

AN OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY;

From Abraham to Modern Israel

Lesson 8

One of the several great Jewish minds stolen from Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar was Daniel. And no doubt the pious, genuine and upright prophet Daniel helped to paint the Jewish exiles in a good light to Babylonia's ruling elite, and this in turn influenced the upper echelon of the Babylonian government to treat the Jews with more respect, dignity, and fairness than we might have expected. As invariably happens the example set by a nation's government trickles down to its population.

From late in the 8th century and throughout much of the 7th century B.C. Daniel would witness both the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire, and he would see Persia arise as the 2nd of the empires that a divine vision from God informed him would happen in the future (I wonder if Daniel thought that the future would happen so quickly?). Daniel's dream-vision of an enormous, frightful statue explained that Babylon (the head of gold) would be the 1st of the gentile empires depicted, which would give way and be followed by Persia, the 2nd; and then next a 3rd one represented by the trunk and thighs of bronze that would conquer the 2nd. But the advent of the 3rd empire would happen well after Daniel's era. With the rise of Greece in the 5th century B.C. as an ascending regional power the 3rd empire revealed itself.

What we must note however is that we won't find anything about the end of the Persian domination and the beginning of the Greek because this happened during an era that has in Protestantism come to be known as the Silent Period. That is, it happened after the close of what forms the modern Old Testament and before the opening of the New Testament. However there are books that had always been part of the Christian Bible from its earliest formation that did include the development of the Greek Empire. There are 15 of these books and they are known as the Apocrypha. The so-called Silent Period isn't real; it was created early in the 1800's in the West when the British and American Bible Societies (which were of the Protestant branch of the Church) decided that those books of the Apocrypha ought not to be in Protestant Bibles. The Eastern Church (often called the Orthodox Church) retained the Apocrypha as did the Catholic branch.

The transition of the 2nd empire to the 3rd began somewhat invisibly around 440 B.C., while Ezra and Nehemiah were still living. Greek society emerged from a long period of darkness and irrelevance to become a sought after way of life that spread like wildfire around the Mediterranean region. But then a young charismatic Greek leader arose who would be the catalyst to propel the Greek philosophy of life and governing to new heights.

In 333 B.C. Alexander the Great, usually called a Greek but who was actually a Macedonian, officially defeated the Persians, took their empire from them, and was now the greatest monarch on earth. The 3rd empire of Daniel's dream-statue had arrived with a bang. Within a year Alexander marched his army into **Y'hudah** (Judah) and took control. Soon Judah would be called Judea, a Greek word meaning "nation of the Jews". Alexander would look upon the Jews with favor. But only nine years later, he was dead of a sudden illness. Combined with the work of his enemy to the north, Rome, the world was now Greek; Greek language, Greek society, Greek philosophy.

Shomron (Samaria), a lovely and fertile area located a mere 40 miles north of **Yerushalayim** (Jerusalem), became home to many of Alexander's military veterans. Samaria, at one time almost 4 centuries earlier the capital of Ephraim-Israel, had now become transformed into a Greek city that worshipped Zeus as its patron god. But, there was a problem because it was now rubbing shoulders with the pre-eminent center of traditional Judaism: Jerusalem. And, the two cultures hated one another.

Upon Alexander's death, his enormous empire was divided up and distributed among four of his most trusted generals. Of concern to our study is that the region of Syria went to General Seleucus, and Egypt to General Ptolemy. The land of Judah as well as the former territory of Ephraim-Israel (now generally called Samaria) that lie between Syria and Egypt was at first not specifically assigned to a particular general, so initially there was a political tug-of-war over who would control it. It first fell to Seleucus; but within 20 years, it went to Ptolemy, governor of Egypt, whose dynasty governed Judah for about 100 years. The Jews coexisted rather peacefully with Egypt during that time. In fact, many vibrant Jewish communities were established in the glorious Egyptian city of Alexandria (named for Alexander the Great), establishing Alexandria as the 3rd great center of Judaism in the world (along with Babylon and Jerusalem), and therefore Alexandria became a clear rival to Jerusalem and the religious authorities of Judaism who resided there and felt entitled to control the Jewish religion.

Around 250 B.C. an event of immeasurable impact upon Western civilization took place: the Hebrew Bible (the **Tanakh**) was translated into the everyday language of the people of the Greco-Roman Empire... Greek. There were a few Greek dialects in use but the one the Hebrew Bible was translated into (at least the oldest manuscripts that have been found use this dialect) was called Koine Greek: common spoken Greek. This was the everyday language common folks spoke, as opposed to the academic and poetic Greek dialects used by scholars and the great Greek writers. The enormous and delicate task of translation was undertaken in

Alexandria, Egypt (where there was a large Jewish population), and set into motion by Philadelphius, the Greek governor of Egypt (the 2nd to rule in the Ptolemaic dynasty).

The story of how this endeavor occurred is contained in the Letter of Aristeas of Alexandria. When Governor Philadelphius was bragging one day that he had collected every worthwhile work of literature in existence for his library, his librarian informed him that there was one significant work that he didn't have and that work was the Hebrew Bible.

The High Priest of Jerusalem was asked for copies of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, which formed the **Tanakh**, the Hebrew Bible (written entirely in Hebrew and its Aramaic offshoot), and to assemble some learned men who could help to translate it. The High Priest sent 72 trusted Jewish scribes along with the **Tanakh** scrolls to Alexandria, Egypt. The 72 men were composed (according to legend) of 6 men from each of the 12 tribes of Israel (this is a pleasant fiction of course). In reality these 72 only *symbolically* represented the 12 tribes, as only members of the tribe of Judah, the Jews, were actually still an identifiable Israelite tribe (although the Levites maintained their separate identities, and in some cases so did the Benjamites, the world still lumped them all together into one category: Jews). Accordingly, the name given the Greek translation was given in honor the men who accomplished it. Thus it was called the "Septuagint", a Greek word meaning "the seventy". Often, for the sake of brevity, we will see the Roman Numerals 'LXX' (which is the number 70) used to signify the Septuagint.

The Tanakh, due to the unique Hebrew language used in writing it, was previously known only to the esoteric Jewish culture. The thing that we must be aware of when studying the Bible is that it is a Hebrew document, arising out of Hebrew culture with all of its writings attributed to inspiration from the Hebrew God. All language is based on the culture it represents. There are thoughts and ideas in each unique culture that don't necessarily exist in other cultures. And the Hebrew culture was entirely defined and established around the Word of God, the **Tanakh**..... contrary and unique from any other culture that had ever existed. But now, the Hebrew Bible was suddenly available to the whole Greek-speaking pagan world. While this would, in time, be a welcome aid to the dispersed Jews who could read Greek but could no longer read Hebrew; and later on, for gentile Christians throughout the Greek speaking Roman Empire; a carefully guarded door was now thrown open wide, and it proved to be the point of entry for pagan foreign influence upon Judaism..... some of it innocent error, some of it based on a Hellenistic (Greek philosophical) cultural agenda.

In 198 BC, Syria took over control of Judah from Egypt and so it was now governed by a series of Syrian/Roman Kings. In 175 BC, the throne passed to Antiochus IV Epiphanies, who was determined to eradicate the peculiar religion of the Jews called Judaism (something that was at odds with, and completely different from, all the other religions of the day) and replace it with the common social order at that time: Hellenism. Yehoveh worship....that is the worship of the God of Israel... adherence to the Torah, even sacrificing in the Temple was terminated by

Epiphanies under penalty of death for violators.

Hellenism was a social and religious philosophy that embodied all that was Greek. Today we might describe Hellenism by using the terms Liberal and Progressive. At its heart was an attempt to establish a new, tolerant, universal world order. Whereas the word "Greek" would naturally refer to a specific nationality (Greece), and to a specific language, Hellenism refers to the underlying and overriding cultural philosophy credited to the Greeks, which is Gnostic in its origin. Hellenistic philosophy believed in multiple gods, Emperor worship, a free-wheeling and self indulgent lifestyle, few boundaries on morality, and acceptance for all forms of religion. Pursuit of pleasure and happiness were seen as the ultimate goals of life, with the search for knowledge (intellectualism) running a close second. Right and wrong were viewed as relative to the current and evolving needs of society. A well defined system of written and homogeneous laws that applied throughout the empire generally separated government from too much religious influence. Knowledge and literature were considered the sources of all wisdom, and as the keys to world progress and peace. What is the difference between the Hellenism of the Roman Empire, and the societal goals of our modern Western Culture? None. They are one in the same.

Epiphanies wanted a Hellenistic Judah, but this was incompatible with Judaism. To accomplish his goal he had to dismantle the Jewish religious structure; his first step was to depose the rightful High Priest, Onias III. In 173 BC, this descendent of the House of Zadok (of the tribe of Levi), the hereditary line of High Priests first established by God through Moses and later re-established by King David, was removed in favor of a man who was **not** of the required lineage. With Epiphanies' hand picked lackey now in place, the corrupted High Priesthood of the Jews was more than co-operative. The Priesthood had become an office that could be, quite literally, bought and sold. Until Epiphanies' time, civil and religious power over the Jews was in the hands of the Priesthood. Then Syrian officials took control of the civil matters, including taxation. Tithes and revenues of the Temple were taxed. The common peasants, who made up the bulk of the population, paid 1/3rd of their field-crops and 1/2 of their tree harvest as taxes.

About 170 BC, a new High Priest was named. Joshua, who preferred to go by his Greek name Jason, was completely sold out to the modern Hellenistic views. Yet, he didn't want to see Judaism die. He believed with some compromise the two could be compatible. Note that more and more this has become the viewpoint of the Church; in fact, this mindset is the basis of the Interfaith movement that seeks to dissolve the lines between ALL faiths thereby making any kind of religious experience out to be a good and worthy one. Of course, just as the world is now actively moving towards a One-World Government, much of the modern Church, in lock step, is moving towards a one-world religion even if it is not recognized. At any rate, Jason's desire to retain some semblance of Judaism did not sit particularly well with the cruel and pragmatic Epiphanies, so Jason was replaced by the highest bidder. Menelaus was the proud new owner of the High Priest position, the Pontificate as it was called by the Romans, and it was he who fully instituted Epiphanies' official policies designed to eradicate all the trappings

of Judaism. Imagine: the Jewish High Priesthood, now bent on the destruction of the Jewish religion!

Many ordinary Jews had thoroughly adopted the new Hellenistic lifestyle. Greek symbols, Greek gods, even a Greek school called a Gymnasium had been built in the Holy City, Jerusalem. Greek cities arose all throughout Judah, Samaria, and the Galilee. Jewish businessmen, the wealthy, civic leaders, and others who had something to gain by a good relationship with their Syrian governors welcomed the change. Others, the common peasants, their tribal elders, and the Levite priests, were not only appalled and disgusted with this turn of events, they were terrified. They were afraid that if they accepted the Syrian government's order to worship pagan Greek gods, Yehoveh would once again punish them with destruction and forced exile for their idolatry. They saw no other avenue than to resist. The Jewish faithful rioted in the streets of *Yerushalayim*.

Judaism was in a shambles. The Temple was plundered for its jewels and precious metals by the illegitimate High Priests. Religious prostitution replaced the now outlawed Levitical altar sacrifices. The Temple itself was rededicated to the Greek god Zeus. And Jews were commanded, on pain of death, to partake in heathen Greek worship practices.

THE MACCABEAN REBELLION

It's 167 BC. About 20 miles outside the city walls of Jerusalem Mattathias, the elderly patriarch of a family of Levite priests enlisted the help of his 5 sons to kill a Jew that he observed was about to obey the government edict to sacrifice to Zeus. This instruction had been instituted by King Antiochus Epiphanies, who, trying to eradicate Judaism, had forbidden circumcision as well as observing *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) and kosher eating. In a heretofore unrivaled desecration of the Holy Temple, Epiphanies sacrificed a pig to the god Zeus on the Holy Altar, had the pig boiled, and the broth poured over the Torah scrolls. The man who Mattathias killed was about to become the first of many Jews to comply with this order to sacrifice to the pagan gods. Mattathias followed up this murder with the killing of the Syrian army officer and his troops who were assigned to enforce the order for Jews to sacrifice to Greek gods.

A pig was an unclean animal to the Jews. It was representative of the pagan gentile world and all that was unholy. Jews could not raise pigs, eat pigs, and where possible they avoided touching pigs. Pigs were specifically outlawed by the Torah as sources of food or sacrifice. Therefore, the magnitude of the offense of sacrificing pigs on the Holy Altar, under any circumstance, is difficult to overstate. That the High Priesthood endorsed it was an abomination of the highest order and the best indication of just how debased the Jewish religious leaders had become.

The killing of the Jewish man by Mattathias and his sons sparked riots and rebellions, and revenge killings began occurring everywhere throughout the Land. Hebrews (at this time in history the title of “Hebrew” generally identified those Jews who stayed loyal to traditional Judaism) were assassinating the Hellenist Jews (those who had accepted the Greek gods and Epiphanies’ orders and policies). Retaliations followed, and Mattathias took his 5 sons and fled to the hills.

Mattathias’ son Judas the Maccabee (Maccabee was a nickname) took command of a growing rebel force of Jews, and won battle after battle against the seasoned Syrian forces that were under Roman control (Syria was a Roman province). Within 3 years Judas the Maccabee and the rebels re-captured the Temple Mount, purged the Temple of the defiling pagan images, killed the priests who participated in such apostasy, and re-instituted traditional Jewish sacrifice on the altar of God. The Jewish celebration of Chanukah, also called the Feast of Dedication or the Feast of Lights, was established in remembrance of this re-dedication of the Temple to the God of Israel, and the purging of pagan sacrifices. It is 164 BC and, that same year, the hated Antiochus Epiphanies would die in battle.

The Jewish rebels continued to recapture territory and liberate the scores of small Jewish villages. The larger cities of the region, all Greek, including the so-called Decapolis (meaning 10 cities), had no interest in being “rescued”; they were thoroughly Greek by choice. Eventually Hellenistic Jews and Hebrew Jews put aside their differences in faith and joined forces, as they had a common goal of freeing Judah from the harsh hand of Syria, Rome’s proxy.

One by one the sons of Mattathias, including Judas, were killed. **Y’honatan** (Jonathon) his brother succeeded Judas and was made High Priest. By that time, the appetite for rebellion was diminished as was the size of the rebel army. They retreated to the east side of the **Yarden** (Jordan River) to regroup. Jonathan was killed by assassins. The rebellion continued.

Ten years later in Syria, another king (in a long line of short-lived kings) was crowned. This King relented and gave Judah more independence, and exempted them from paying tribute. Its 142 BC and **Shim’on** (Simon), the last of Mattathias’ sons, was appointed High Priest.

Simon set about to expunge the Hellenistic views that so dominated the Land, and re-establish a more traditional Judaism. Rome was now an unshakable power, and Shim’on sent a representative to Rome to sign a mutual protection treaty. Rome recognized Judah as an independent nation, but in alliance with Rome. It was during this time that we first hear of the **P’rushim** (Pharisees) and the **Tz’dukim** (Sadducees), these groups resulting from a split in the Jewish religious and political leadership. The Pharisees represented the more Orthodox views, and the Sadducees the more conservative.

Shim'on (*Simon*), the High Priest, and 2 of his 3 sons were assassinated in an ambush by his power hungry son-in-law. The surviving son, John Hyrcannus, became the next High Priest and also took on the title of King; however his position wasn't recognized as legitimate. The concept of the High Priest and the kingship being held by one person was dismissed by the Jewish people especially since this man wasn't of the dynasty of King David.

The fortunes of war having now swung in favor of the Jews, John Hyrcannus led the Jewish army to recapture all of Judah and most of former Ephraim-Israel. He also captured the nation of Idumea, to the south, and forcibly converted the inhabitants to Judaism.....a first. Thirty years later, he died and his son took over some other nearby territory and also forced those inhabitants to convert to Judaism. By the time John Hyrcannus died in 76 BC, his wife Salome became Queen of Judah and ruled a land almost as large as the kingdom David and Solomon had put together a 1000 years earlier.

ROME RULES THE LAND

Queen Salome died after 9 years on the throne. Rome then annexed Syria. A civil war broke out in Judah as 3 different factions sought to ascend to the throne vacated by Salome's death. The Romans sided with the faction led by Hyrcannus II, because they felt he was more sympathetic to their empire building plans, and he would be easier to control. True to form, Hyrcannus II cut a deal with the Romans and opened the gates of **Yerushalayim** to the Roman soldiers. The other factions fought to keep them out. A three month battle ensued and thousands of Jews on both sides were slaughtered.

In 63 BC Judah became an official Roman province. Rome took all rights to self-rule, and kingship, away from Judah (never mind that the kings and queens of Judah over the past few years were illegitimate). Never again would the Jews bow down to an Israelite King. The region of Samaria was separated from Judah as was the **Galil** (Galilee). Once again, the Promised Land was divided; this time into 3 Roman governing districts: Judea to the south, Galilee to the north, and Samaria sandwiched between the two. Soon, a 4th district would be added to the east of the Jordan River, on former Israelite territory: Perea.

Once again rebellions, riots, and assassinations overtook the Land. In 44 BC, the current Roman Emperor, Julius Caesar, very tolerant of the Jews, was murdered and the Roman Empire became unstable. At this point in time it is estimated that somewhere between 6 and 8 million Jews were living in relative peace in Jewish colonies scattered throughout the Roman Empire that began at the Atlantic Coast of Europe and stretched all the way to modern day Iran.

Two years after Julius Caesar's death, the Parthians invaded Roman controlled Syria. Parthia is located in what today is roughly northeast Iran, and were Persian by ethnicity. Thousands of Jews joined the Parthians in hopes that after taking Syria, the alliance next would set their sites on liberating Judah from the Romans.

During this time an ambitious young man only 25 years old, named Herod, was appointed governor of Galilee by the Roman Senate, and his brother was appointed governor of Jerusalem. Quickly, the young Herod ingratiated himself to Mark Antony in Rome. The Roman Senate, greatly impressed with Herod's loyalty to Rome, elevated his status to King of Judea. The Jews never accepted him as King. Herod was an Idumean (a descendant of Esau), not an Israelite. Idumea was a country to the south of Judah that had been conquered by the Maccabees many years earlier. Herod's father had converted to Judaism, which would technically have made Herod a Jew.

Herod was detested by the Jews; his deeds of cruelty are the stuff of legends. It was even necessary for him to surround himself with foreign mercenaries as palace guards, for otherwise he surely would have been killed in short order by the Jewish people near to him.

The Parthians, as hoped, marched alongside their Jewish comrades into Judah, but not surprisingly Rome responded forcefully. At Herod's request, Mark Antony sent a Roman Legion toward Judah with Herod at the helm. In no time the Jewish rebels and their Parthian allies were subdued, and the Land, except for Jerusalem, was back firmly in Rome's (and Herod's) hands.

Herod then set his sights on **Yerushalayim**, and led the Roman army in a siege of the Holy City. The rebel Jews resisted, and the carnage was terrible. After taking Jerusalem Herod convinced Mark Antony that his own personal guard of foreign mercenaries could hold the city without the help of the Roman Legion; so leaving only a handful of Roman soldiers behind, the army marched back to Rome. A clever move, because now there was no one left to check Herod's ambitions and blood lust. We are now at a point about 30 years before Christ is born.

ISRAEL AND YERUSHALAYIM (JERUSALEM) IN THE TIME OF YESHUA (JESUS)

Herod's infamous paranoia and lack of conscience was not manifested exclusively on his Jewish subjects. He killed several of his own family members: aunts, uncles, cousins, wives, even his own children, when he felt angry or threatened. Yet, in some perverse psychology, he thought himself a good Jew, held himself up as a fellow Judean, even upgraded the Temple to become more grand than **Shlomo's** (Solomon's) to show his dedication to Jewish heritage. This seems to have ingratiated him to the Jewish religious leadership of the time, including the

Sanhedrin and the High Priesthood. Herod was careful not to defile the Temple or to interfere with the outward functioning of the priests (most of who were corrupted). In fact, the 2nd Temple is called by his name to this day: Herod's Temple. The upgrading was so thorough and magnificent that some Biblical scholars refer to Herod's Temple as the 3rd Temple..... a designation which can certainly be confusing.

Around the time of **Yeshua's** (Jesus') birth, two distinctly different worlds co-existed in the Holy Land..... or better, they tolerated one another. On the one hand was the Greek Hellenistic oriented culture of the wealthy and privileged, with their theatres, house slaves, circuses, tolerance for all religions and gods, and desire for all things new and exciting. On the other was the older traditional Jewish world, with farmers, peasants, fishermen, craftsmen, and the lower priests, centering their lives round the Temple, Jewish education, and Torah study. Greek was the language of the privileged and educated, as well as the huge non-Jewish population at large. Greek was also the language of, perhaps, the bulk of the Jewish population that lived, scattered, throughout the Roman Empire. Aramaic (a cousin of the Hebrew language) was the language of the Jewish commoners who lived in the Holy Land, and was what Jesus undoubtedly spoke (along with Hebrew). Many of both social classes also spoke Hebrew. Written ancient Hebrew was now practiced only by a handful of learned priests, Rabbis, and scribes, while the common Jewish folk were generally able to write in Aramaic, and some in Greek.

It is key for us to come to grips with the realities of the Jewish life in the years leading up to, and during, the years of Christ's earthly ministry, if we are to understand the Jewish authors of the New Testament writings. Jewish life centered mostly on Jerusalem, itself centered on Herod's Temple. Synagogues lived side-by-side with the Temple, and in some ways competed with the Temple because much worship and ceremony and leadership that was formerly reserved as a Temple activity, now took place in the Synagogue. The Temple was a glorious place, admired by foreigner and citizen alike. What a diverse crowd wandered its grounds! Hellenist Jews, and pious Jews (Hebrews); scattered Jewish pilgrims visiting from Europe, Asia, and Africa; Galileans, regarded as filthy mouthed and hot tempered peasants; Samaritans, considered traitors to Israel and to Judaism; local laborers and aristocrats; white-robed Priests; Temple officials; intense, scowling, domineering **P'rushim** (Pharisees); scholarly, proper, aloof **Tz'dukim** (Sadducees). And, always, the myriads of curious gentiles.

The Temple, breathtaking in its magnificence, was a place of worship, sacrifice, study, and social gathering. Facing eastward, and made of white variegated marble, it rose some 150 feet above its base. It was decorated with pure gold, and the Jewish/Roman historian Josephus described its appearance as that of "a snow capped mountain". Since the days of their exile in Babylon, study and knowledge of the Law, the Torah, had become the preeminent activity of pious Jews. The large court outside the Temple was a place commoners could go to hear the smaller Sanhedrin, the lower religious court, answer doctrinal questions if they felt the inquiries deserving of their time. In the outer most Temple court, where the gentiles could gather (The Court of the Gentiles it was called), sat the ancient equivalent of Thomas Cook foreign

exchange booths. For a commission, much of which was given to the High Priest as rent, the money changers would exchange Temple currency (coins minted by the Temple staff) for any other kind. Generally speaking only animals purchased at the Temple were considered suitable for sacrifice (another convenient way for the High Priest to rake in more profit), and these could only be purchased with coins minted by the Temple.... a pretty nice racket.

The wealthy and the learned strolled through the streets of Jerusalem looking down their noses at the masses of dirty, ignorant peasants that seemed, to their cultured view, as little better than beasts of burden and a bother at that. Noisy beggars, some disfigured by disease, others intentionally made lame in childhood by their families to attract more pity (and hopefully, more charity), lay wherever they could find a spot to hold out their shriveled hands for alms. The growing disparity between the poor and the rich created the exploding population of beggars and led to a peculiar method of civil control over them by the authorities. Beggars were required to be licensed. As laziness was not tolerated, they first had to prove that their disability was real and severe enough to warrant their begging. If approved, they were given a special cloak of certain color and design as the visible proof of government authorization to publicly beg. Those without the identifying cloak were arrested and removed from the city. Losing one's cloak to a thief or another beggar or by accident was tantamount to losing one's only source of livelihood.

Proud Rabbis and Scribes would pass through the Holy City's streets with their flocks of disciples close behind, ignoring the beggars' cry for coins. Priests of high office, along with their courts, would strut unimpeded as the crowds parted like the Red Sea to let them pass. Neither Priests nor Rabbis were particularly interested in such mundane matters as charity for the poverty stricken or disabled. Rabbis dominated the Synagogues; their status had become so elevated that their words could, and did, begin to replace God's words. It was said of them that had a Rabbi declared day, night... and night, day..... it was so. I have spent some time studying the Talmud and the Mishna, ancient rabbinical commentary and religious law, and I can tell you that several of the Rabbis fancied themselves as having direct conversation with God. In fact, there is more than one Talmudic Tractate that literally describes God as coming to the Rabbis to beseech them for their wise advice. They were revered and they were protected at all cost; this was Tradition at its worst, and it was what Judaism had become. Yeshua would openly and loudly criticize these manmade traditions that now formed the basis for Judaism, and it had much to do with the religious authorities wanting him killed.

Jerusalem was now about a 300 acre walled city, the inhabitants living inside the city walls numbering around ¼ million. Many local residents lived outside its walls, outnumbering by far those living within the city; and then there were several suburbs just a donkey ride away. They came in to the city only for Temple activities, and to buy and trade at the myriad of open market tables. One could buy almost anything from anywhere here: goods from India, Italy, Greece, even Europe and China. Luxury items were enormously expensive; but, every day items were reasonable. Corn, fruit, wine, olives and oil, were all quite cheap. Unlike in the outlying smaller villages, the markets in Jerusalem were open every day.

On the surface, in Christ's time, Yerushalayim was the London of its day: international, diverse, tolerant, prosperous, and a center of learning. Below the surface, the common peasant Jews were deeply offended, oppressed, and barely able to hide their disdain for the corrupt, illegitimate Priesthood and the unclean heathens that wandered their streets, controlled much of their lives, and defiled everything they touched.

There were many synagogues in and around Yerushalayim because by now the Jews had broken into many different sects, though there were four that are the best documented. We don't need a vivid imagination to grasp the concept of Judaism being comprised of many sects, each dedicated to their own synagogue. For, it was then with Judaism exactly as it is today in Christianity, only we use different terms; the modern church system is modeled after the Jewish synagogue system, with common prayers, music, preaching, Bible reading, and order of service.

The modern Christian would say we are but various denominations (at current count, something around 3000 Christian denominations have been identified), attending different Churches. In reality, however, we are but a body divided by socio-economic status, race, manner of dress, dedication to certain time-honored traditions, and more often than not, the most minute differences in detail of some Scriptural representation. If we simply equate 'synagogue' with 'church', and 'sect' with 'denomination', we will have a clear picture of religious structure and controversies in Jesus' time.

Next week we'll look more closely at some of these various sects that comprised mainstream Judaism in Christ's day.