

College Press

It is helpful to review the history of Hellenism in the near east immediately following the death of Alexander the Great.

After nine years in Asia, Alexander began to doubt the wisdom of Aristotle's instruction to him to treat the "barbarians" as slaves. He found in the aristocratic elements of Persia a refinement seldom seen among the temperamental and warring Greeks. He doubted that his uncouth Macedonians could replace these Persian nobles in successful administration of the conquered peoples of the orient.

He began to think of himself not as a Macedonian emperor ruling a conquered Persian empire but as a Graeco-Persian emperor ruling over Greeks and Persians as equals.

Pursuant to this policy Alexander married a Bactrian princess and encouraged his officers to follow his example. He opened the Persian land to Greek colonists and gave large dowries to his soldiers who would marry middle eastern women.

All this marked the beginning of the Hellenization of that part of the world which included the holy land and which was vital to the development of events in the Seleucid empire following the death of Alexander.

Another factor in Alexander's reign was to greatly influence the subsequent history of the holy land. He did not choose a successor. When he was dying in Babylon following a drinking bout at the age of thirty-three (323 B.C.) he was asked to whom he would leave his empire. He answered simply, "To the strongest."

Alexander's empire had no solid root. He was a Macedonian attempting to be Greek and he became almost a Persian. His attempt to Hellenize the orient resulted in no strong bond designed to hold the empire together. It was consequently no strange thing that it came apart, so to speak, shortly after his death.

The division came in five parts. Antipater took Macedonia and Greece; Lysimachus ruled Thrace; Antigonus, Asia Minor; Ptolemy, Egypt; and most significant for our purposes, Seleucus took Babylon, including Palestine as far south as the southern border of Samaria.

A struggle ensued between Seleucid Asia and Ptolemaic Egypt for control of what the Romans would later call Palestine. The original division gave Palestine south of Samaria to Ptolemy and it became part of Egypt. The Seleucids never agreed to this division, desiring full control of the trade route which passed through Damascus and Jerusalem.

From 312-198 B.C. the Ptolemies were able to resist the Seleucid attempts to wrest Judea from them by force. The Jews were allowed a large measure of local self-government. The ruling elements were the hereditary high priest and the gerousia or Council of Elders which had been established by Ezra and Nehemiah. . . .

In effect this regulation simply attempted to prevent the Jews from succumbing to the Hellenistic pressures with which they were surrounded. . . .

A concerted effort was made by the Hellenists to break down

this resistance. Judea was ringed with a series of Greek settlements in league with the trans-Jordanian Decapolis. Each of these tantilized the Judeans with temples to Greek gods and goddesses, Academies, schools, gymnasiums and nude games.

Captives of Hope

Ephesians 4:8–10 (KJV (WS))

⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

1 Peter 3:18–22 (KJV (WS))

¹⁸ For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

¹⁹ By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

²⁰ Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

²¹ The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

²² Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.