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Charles E. Raven and Eleanor Raven
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CHAPTER I

JUDAISM IN THE TIME OF OUR LORD

The Introductory Chapter is divided into three sections dealing with (A) the outline of Jewish history; (B) the development of Jewish religious beliefs; and (C) Judaism at the time of our Lord. Section A deals only with the historical events which are definitely connected with religion, and makes no attempt to give facts which are to be found in Old Testament histories. In Section B the growth of religion has been traced in such a way as to illustrate the influence of historical circumstances upon intellectual and religious life. It has not always been possible to keep separate the subject-matter of the two sections, but as far as possible repetition has been avoided. In Section C a short survey of Judaea at the time of Christ sums up the combined results of the two parts, and leads on to a consideration of Jewish religious beliefs of the same period; the more important of these beliefs has been explained, and their development, if not previously given in the earlier sections, has been outlined.

In addition to more general treatises the following will be found specially valuable:

- E. Bevan, *Jerusalem under the High Priests*.
- F. C. Burkitt, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*.
- R. H. Charles, *The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, in Judaism and in Christianity*.
- R. T. Herford, *Pharisaism*.

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A. OUTLINE OF JEWISH HISTORY

The development of Jewish religious beliefs continued through the centuries of national history and was inseparably associated with external events and the circumstances of national life. The facts of Jewish history here given are outlined from the point of view of religious development; for an understanding of Judaism at the time of our Lord is important for the study of His Life and Teaching and cannot be gained without the help of some knowledge of its past history.

The Prophetic Teaching. Pre-exilic. In the years preceding the Exile (586 B.C.) the prophets were the great figures of Jewish history, and the teaching which it was their life work to impress upon the people was the most important of all religious influences. Through Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah a revelation of Jehovah was successively carried forward, and the identification of religion with goodness, which was characteristic of the prophetic message, was increasingly established. In the later days of Jeremiah the Captivity and Exile destroyed for many generations Jewish national life.

The Captivity and Exile. Old Testament history in the books of Kings and Chronicles gives clearly the record of the misdoings of rulers and people which led to the fulfilment by Nebuchadnezzar of the prophecies of Jeremiah. The Babylonian prince (Nebuchadnezzar's father was then upon the throne) defeated the Egyptians, the allies of Israel, at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., and subsequently marched against Jerusalem. The city

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF CHRIST

was taken and great numbers of the Jews sent captive into Babylon. In this time of Exile Jewish faith was kept alive by the prophet of the Exile, Ezekiel, who had himself gone into captivity with the first prisoners at the time of Jehoiachin's surrender (2 Kings xxiv). His work was continued, when a return to Jerusalem became possible, by the great prophet, who is called the Second Isaiah because his writings are included in chapters xl–lxvi of the biblical book of Isaiah and his own name is unknown. Babylon was conquered by Cyrus of Persia in 538 B.C., and Cyrus seems to have allowed the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem. Little or nothing is known historically of this return which had been hailed by the Second Isaiah with such hope and exultation, or of the Jews in the years immediately following it, but the books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the later return under Artaxerxes, which is generally considered to have taken place about the year 430 B.C. This revival of religious life was of the greatest importance in the development of Judaism.

The growth of Legalism in post-exilic Judaism. It is to Ezra and Nehemiah and their predecessor Ezekiel that the emphasis upon Legalism or the supreme influence of the Law is chiefly due. Ezekiel had dwelt much upon the wickedness of the people and the need to build up a nation freed from iniquity; but in this new nation he had foreseen a priestly community in which the holiness of God should be preserved by a system of ritual and worship, having for its centre the new Temple, and so ordered that the people by its means might be kept holy and fit to serve a holy God. Ezekiel's outlook was con-

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[More information](#)

JUDAISM IN THE TIME OF OUR LORD 5

fined to the idea of Israel as the chosen people; although he asserts the sovereignty of Jehovah over the nations, his vision in contrast to that of the Second Isaiah was a narrow and exclusive one. He aimed at combining the prophetic teaching with the setting up of an organisation which should express it in the national life, and safeguard it by means of external discipline and obedience to lawful authority. Idolatry, a very present danger in Ezekiel's time, was to be combated by giving the people ceremonies and ritual in a restored and purified Temple and by revising the Law and traditions. The imagery which expresses his ideas for reformation illustrates the passing from the prophetic to the Apocalyptic¹ age, for as the successor of the prophets he was also the forerunner of Daniel and Enoch; and the vision took the place of the prophet's message, as a manifestation of the will of God. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezekiel's ideal was put into practice. During the Exile there had been a codifying of the Law, which under Ezra, the priest and scribe, took shape as the Priestly Code, including Leviticus, the later chapters of Exodus and the legal parts of Numbers. Certain chapters in Leviticus (xvii–xxvi) were known as "the Law of Holiness", and the whole code was insistent upon the holiness of Jehovah and His demand for the holiness of His people. As the fulfilment of the obligations of the Law became increasingly the service required by Jehovah from them, there arose the danger of a merely formal religion, an

¹ This word is derived from the visions or revelations (Apocalypses) which took the place of prophecy. For its significance see below, pp. 15, 16, etc.

6 THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF CHRIST

obedience to the letter without regard to the spirit, which characterised the priestly and Pharisaic religion of the time of Christ.

For the remainder of the Persian period of Jewish history, that is until the conquests of Alexander, there is little available historical material. The Jews were without political power or national independence, and devoted themselves to the practice of their religion with a zeal which strengthened Judaism to resist the disrupting forces of Greek culture, with which from that time onwards it came into contact.

The Jews and the Greek World. By the defeat of the Persians by Alexander at Arbela 331 B.C., Palestine became a part of the Macedonian Empire, and subsequently the bone of contention between Syria, which after Alexander's death was ruled by the Seleucid monarchs, and Egypt under the Ptolemies. It lay between these two countries and was desired by both. From 320 to 198 B.C. it was ruled by the Ptolemies; in the years following it became a possession of Syria until the Maccabean revolt. During all this time the Jews were brought directly into touch with Hellenism. In growing numbers they were attracted to Alexandria and at the university there met at first hand Greek philosophy and speculative thought, in an atmosphere wholly different from the nationalism and exclusiveness of Jewish surroundings. As a consequence of this there developed a series of writings known as the Wisdom Literature, which shows clearly the traces of foreign influence and includes such widely different books as Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus. During this period and probably in the

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JUDAISM IN THE TIME OF OUR LORD 7

reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (284–246 B.C.) was begun the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, which had so great an influence in interpreting the religion of Israel to the Gentile world and in promoting the spread of Christianity. During it also the Dispersion or settlement of Jews in places outside Palestine was greatly extended; and this too was important for the preaching of the Christian missionaries. From submergence beneath the powerful Hellenising forces the Jews were rescued by the political events of their history. Under Antiochus Epiphanes, 175–164 B.C., and with the support of the high priest, a deliberate attempt was made to introduce Greek dress, customs and religion, and when this provoked resistance the king set himself to extirpate the Jewish faith. His persecutions aroused the revolt of Mattathias, the father of the five great Maccabean leaders, who at length won freedom for Israel. It was most probably during those days of trial that the book of Daniel was written to strengthen Jewish loyalty and hold out to the afflicted people a hope of comfort in a future life. Daniel's vision is indeed only of a partial resurrection, in which the righteous alone will inherit the Messianic kingdom, but the Messianic Hope which is so prominent in the writings called Apocalyptic was a great means of keeping alive Jewish religion.

The Jews and the Roman World. At Magnesia in 190 B.C. the Romans had defeated Antiochus the Great of Syria, and Roman intervention in the East began. The Jews under their Maccabean leaders had already approached Rome for a protective alliance, and Jonathan,

8 THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF CHRIST

who had succeeded his brother, the warrior king Judas, arranged such a treaty with the Roman Senate. Simon, the third Maccabee, was confirmed in his office as high priest and governor of the Jewish commonwealth by the Syrian ruler in consequence of this alliance. A time of prosperity began for the long-tormented Jewish race, but under it the people soon became secularised and forgetful of their religious vocation. Judaism was extended by conquest under succeeding rulers, and it was to combat the growing irreligion which this absorption in political matters was fostering that the separated party, the Pharisees, withdrew themselves more and more from contact with the Gentiles, and in consequence began to assume an attitude of superiority towards their fellow-countrymen which was in time to make the name of Pharisee proverbial for spiritual pride.

Jewish independence was ended by Rome at the instigation of Antipater, the Idumean and father of Herod the Great, at a time when the great-grandsons of Simon Maccabaeus were rival claimants for the throne. One of them, John Hyrcanus, who had been expelled by his brother, was supported by Rome. Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and reinstated him; Antipater was made procurator; Palestine was divided into five districts and attached to the Roman province of Syria. In the time of Julius Caesar the Jews were well treated and allowed exceptional privileges, such as permission to pay the Temple tribute. After 44 B.C. the Idumean rulers, Phasael governor of Jerusalem and his brother Herod governor of Galilee (Antipater being then dead), were favoured, and confirmed as tetrarchs by Antonius (Mark

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JUDAISM IN THE TIME OF OUR LORD 9

Antony) then ruling the East under the Triumvirate. Idumean supremacy was intolerable to the Jews, and risings, aided by Parthia, temporarily evicted Herod and led to the death of Phasaël. Herod then enlisted the help of Octavian and was restored with the title of king by Roman authority, taking Jerusalem in 37 B.C. He thenceforth retained his throne securely by the will of Rome, dazzling the people by his magnificence and horrifying them by his cruelties. In spite of the lifelong hatred of his subjects, Herod did much for the country, establishing peace and order and expending his wealth upon the rebuilding of the Temple. So bitter, nevertheless, was Jewish detestation that the day of his death in 4 B.C. was commemorated by them as a feast of national rejoicing.

After his death the seeming prosperity of Judaea rapidly disappeared. Three of his sons the king had himself done to death, but six still survived, and of these three had been nominated in Herod's will to divide the country between them. To Archelaus was given Judaea and Samaria; Herod Antipas received Galilee and Peraea with the title of tetrarch; Philip the tetrarchy of Trachonitis with other adjacent districts. Few traces of family affection are to be found in the story of the Herods, and the discord which had always haunted the blood-stained domestic life of Herod the Great was still further increased by their jealousies. Among the risings of that unhappy time was that of Judas the Galilean, which, though Judas himself escaped, brought Roman vengeance hard upon Galilee.

Archelaus reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6, in which year he was dethroned by Roman decree for his misdeeds.

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[More information](#)

10 THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF CHRIST

Judaea was taken under the immediate rule of the Roman Emperor; a procurator was appointed with a garrison of troops; the political importance of the Jewish Sanhedrin or State Assembly was much diminished; and a system of taxation, based upon the population and the estimated resources of the country, was imposed, which provoked a universal hatred extending to all even remotely connected with its organisation.

When Octavian became the Emperor Augustus in 27 B.C. his greatest work had been to reorganise the provincial government of the Empire. As commander-in-chief or imperator, he took under his personal control the provinces requiring an army, leaving the older and more peaceful areas to the Senate. In the imperial provinces, as in Syria, he appointed *legati* or governors, the title given by St Luke (ii. 2) to Cyrenius,¹ and under them or in smaller districts *procuratores*. These were men of equestrian rank, trained in the civil service, and usually of large experience and tested character. Their direct dependence upon the Emperor checked the opportunities for extortion and cruelty which had disgraced the administration in the days of the Roman republic; for their careers depended upon his favour, and upon a quiet tenure of office; outbreaks of revolt or complaints of disloyalty might be fatal to them, as we see in the case of Pilate. He was the fifth procurator and was appointed in A.D. 26. His attempt to introduce the imperial standards and emblems into Jerusalem provoked an outbreak early

¹ There is much uncertainty as to the date and the exact position of Cyrenius (Quirinius). He was certainly *legatus* of Syria in A.D. 6, and may have held a temporary appointment there earlier.