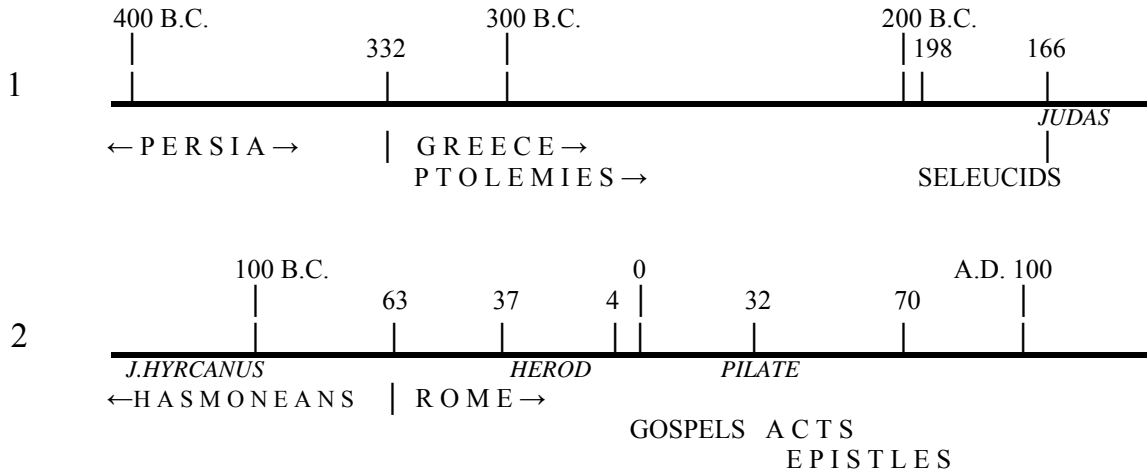# Jewish Time-Line & Historical Periods
400 B.C. to A.D. 100
Dates, Rulers, Nations, Books
John Hepp, Jr.

```
          400 B.C.                    300 B.C.                    200 B.C.
            |             332           |                          |198      166
1    _____|_____|_____|_____||_____|_____
                                                                           JUDAS
           ←P E R S I A →   |  G R E E C E →                           |
                               P T O L E M I E S →                 SELEUCIDS
```

```
          100 B.C.                          0                    A.D. 100
            |             63        37      4 |         32          70      |
2    _____|_____|_____|_____||_____|_____|_____|_____
          J.HYRCANUS               HEROD        PILATE
           ←H A S M O N E A N S   |  R O M E →
                                            GOSPELS  A C T S
                                                 E P I S T L E S
```

Later Persian Period, 400-332 B.C.

For this period little is known about the Jews in the Holy Land, who had returned under Zerubabbel (538 B.C.) and Ezra (458 B.C.). The following institutions continued to develop:

1. The office of scribe, which began with Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 12). Scribes studied, interpreted, and copied the Scriptures. They also prosecuted those who broke God's law.

2. The synagogue—the local center for worship, Torah study, all Jewish life. The synagogue was the key to Jewish survival—and the first place many early Christians gave their witness.

"Greek" (Hellenistic) Period, 332-166 B.C.

Alexander the Great conquered the "world" and died young, 334–323 B.C. Palestine fell in 332 B.C. Alexander's aim was to unite civilization through the Greek language and culture (Hellenization). After his death his kingdom split into four parts. Two generals, Ptolemy and Seleucus, founded dynasties (Ptolemies and Seleucids) that fought over Palestine.

1. The **Ptolemies**, based in Egypt, controlled Palestine 320–198 B.C. They were considerate of the Jews, having many thousands in Alexandria. There, starting about 250, the Scriptures were translated into Greek for the great library in Alexandria. This translation, called the **Septuagint** (or LXX), introduced the world to God's Word and became the Bible of the early church.

During the Ptolemaic period the first books of the **Apocrypha** were written and included in the Septuagint. Jews in general or officially never accepted these books as inspired, but the Roman Catholic Church later did.

About 300 B.C. the long process of oral teaching began that would result in the books of Jewish tradition, the **Talmud**. Eight centuries later (by A.D. 500) the Babylonian Talmud was complete, consisting of Mishnah (legal opinions and illustrations by early teachers) and Gemara

(exposition of the Mishnah). There was an earlier (A.D. 200), less important, Jerusalem Talmud with its own Gemara. Jewish scholars nowadays study the Talmud rather than the Scriptures.

2. The **Seleucids**, based in Syria, controlled Palestine 198–166 B.C. At first they were considerate of the Jews. But later Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" (175–164 B.C.) put the Jews in grave danger. When his empire weakened, he tried to consolidate it through Hellenization. Attempting to eradicate the Jewish religion, he forbade circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and possession of the Torah. He required offerings to the Roman god Zeus and, in 168 B.C., erected in the temple a statue of Zeus and sacrificed a pig (an "abomination of desolation").

Hasmonean Period, 166-63 B.C.

Persecution by Antiochus sparked Jewish revolt (166–142 B.C.), led by a priest (Mattathias) and his five sons. They are called **Maccabeans** after the nickname (*Maccabeus,* "the hammerer") of the most notable son, Judas. Judas cleansed the temple and rededicated it in December, 165 B.C.; this was the beginning of the **Feast of Dedication** (Hanukkah). Maccabean descendants known as **Hasmoneans**, beginning with John Hyrcanus, ruled the Jews until the Roman period. Forsaking their origins, the Hasmoneans became more and more Hellenistic.

Several groups later prominent in the Gospels acquired their character during this period. (1) After some years the priestly rulers sided with the intellectuals known as **Sadducees.** Sadducees believed in only the five books of Moses (the Torah) and doctrines found there. They opposed (2) the "separatists," the **Pharisees**—the party of the synagogue. Pharisees believed all the Scriptures and added to them a protective "hedge" of tradition. Most scribes were Pharisees. As the only party to survive the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Pharisees became the religious foundation of modern Judaism.

Even more extreme and strict were (3) the **Essenes**, who considered the temple priesthood corrupt and rejected much of the temple ritual and sacrificial system. Considering themselves a true remnant, they separated from society to pursue purity and prepare for the final war between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness." They were celibates (unmarried) and communists (living in a community that owned all property). It may have been an Essene community at Qumran that hid in caves the "**Dead Sea Scrolls**" rediscovered starting in 1947. About a third of these scrolls are copies of Old Testament books, providing us texts a thousand years older than those we had before.

(4) The **Sanhedrin** (council) also matured at this time, the court that interpreted and applied religious laws. The main such council was in Jerusalem; its seventy-one members included priests, elders, and scribes.

Roman Period, 63 B.C. to A.D. 100 and Later

Two Hasmonean brothers bitterly disputed over which should rule. The Roman general Pompey was only too glad to come settle the dispute. He took Jerusalem, massacring priests and entering the Most Holy Place. In 37 B.C. the Romans made **Herod** ("the Great") king. Partly Jewish and partly Idumean, Herod was never acceptable to strict Jews. A clever politician, he kept his power through several changes of Roman rulers. Ruthless, he killed his own wife and several sons. He engaged in mammoth building projects; among them, enlarging and beautifying

the temple, starting in 20 B.C. When the modern calendar was devised centuries after these events, it was wrong by about five years. Christ Jesus was born about 5 B.C., and Herod died in 4 B.C.

At Herod's death his kingdom was broken into four tetrarchies. It was his son **Herod Antipas**, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea in A.D. 4–39, who killed John the Baptist. Judea was governed by procurators appointed by Rome, among them **Pilate** (A.D. 26–36).

Jesus' ministry, sketched by the four Gospels, probably lasted A.D. 29–33. The book of Acts continues the story, giving samples of church growth, to the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (A.D. 60–62). Most New Testament books were written before A.D. 70. In that year the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, as Jesus had predicted. The book of Revelation was written last, about A.D. 95.