far-flung Jews forgot their native language, they never forgot the Scriptures. By the time of Jesus, the complete Old Testament had been translated into Greek, the language almost everyone spoke in the eastern half of the Roman Empire. The Greek version was called the Septuagint, from the Greek word for seventy, because seventy scholars worked on it. When the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament, it is usually in the words of the Septuagint.

Synagogues first appeared during the Exile, when the faithful people of God could no longer get to the Temple in Jerusalem to make their sacrifices. Even after the exiles returned and rebuilt the Temple, the far-flung communities of the faithful kept up their synagogues, just as we keep up our parish churches.

When the faithful met every week, their service was very much like our Liturgy of the Word, the first part of our Mass. They heard a reading from the Law—the first five books of the Old Testament. Then they heard a reading from the Prophets, in which they heard God’s promise to send a Messiah to free them from their bondage and restore the kingdom of Israel. After that, a speaker might give what we would call a homily.

Christians have kept that old synagogue liturgy, but with this important difference: we proclaim that the Messiah has already come. When Jesus told the congregation at Nazareth that they had seen the Scriptures fulfilled that day (see Lk 4: 16-21), he marked the change from Old Testament worship to Christian worship.

## The Roman Empire, 14 A.D.



Caesar Augustus 63 B.C.-14 A.D. was the first Roman ruler to put his image on official Roman coinage. Known in his earlier life as Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, he was named the first "Augustus" (revered one) by the Roman Senate on January 16, 27 B.C. He was the first Roman Emperor and ruled as an autocrat for forty years. He ended a century of civil wars and gave Rome an era of peace, prosperity, and imperial greatness.



Mithras was the most widely venerated god in the Roman Empire at the time of Christ. Mithras was important to the Roman legions, due to Mithraism's strong emphasis on honor and courage. Mithras is shown slaying the constellation bull symbol Taurus. Mithraism was practiced in the Roman Empire from the 1st century B.C. to the 5th century A.D.

## Proselytes Of The Gate

- **Judaism appealed to many Gentiles in the Roman Empire.**
- **“Proselytes of the Gate” were Gentile converts who were not circumcised.**
- **These proselytes of the Gate knew enough of the Scriptures to recognize Jesus as the Christ.**

**B**ecause Romans all over the Empire were constantly searching for new religions, many of them turned to the Jews. Judaism became another of the fashionable Eastern religions popular among all classes of people in the Empire.

To be a full member of the Jewish community, you had to be circumcised and obey all the dietary laws. But there was an intermediate step. You could be attached to the Jewish community without being fully Jewish. These intermediate people were called “proselytes of the Gate.” They went to worship at the synagogues, and they learned all about the Hebrew Scriptures. Although they weren’t full members of the Jewish community, they expected to have some share in the future kingdom when the Christ came.

When the early Christians started to spread the Good News, they made many converts in the Jewish communities everywhere. But they made even more converts among the proselytes of the Gate. Wherever the apostles went, they found pockets of God-fearing Gentiles who knew the Scriptures and understood how Jesus Christ fulfilled them. Then those Gentiles would take the Good News back to their families and friends and make more converts. No wonder the Gospel spread so fast!

See Acts 13:16-41 for a good example of how St. Paul preached a sermon to both Jews and proselytes. He addresses them as “Men of Israel, and you that fear God” (Acts 13:16), and “Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God.” In other words, there are two groups in his audience: Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. He expects both to know the stories of the Exodus, Saul, and David. In the end, many of the Gentiles “were glad and glorified the word of God.” If they had not understood all of Paul’s allusions to the Scriptures, they never would have understood his message.

## Judea And Galilee

- **Judea, the southern part of Palestine, was settled by exiles returning from Babylon.**
- **Some Jewish settlers also moved into Galilee in the north.**
- **Rome left Palestine under the rule of the Herods.**

**P**alestine was part of that great Roman Empire in the time of Jesus, and it was one of the more troublesome parts. It was full of rebels who were always trying to start a revolution against the Romans. Sometimes one of those rebels would claim to be the Christ, and then the Romans would have to send in the legions to put down the disturbance.

When the Jewish remnant had returned from exile in Babylon, they had settled around Jerusalem, roughly in the old territory of the kingdom of Judah. The Romans called that area Judea, and its inhabitants were Judeans, or Jews as we would call them.

Some Jewish settlers also moved into Galilee, the land that had been the northern part of the kingdom of Israel. Galilee was already inhabited by Israelites, descendants of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, which had not been deported with the rest of Israel. It was a pleasant land of small

towns and poor, honest farmers. The Jews in Jerusalem thought of Galileans as no better than peasants. When Jews from all over came to Jerusalem for religious festivals, you could always tell the Galileans by their accent.

As they often did, the Romans left local kings nominally in charge, although the indigenous people had to answer to a Roman governor. When Jesus was born, the king in charge was Herod “the Great,” who would murder every infant under two in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus.



Capernaum is on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. After leaving Nazareth, Jesus made it the home of his ministry (Mt 4:12-16). A fourth century synagogue of white limestone stands in Capernaum. The foundation of this synagogue is constructed of black basaltic stone, probably dating to the first century synagogue built by the Roman centurion who was stationed here (Lk 7:5). At the request of this centurion and encouraged by the synagogue elders, Jesus healed the centurion's servant.

## The Samaritans

- **The Samaritans were a mixed population who worshiped God in a different way from the Jews**
- **Jews refused to have any dealings with Samaritans**
- **Jesus shocked his contemporaries by speaking to Samaritans**

Between Judea and Galilee was Samaria, where the Samaritans lived.

Throughout the Gospels, we hear about the Samaritans. We can tell that most Jews didn't like them. In John 4: 9, a Samaritan woman is astonished that Jesus will even speak to her: "The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."

Who were these Samaritans, and why did the Jews hate them?

When the Assyrians carried off the northern tribes of Israel, they probably left behind some of the poorer population. We know that the Assyrians resettled other exiles from all over their empire in Israel (see 2 Kgs 17: 24), and those people began to worship the God of Israel alongside their own gods (2 Kgs 17: 25-41). They probably intermarried with the Israelite stragglers left behind.

There were also poor farmers left behind when Judah was carried off to Babylon (2 Kgs 25: 12), and those may have mixed with the already mixed Samaritan population.

The Samaritans of Jesus' time, like the Samaritans today, worshiped the one true God, but in a different way.

Only the five books of Moses are considered Scripture by the Samaritans. They don't accept any of the historical books, wisdom literature, or prophecy. Instead of worshiping at the Temple in Jerusalem, they worship on Mount Gerizim, near the present city of Nablus in the Palestinian West Bank. (See Jn 4: 20, where the Samaritan woman tells Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you [meaning the Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place to worship.") They believe that their holy mountain has a better claim than Mount Zion, since it was a worship site long before King David conquered Jerusalem (see Dt 27: 12).

To the Jews of Jesus' time, the Samaritans were hated heretics who defied God's word as spoken through his prophets. Even talking to a Samaritan would taint a proper Jew with the Samaritan heresy. It was shocking when Jesus spoke to Samaritans as though they were human beings.



Today there are at most a few hundred Samaritans left. For more than two thousand years they have kept their traditions, in spite of everything that has happened in Palestine. But even now they are a persecuted minority, and the last Samaritans may die out in the near future.

Modern-day Samaritans celebrating Passover on Mt. Gerizim.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

**Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, from Book 18**

3. Now, for the Pharisees, they live simply, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in any thing which they have introduced; and when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to make a temperament, whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of man can act virtuously or viciously. They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about Divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.

***Commentary, The New Testament***

The entire New Testament tells us about Jesus Christ, revealing him to be “the Son of God made man, the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word” (CCC 65). That is why reading the New Testament is a very good way to get to know Jesus. The Gospels tell us what “Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught” (Vatican II, DV, 19). The other books, “in accordance with the wise design of God, firmly establish those matters which concern Christ the Lord, formulate more and more precisely his authentic teaching, preach the saving power of Christ’s divine work, recount the beginnings and wonderful spread of the Church, and foretell its glorious consummation” (ibid., 20). This means that, by reading and reflecting on the books of the New Testament, Christians find a compass for their life’s journey: the Gospels bear true witness to Jesus’ life on earth and provide Christians with their Model; the letters help them to see what Christ’s person and work mean for them today and for their Christian life; and the book of Revelation and other eschatological passages in the New Testament give them strength and encouragement to cope with difficulties and to keep alive their hope in ultimate victory.

A Samaritan priest displays a Torah scroll. Samaritans only accept the five books of Moses. They believe that Mt. Gerizim is the one true sanctuary chosen by Israel’s God. They reject Jewish codes of law and have a different version of the Ten Commandments (for example, their tenth commandment is about the sanctity of Mt. Gerizim).



## VOCABULARY

### ARISTOBULUS

The Jewish high priest who declared himself king in Jerusalem. He was a Levite, not a descendant of David.

### GALILEE

The land that had been the northern part of ancient Israel, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

### HEROD THE GREAT

A wickedly ambitious king who took over the government of Palestine with the support of the Romans. He was an Edomite, but he portrayed himself as a Jew returned from exile.

### HYRCANUS, JOHN

The Jewish high priest who conquered almost all the territory of the ancient Davidic kingdom and "Judaized" the whole country.

### PHARISEES

A Jewish sect that believed in keeping separate from the Gentiles. They followed the Law of Moses strictly and added many traditional interpretations and regulations of their own.

### PROSELYTES OF THE GATE

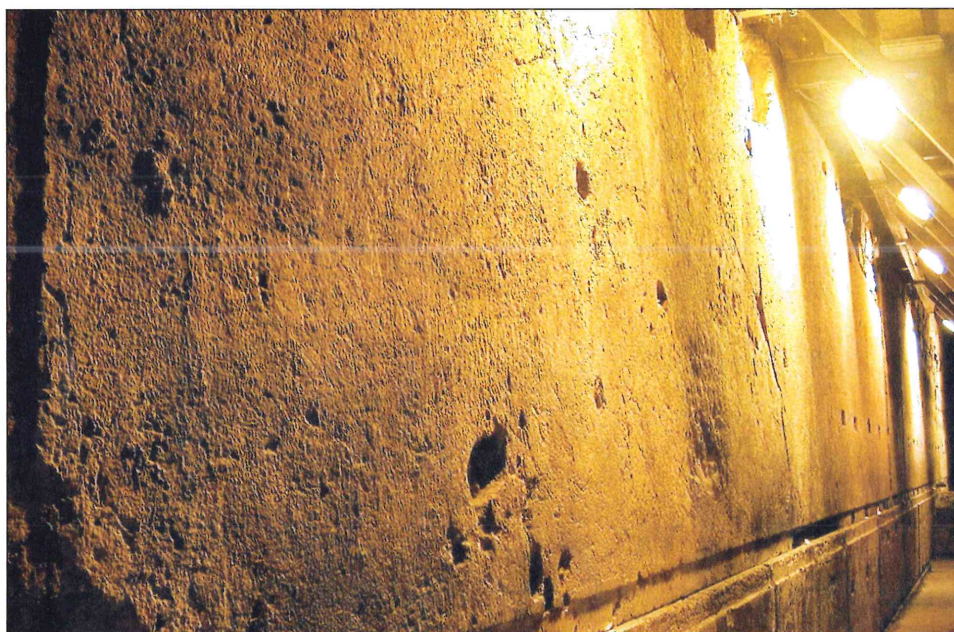
Gentiles who worshiped the True God and knew the Jewish Scriptures, but were not circumcised and did not keep the whole Law of Moses.

### SADDUCEES

A Jewish sect that believed in accommodating Judaism to modern life. They held most of the positions of power in the priesthood. Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and denied the existence of angels and spirits.

### TETRARCHY

The division of Herod the Great's kingdom among his four sons.



The largest building stone. A large course of stones is visible beneath the Western Wall of Herod's Temple. The master course consists of four stones, the largest of which weighs 570 tons and is 44 feet long, 10 feet high and 12-16 feet deep. These are the largest stones ever quarried by man. No stone this size exists in Greece or in Egypt (the largest stone in the great pyramid weighs 11 tons). It is an engineering mystery how they were quarried and moved into position. These stones can be viewed in the archeological tunnels that have been opened in the past few years.



## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Which high priest successfully conquered all the Kingdom of Israel's former territory?
2. What choice did he offer all the non-Jewish residents in his territory?
3. Why was circumcision so important?
4. Which high priest declared himself king?
5. From what tribe did the new king come?
6. Which group of scholars decided it would be best to separate themselves from the Gentiles?
7. Which Jewish sect encouraged all Jews to imitate the ritual purity of the priests in Jerusalem?
8. Which Jewish sect denied any kind of resurrection of the body?
9. How did the Sadducees plan to ensure the Jewish religion would survive?
10. What did the Sadducees believe?
11. How did Herod establish his rule in Jerusalem?
12. Why was Herod called "the Great"?
13. What were the effects of the Roman Peace?
14. How did the Romans deal with local religions?
15. What does "*Credat Judaeus*" mean?
16. How did Jewish people outside Jerusalem worship?
17. Who were the Proselytes of the Gate?
18. Who were the Samaritans?
19. Where did the remnant from Babylon settle after the return?
20. What was the Septuagint?
21. Why did synagogues first appear?
22. How did the Samaritans worship?

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. The Pharisees were a group of Jewish believers who appear often in the New Testament. Though the Gospels only mention the Pharisees when they are at odds with Christ, there were many laudable teachings of the Pharisees in the Old Law. What were some of the teachings of the Pharisees that led to their opposition to Christ? What were some of their habits that Christ spoke out against? What are some habits that people have today that can be related to the faults of the Pharisees?
2. Since God exists outside of time, he is able to see all things at once. The past, the present and the future are all right in front of him, always. Why do you think that God chose to send his son to save us when he did? Why was that moment chosen as the "fullness of time?" Was it because we needed it? Was it because that was when God's word would be spread the fastest, and the most people would believe?
3. How did the Jewish and Christian religions differ from other religions within the Roman world? Do you think this had an effect on their acceptance in the Roman world? Did believing in one God necessarily interfere with the Roman state?

FROM THE CATECHISM

**2** So that this call should resound throughout the world, Christ sent forth the apostles he had chosen, commissioning them to proclaim the gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28: 18-20). Strengthened by this mission, the apostles “went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (Mk 16: 20).

**156** What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe “because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived” (*Dei Filius* 3: DS 3008). So “that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit” (*Dei Filius* 3: DS 3009). Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church’s growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability “are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all;” they are “motives of credibility” (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is “by no means a blind impulse of the mind” (*Dei Filius* 3: DS 3008-10; cf. Mk 16: 20; Heb 2: 4).

**422** “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4: 4-5). This is “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1: 1): God has visited his people. He has fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants. He acted far beyond all expectation—he has sent his own “beloved Son” (Mk 1: 11; cf. Lk 1: 55, 68).

**588** Jesus scandalized the Pharisees by eating with tax collectors and sinners as familiarly as with themselves (cf. Lk 5: 30; 7: 36; 11: 37; 14: 1). Against those among them “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others,” Jesus affirmed: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Lk 18: 9; 5: 32; cf. Jn 7: 49; 9: 34). He went further by proclaiming before the Pharisees that, since sin is universal, those who pretend not to need salvation are blind to themselves (cf. Jn 8: 33-36; 9: 40-41).

**791** The body’s unity does not do away with the diversity of its members: “In the building up of Christ’s Body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church” (LG 7 § 3). The unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity among the faithful: “From this it follows that if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice” (LG 7 § 3; cf. 1 Cor 12: 26). Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 27-28).

**1349** The *Liturgy of the Word* includes “the writings of the prophets,” that is, the Old Testament, and “the memoirs of the apostles” (their letters and the Gospels). After the homily, which is an exhortation to accept this Word as what it truly is, the Word of God (cf. 1 Thes 2: 13) (cf. DV 21), and to put it into practice, come the intercessions for all men, according to the Apostle’s words: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings, and all who are in high positions” (1 Tm 2: 1-2) (cf. Lk 24: 13-35).