

Chapter 16

The Age of the Greeks

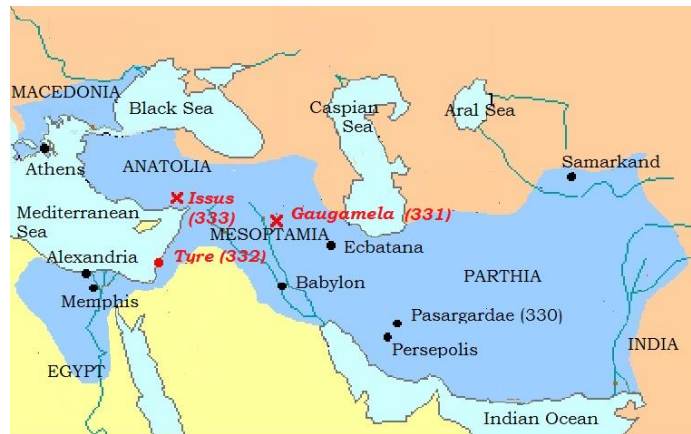
(340-178 BCE)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

*A time to be born and a time to die;
 A time to plant, and a time to harvest;
 A time to kill and a time to heal;
 A time to break down and a time to build up¹*

Phillip of Macedonia developed improved techniques for assaulting cities and disposed of the convention that war was only conducted in the ‘season’; he waged year-round warfare. Phillip created a powerful army financed by the discovery of local gold: he used this army to destroy the combined forces of Thebes and Athens in 338, thereby creating a Pan-Hellenic league under his control. By the same date Rome had beaten back a Gallic trans-alpine invasion and established herself as the main power on the western Italian sea-board.

Since Greek mercenary armies had been doing most of Persia’s fighting for quite a time and Phillip now had the largest and most efficient Greek army, he could have legitimately fancied his chances when he announced a campaign against Persia: but Phillip was assassinated in 336 BCE, perhaps with Persian complicity. His son Alexander inherited a treasury that was short of cash and an army that needed a great deal of money to run. An early victory over a Persian army at the river Granicus gained him Anatolia and some financial relief.



Conquests of Alexander 334 - 323 BCE

His money problems were completely resolved the following year when he crossed the Taurus, defeated the main Persian army at Issus and acquired Syria, the Levant and Egypt. The city of Alexandria was named in his honour.

The Persians offered a peace on the basis of the status quo, but Alexander moved on, defeated the last Persian army and won the empire. Alexander gained the Persian Empire more speedily than Cyrus had built it. The young victor saw Cyrus’ grave at Pasargadae with its simple inscription. “Mortal! I am Cyrus, son of Cymbyes, who founded the Persian Empire, and was Lord of Asia. Grudge me not my monument.” When he read this Alexander was moved to tears, or so it is said. He posted a guard on the tomb and ordered that it not be vandalised. Unfortunately, his orders were not obeyed.

When there is strong central control, it is only necessary to gain the centre; empires do not have to be fought over inch by inch. There is a tradition that Alexander visited Jerusalem on his way to Egypt. This may not be historically accurate, though it is true that his armies were in the area in the late 330’s. Samaria did not take the transition from Persian to Greek rule as easily as Jerusalem appears to have done. As a result, the city was destroyed, its inhabitants expelled and what remained of the city was resettled from elsewhere. Some of the former inhabitants fled to Shechem and set up a Yahwist community near Mount Gerizim, where their descendants are said to remain to this day.²

The Samaritan Temple (ca 330)

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:1

² S.J.D Cohen (1989); From the Maccabees to the Mishnah; p 169

Back in Nehemiah's time the daughter of the Samaritan leader Sanballat had been married, much to Nehemiah's dismay, to the grandson of the "New Israel" high priest Eliashib. Nehemiah claimed that he then drove Eliashib out because the mixed marriage defiled the priesthood.³ At that time, other men had not been so loyal to their wives and had chosen instead to put them and their children aside – rather than be driven out of Jerusalem's elite priestly community.

Three generations later a similar situation had arisen. Eliashib's great grandson Jaddua was now high priest but it was his brother that worried the priestly community. The brother was called Manasseh and he was married to Nicaso, the daughter of another Sanballat⁴. Manasseh was inclined to divorce his wife in order to retain his priestly status, but his father-in-law would have none of it. Old Sanballat offered to build a temple like the Jerusalem temple and make Manasseh high priest there with priestly authority over all Samaria – an offer that Manasseh accepted. Thus it was that a new temple to Yahweh was built for the community near Mt Gerizim around 330 BCE and Manasseh became its first Chief Priest.⁵

Manasseh used a version of the consolidated Torah, as edited in exile, as the scripture of the Gerizim community – now known as Samaritans⁶. There are differences between the Samaritan Torah and both the Masoretic text used as the basis for most modern translations of the Hebrew and the text that was used as the source of the Septuagint, although a significant minority of the differences are common to both.⁷ The Samaritan Torah acquired some variations of its own; most significantly it adopted, as an extension to the 10 commandments, an instruction to build a temple on a mountain which can be interpreted as Mt Gerizim. The Samaritan Torah is still in use around Nablus to this day⁸, where it is regarded as the only Scripture.

The Completion and Division of the Greek Empire

Alexander pushed on beyond the Persian frontier into India's Northwest and was prevented from advancing to the Ganges only by the reluctance of his army. When Alexander died in 323 BCE, the Greek empire he had created was left with Alexander's slow-witted half-brother Arrhidaeus, Alexander's pregnant wife Roxana and a group of ambitious generals. Roxana's child was a boy, and though it was decided that he and Arrhidaeus should reign, they were never permitted to rule, becoming instead pawns in the game of regency. Plutarch claims that, on Alexander's death, Roxana murdered at least one and possibly both of Alexander's other wives⁹.

For the next 30 years his generals fought each other for territory and power. Alliances came and went as each contender tried to find opportunities for total domination. Perdikkas, one of the contending generals, claimed to have been given Alexander's deathbed blessing and his signet-ring. In furtherance of his ambitions, Perdikkas wanted to secure and bury Alexander's body since in many traditions it is the successor that buries the dead king. But Ptolemy stole the body and had it removed to Alexandria, the "city that Alexander founded" and Ptolemy's power base. The first war of the successors (322-320) was the result. It ended with the murder of Perdikkas by his own officers. The coalition of victorious generals decided that one of their number, Antipater, should be made Regent of the empire, in charge of the two 'kings' - Alexander's brother and young son. But the other generals, Antigonus (known as 'One-Eye'), Ptolemy and Lysimachus, all retained significant power bases. The second war (319-315) broke out upon the death of Antipater since his appointed successor did not meet with the approval of the other contenders. This was largely fought as a series of battles for the control of the homeland – Macedonia. Roxana and her son had been protected by Alexander's mother, but her assassination in 316 enabled Cassander to claim the Regency. Meanwhile 'One-Eye' used the opportunity to drive East: in the final battle the opposing general was betrayed by his own troops and delivered to One-Eye, who executed his opponent and established himself in undisputed control of the Asian territories. The third war (314-311)

³ Nehemiah 13:28

⁴ The name Sanballat means "Sin (the Mesopotamian moon god) gives life". (Akkadian "*Sin-uballit*") The family may have been forcibly settled in the former Israel after its destruction by Assyria in 722 BCE.

⁵ Josephus *Antiquities* 11.306-12

⁶ The term Samaritan is used here to distinguish them from the Samaritans – a term which applies to the people of Samaria (who are not necessarily Yahwist).

⁷ K. Waltke; *Samaritan Pentateuch*; ABD

⁸ This was true at the time of the author's visit in 1963.

⁹ Plutarch. *The Parallel Lives*. 'Alexander' 77.6

was led by Ptolemy who assembled a coalition of his fellow rulers against One-Eye, who they felt had grown too powerful. Although Antigonus negotiated a compromise settlement with Ptolemy, this was not accepted by all the coalition and one of them, Seleucus, continued to fight. In 310 BCE Cassander secured direct control of the Macedonian heartland and had Roxana and her son executed. In the Babylonian war (311-309) Seleucus defeated One-Eye. One-Eye's response was to start the fourth war (308-301) with an attempt to invade Ptolemy's power base of Egypt. When this failed One-Eye and his son besieged Rhodes. Naturally Ptolemy and the others came to the aid of Rhodes. The outcome was a commitment by Rhodes to support One-Eye and his son against all the others except their ally Ptolemy – a sort of victory for Ptolemy who took the title 'Soter' (meaning 'Saviour') because he claimed to have saved Rhodes. But the agreement released One-Eye's son from his obligations and enabled him to challenge Cassander for the control of Macedonia. Cassander sued for peace – a peace that was rejected by old One-Eye. In desperation, Cassander called in help from the others; help which enabled him to push One-Eye's son out of Macedonia. Lysimachus and Seleucus defeated One-eye himself in the battle of Ipsos where the old man finally lost his life. His son fled back to Macedonia to defend what remained of his rule there.

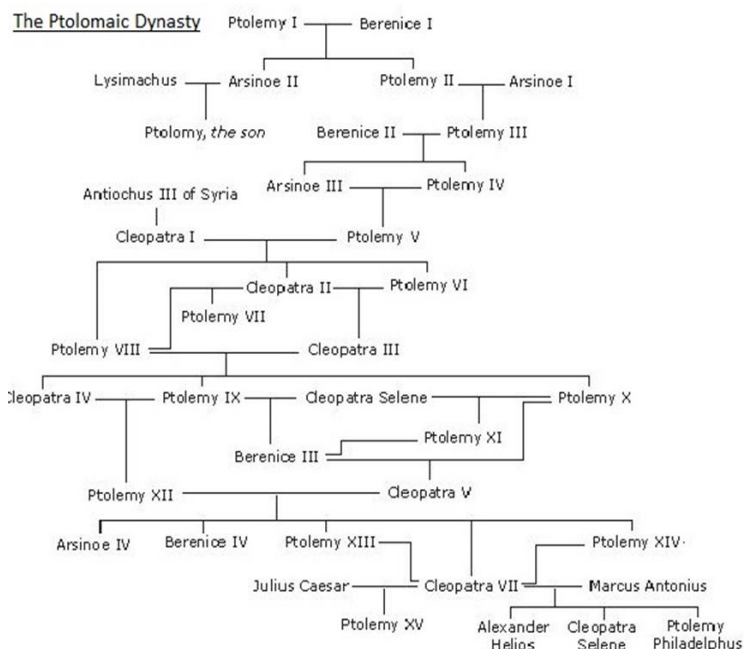
Whilst the struggle for Macedonia was to continue until 285, the rest of the Alexander's land was now divided between Lysimachus (Western Asia Minor), Seleucus (Mesopotamia and the East) and Ptolemy (Egypt). Jehud fell to Ptolemy but her borders were dangerously close to Seleucid territory. The struggles of these military giants had ravaged the lands over which they fought. Murder and betrayal was commonplace. There is a story, recounted by Diodorus, that Persepolis was burnt for the amusement of a prostitute at a drunken victory party.¹⁰ The winners were not averse to seeing themselves as demi-gods. Ptolemy established the cult of Alexander, whose servant became the highest priest in Egypt. Seleucus' son established the cult of his father and had himself worshipped as Zeus Nicator.

Ptolemy's capital was Alexandria and it was from there that the former Persian province of Jehud, now called Judea, was administered. Greek became the language of the administration and of the elite within his empire. Ptolemy founded a dynasty that suffered a significant amount of inbreeding as a result of the practice of the ruler marrying his own sister. Nevertheless, the dynasty lasted until the day that Julius Caesar enjoyed an affair with Cleopatra VII, the sister of Ptolemy XIV. Her alleged child by Julius Caesar would be called Caesarion and would take the throne name Ptolemy XV.

2nd Zechariah: 1st Oracle

It may also be around this time, when the Greeks were the conquerors of Judea, that an Oracle was composed which is now to be found in Zechariah 9-11. First Zechariah can be defined as comprising the first 8 chapters of the present book of Zechariah. The remainder, the so-called "2nd Zechariah", contained two oracles: the first of which began at today's Zechariah 9; the second at chapter 12. Comparisons of language and the fact that both parts of '2nd Zechariah' and the beginning of Malachi are all prefaced by the heading 'An Oracle', have suggested a co-editing of these works. There is a theory that all three booklets were later appended to Zechariah 1-8 to form one work. They were divided into two later in order that there should be twelve Minor Prophets, a more satisfying number than eleven. It was then that Malachi was given its anonymous name of 'My Messenger'.

The major themes of 2nd Zechariah 9-14 are the restoration of the exiles (1st Oracle), battles against Jerusalem (2nd Oracle) and the condemnation of the leadership (a theme which links both Oracles). These oracles make increasing use of allegory as a means of criticising the ruling powers,



¹⁰ Diodorus of Sicily; *World History*; 17:20-22. Translated by M M Austin.

perhaps because this procedure was safer than open criticism. Judean kings had tended to tolerate prophetic criticism, but the religion that enabled such tolerance was not shared by the Greek rulers, whose sensitivity to criticism would have been amplified for some of them by their personal insecurity. The criticism was not confined to the Greek rulers, but extended to the indigenous religious leadership for the priesthood was felt to have been compromised by its adoption of the culture of the conqueror. Allegorical works would continue to be written and circulated for more than 400 years - well beyond the turning of the era.

Scholars have not reached a consensus as to whether the two oracles are by the same author, or even whether each oracle is just the work of a single author.¹¹ On the one hand there is a distinct literary structure underlying the work, but on the other there are passages which refer to events so separated in time as to be unlikely to be the inspiration of a single writer. The texts make deliberate references to earlier scripture; in particular the theme of the 'shepherds' (as a metaphor for the leaders) seems to hark back to Ezekiel; and in the section condemning prophets there is a quotation from Amos' defence when he was accused of being a prophet; it was recalled that he had said that he was no prophet, just "a tiller of soil"¹².

A date of the 1st Oracle is suggested by a reference to Javan (Greece) as the oppressor against whom the "Sons of Zion" have been aroused. Another indication is the reference to the rupturing of the family ties between Judah and Samaria/Ephraim – a rupturing made concrete by the establishment of the Samaritan temple around 330 BCE.¹³

The oracle opened with some prophesies against the nations, a standard feature of the works of the earlier prophets, although this is the only instance of such prophesies in the works of the later prophets - Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The 'nations' section was followed by a vision of a king whose rule will extend from the 'river' to the 'ends of the earth'. He will come:

*triumphant and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war-horse from Jerusalem.*¹⁴

The oracle continued with the criticism of the leaders, the 'shepherds'. They will be punished and Yahweh will shepherd his people himself. Judah will be strengthened and secured. In an echo of Deuteronomy, Yahweh promised that: -

*"Though I scatter them among the peoples,
yet in distant lands they will remember me.
They and their children will survive,
and they will return."*¹⁵

The verse reflects the understandable desire that more of the exiles should return. Judah remained marginal¹⁶. There followed an extended cryptic prose passage which is probably an allegorical criticism of the theocratic leadership of Judah. The passage may have been composed with Ezekiel's parable of Judah and Ephraim as two sticks in mind¹⁷. The shepherds (the leaders) had failed so the prophet was called to the task and became for a time the 'shepherd' of the flock – a flock assigned by the 'merchants' for slaughter. But the prophet had a conflict with three other 'shepherds' and resigned his commission by breaking the staff called 'Kindness' and saying 'what is to die, let it die!' The prophet offered to forgo his fee, but they weighed out thirty pieces of silver anyway. Yahweh told the prophet to throw the fee *into the treasury* (though some translations prefer 'to the potter'). The prophet continued, saying: -

¹¹ See Petersen's article on *Zechariah 9-14* in ABD for an exposition of the variety of views.

¹² Zechariah 13:5 and Amos 7:14.

¹³ Zechariah 9:13 and 11:14.

¹⁴ Zechariah 9:9b-10a. This passage is of importance to Christians as they claim it is a prophesy of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem on a donkey in the week that ended with his crucifixion.

¹⁵ Zechariah 10:9. Compare Deuteronomy 30:1-3.

¹⁶ Leith (1998) in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*; p384

¹⁷ Katrina Larkin. Oxford Bible Commentary. *Zachariah*. She observes that 'Lebanon' as used in the verse introduction is often code for 'the temple' in Qumran and Rabbinic literature.

*So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of Yahweh.
Then I broke my second staff, Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel.¹⁸*

The breaking of the staff called ‘Unity’, suggests the time of the break with Samaria. If this is correct then the anger against the *shepherds* may have originated in their failure to prevent this break. Christian interest in this oracle has been generated as a result of its quotation by Matthew in his Gospel (late 1st century CE). Dealing with Judas’ returning his fee for the betrayal of Jesus to the priests in the temple, the author of this Gospel wrote “Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they gave them for the ‘potter’s field’, as the Lord commanded.’”¹⁹ Interest has also been generated by the conflict of evidence between the Old Testament and the New, for the Old Testament evidence is that the prophecy did not come from Jeremiah. Which Testament was authoritative? It is possible that Matthew was recalling his texts from memory and may have confused this text with passages in Jeremiah 18 and 19 which did concern pots and potters. The allegory has given rise to numerous interpretations – there are, for example, 40 different suggestions as to the identity of the three shepherds. Overall, the passage shows a prophet declaring Yahweh’s punishment of his disloyal people by removing them from his care – a not uncommon prophetic theme, and one certainly promulgated by Jeremiah amongst others.

The oracle ends with Yahweh declaring that he will ‘*raise up a shepherd who will not care for the lost, nor seek the young, nor heal the injured, nor feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep – even tearing off their hooves.*’ The author then reverts to verse to pray that this *worthless shepherd* will be struck by the sword across his right eye and arm, blinding him and withering his arm.²⁰ Is this a reference to Antigonus “One-Eye”?

2nd Zachariah: 2nd Oracle

The second oracle may not be a single work but rather a series of passages filled with images of conflict and judgement – each introduced by the introductory phrase “*On that day...*”. It is therefore possible that each passage may have its own distinct origin. The language is consistent with the first oracle, so it is also plausible that the elements of this oracle were put together sometime in the 4th century BCE.

The opening passage is concerned with an imaginary battle between Judah and the surrounding peoples in which Yahweh will make Judah and particularly Jerusalem into a terror for all the nations that come against her.

On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall hurt themselves...

On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness...

On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves...

And on that day, I will set out to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”²¹

The next section does not obviously follow on; so it may originally have been a separate piece of rhetorical prose. Like the others it is linked by the ‘*On that day*’ phrase. In this passage, it is not clear whether the subject is the prophet or his god.

I will pour out on the house of David and the people of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and

¹⁸ Zechariah 11:13b-14. The ‘potter’ interpretation derives from the Hebrew verb ‘*yatsar*’ which means ‘to form’ hence the noun is ‘one who forms’; it is therefore sometimes translated as ‘potter’. However the Syriac has ‘treasury’ and that seems to make better sense here.

¹⁹ Matthew 27:9-10. Matthew was concerned to show that the events of Jesus’ life had been foretold by the Old Testament prophets. There are those who would suggest that the account of Judas’ death would have been suggested to Matthew because of the Zechariah passage. The other New Testament account of Judas’ death (Acts 1:15) does not involve potters and quotes the psalms instead of ‘Jeremiah’.

²⁰ Zechariah 11:17

²¹ Zechariah 12:3 & 6

supplication. They will look to me, to him whom they have stabbed²², and will cry as one wails for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn.

The existence of dual objects in this sentence – *me* (the prophet) and *him-whom-they-have-stabbed* – was deliberate. The metaphor may be that of a rejected prophet and his god. There may also be a reference here to a similar ambiguity in the 4th servant song in Isaiah where the servant was ‘wounded for our rebellions’²³.

The text continued by comparing the distress ‘*on that day*’ in Jerusalem with the distress of the worshippers of Hadad-Rimmon following the destruction of their god on the plain of Megiddo. Hadad-Rimmon was a name of Baal, the Canaanite god. This is compared to the distress to be suffered in Jerusalem by the descendants of David, Nathan, Levi and Shimei. Shimei was of the house of Saul; it was he who cursed David as he retreated from Jerusalem. These were people on opposing sides in civil wars. The author proclaimed that the women of all the families would mourn in their families, separated from their men. It is possible that here too the reference is to the hurt caused the breakup of marriages and the dismay associated with the breakup of the Yahwist ‘family’ of Judah and Samaria. This section ended with a note of consolation, for

On that day, a fountain shall be opened for the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to wash away sins and impurity²⁴

The next section proclaimed the end of false idols and prophesy: -

On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more...and will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. ...if anyone still prophesies, their own parents will stab the one who prophesies.

On that day the prophet ... will say, “I am no prophet; I am a tiller of the soil...”²⁵

As in the first oracle, there was a shepherd allegory involving the destruction of the flock.

*“Awake, sword, against my shepherd,
against the man who is close to me,” says Yahweh of Armies.
“Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered”
“I will turn my hand against the little ones.*

This line will be quoted in the Gospels (Mathew 26:31 and parallels), but the context here is of a leader, possibly a high priest, who should be struck down so that the people may be punished. Ezekiel 5 contained a division of the remnant into thirds. An echo of this may have inspired Zechariah 13:

*So it will be, throughout the country”, says Yahweh of Armies,
“Two-thirds shall be cut off and die,
One-third shall be left alive”.
And I will put this third into the fire,
and will refine them as one refines silver;
test them as gold is tested.
He will call on my name and I shall answer him
I shall say, “He is my people”
and he, “Yahweh is my god!”.*

The idea of Purification by fire may have been derived from Zoroastrian beliefs.

²² Zechariah 12:10 The Hebrew word ‘*daqar*’ translated here as ‘stabbed’ occurs twice in Zechariah but only 7 other times in the Hebrew bible. It generally refers to a penetrating sword thrust (e.g. Numbers 25:8, Judges 9:54, I Samuel 31:4, Isaiah 13:15) The familiar AV translation is ‘pierced’, but the modern English usage of ‘pierced’ does not fit well with the Hebrew contexts.

²³ Isaiah 53:5

²⁴ Zechariah 13:1. The verse may have been inspired by Ezekiel 36:25 – ‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be cleaned of your filthiness’

²⁵ Zechariah 13:5. The final phrase quotes Amos’ defence when arrested for prophesying.

In the final section²⁶, a terrible battle was predicted in which Yahweh would call the nations to attack Jerusalem. He would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed, her women raped and half the men exiled. Only then would Yahweh enter the fight. The mount of Olives would be split in two and, with a foot on either part, Yahweh would allow the remnant to flee - flee as they did before the earthquake in King Uzziah's time²⁷.

*Then Yahweh my God will come and all the Holy Ones with him.*²⁸

"On that day" there will be neither cold nor frost; there will be continuous sunlight and *on that day* living waters will pour forth from Jerusalem, *"And Yahweh will become king of all the earth"*²⁹ Yahweh will level the ground yet leaving Jerusalem standing high. A plague will destroy those who fought against Jerusalem and even Judah will fight Jerusalem, and neighbour will fight against neighbour.

All who survive of every nation on earth shall go up to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the festival of booths. If any do not go up, they will be punished by drought, hail or plague. *"On that day"* even the bells on the horses shall be inscribed *'Holy to Yahweh'*. All the cooking pots in Jerusalem will be sanctified so that all who come may use them to prepare their sacrifice. And there will be no Canaanites (local traders) in the temple.

The Mediterranean Lands in the first half of the 3rd Century BCE

In the early third century BCE the former Persian province of Jehud, now called Judea, was ruled from Alexandria by the successors of Ptolemy, the Macedonian Greek general who had acquired the Egyptian part of Alexander's empire. The Ptolemies also ruled the Levant south of the Eleutherus River, Northern Egypt and much of the coastal Eastern Mediterranean.

Another Greek dynasty, the Seleucids, ruled Mesopotamia and most of Anatolia (modern Turkey). In the early part of the 3rd century there had been a series of minor campaigns between the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic Greek empires for the control of the coastal Levant including Judea. For the most part these were indecisive and thus Judea remained administered from Alexandria. An early Syrian Greek initiative had been to build the city of Antioch - modern Antakya in southern Turkey. When this was completed the administrative centre of the Seleucid Greek Empire moved closer to the rival Greek empires in Macedonia and Egypt. It also came closer to Rome, the rising power in the Mediterranean, and of course to Judea. The indecisive nature of the struggles between the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic Greeks over Judea gave opportunities for Judeans to play politics – and to make money – but that game could be dangerous.

The Romans were emerging in the west. Pyrrhus, the king of Epirus, attempted to bring Rome within the Hellenic sphere of influence. He landed in Italy in 281 at the head of a large army. Though he won his battles, his successes were of the type that has become known as 'Pyrrhic' victories; he could not hold the territory he won and hence his resources became exhausted and he lost the war. When he was killed in 272, the Roman Republic had become the established power throughout Italy.

The Phoenicians had established trading posts throughout the Mediterranean as early as the 8th century BCE. These trading posts were aimed initially at securing access to the copper mines of Cyprus and the silver, tin and copper of Spain. There would have been ships bound for Spain for any Jonah to catch from an early date. By the 5th century BCE Carthage in North Africa had become an important secondary centre with its own network of colonies in Sardinia and Sicily.³⁰ By the 3rd century, the western centres of Phoenician power were more important than the homeland, for Carthage had secured control of most of the coastal Mediterranean west of Italy.

In 270 BCE, 50 years after the death of Alexander and 250 years after the first return from exile, there were more followers of Yahweh in the Diaspora than in Judea. There had always been Judeans and Israelites in the Egyptian delta. Some were there as slaves – born as slaves or captured as the booty of war; others were there as merchants; others (such as the reluctant Jeremiah) as refugees and yet others as economic migrants seeking a better life. Ptolemy I (305-282 BCE) added to their numbers with captives taken during his struggle to bring Palestine into his sphere of control. In Nippur and in Babylon the exiles had flourished and so too had communities in the old Assyrian capital, Nineveh. By now, only a few

²⁶ Zechariah 14

²⁷ Amos 1:1 refers to this earthquake.

²⁸ Zechariah 14:5

²⁹ Zechariah 14:8 – possibly inspired by Ezekiel 47.

³⁰ Peoples of the Old Testament World p 194

Judeans spoke Hebrew. Even in Judea, Aramaic had been supplemented by Greek, as the accepted language of the educated classes.

In Egypt, Ptolemy II Philadelphus ('Brother-loving') succeeded his father in 283 after a brief period as co-regent. On securing full control, he repudiated his first wife and married his elder sister Arsinoe in accordance with Egyptian custom. He and his sister portrayed themselves as deities (*theoi adelphoi*) – a practice that was followed by some Seleucid and Roman rulers as well as by their own descendants. He built a canal linking the Nile to the Red Sea and completed the famous library and lighthouse at Alexandria that his father had initiated. He appears to have led an effective administration and one that established a period of prosperity. His university rivalled those of Athens as a centre for Greek education and learning.

Between Italy and Syria lay a number of mainland Greek states of which the most important was Macedonia. When Antiochus II succeeded his father as ruler of the Seleucid empire in 261, he reached an agreement with Macedonia to squeeze the Ptolemaic empire out of the Aegean. In this they were partly successful, but when rebellions developed in Corinth and Chalcis (possibly fermented by Ptolemy II) Macedonia lost interest in the war and Antiochus decided to make peace. As part of the settlement Antiochus married Ptolemy's daughter Berenice sometime around 250 BCE. To do this, he divorced his former wife Laodice – an arrangement to which she did not take kindly, especially since it disinherited her children.

According to the Letter of Aristeas, Ptolemy Philadelphus freed thousands of the Judean slaves that had been brought to Egypt by his father as booty from the wars fought with the Seleucids to secure control over the Levant. He rebuilt Rabbah (present day Amman in Jordan) and called it Philadelphia. Akko was developed as a Greek city and renamed Ptolemais. He refrained from using force to impose Hellenic culture on his Judean territories. Perhaps for this reason he was regarded by most Judeans as a benefactor – although the success of his economic policies must also have played a part in this favourable assessment.

Whilst the relationship between Ptolemy II and the Judean community in Alexandria may have been good, the community's relationship with the indigenous Egyptian population appears to have been less so. Manetho, a 3rd century Egyptian priest, wrote in his history that many of the Judeans in Egypt had been leprous and for that reason had been driven out in former times. A king, who Manetho named as Amenophis, had been advised that he might 'see the gods' if he would 'clear the whole country of the lepers and other impure people'. So the king sent 80,000 of them to the mines on the east side of the Nile. Manetho's story continued with some of the impure people being granted residence in Avaris because even their priests were leprous and the king was worried that the gods would be angry if priests were dealt with violently. These 'polluted people' joined up with others and ruled Egypt for thirteen years before being driven out.³¹ The story is confused but was quoted by Josephus as an example of the way the Egyptians took many occasions 'to hate us and envy us – in the first place because our ancestors had had dominion over their country...and in the next place because the difference of our religion from theirs has occasioned great enmity between us, while our way of worship did as much exceed that which their laws appointed, as does the nature of God exceed that of brute beasts'.³²

For the next few centuries, Judeans in Alexandria would play key roles in support of the Ptolemaic dynasty. It was perhaps inevitable that the relatively closed Judean community, cooperating with the occupying power, and with a religion that involved sacrificing animals that Egyptians regarded as sacred, would be disliked by the conquered Egyptian population.

Fallen Angels (Third Century)³³

The bloody struggles of the Greek 'giants' who fought each other for shares of the world conquered by Alexander may have spawned a literary counterpart in the story of the Fallen Angels – a story that would later be incorporated into the book of Enoch.

This story involved named angels - Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Semjaza and others. The idea of a hierarchy of named angels was a second temple phenomenon. Whilst the biblical angels were either sexless or male, the idea of a hierarchy of angels of both sexes has certainly captured the artistic

³¹ Josephus quoted these texts from Manetho in *Against Apion* 1.26 (227-251). Manetho's work is usually associated with the reigns of the first two Ptolemies. If the Manetho mentioned in the *Hibeh Papyri* (241/40 BC) is the same, then he may have continued working into the reign of Ptolemy III.

³² Josephus. *Against Apion*. 1.25 (224)

³³ The story is incorporated into Enoch where it is found in chapters 6 to 11

imagination down the centuries. The origin of the idea in second temple times suggests that it may have been imported from Persia where Zoroastrian literature envisaged the personification of virtuous spirits.

The angels of this story were some of the *'children of Heaven'*, who, when the *'children of men'* had multiplied on the face of the earth, noticed the great beauty of the daughters of men and lusted after them. Some of the angels said to their colleagues, *"Come, let us choose wives from among the children of men and have children by them"*. Two hundred angels led by Semjaza formed themselves into a group, bound by an oath of mutual loyalty, *and they took human wives and they began to go into them and to defile themselves with them and they taught them charms and enchantments*. The women became pregnant, and they bore great giants.³⁴ This echoes Genesis 6:1-4 'When the people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves...' The offspring then were the Nephilim, the 'strong men of old'. The idea that giants are the children of the union of gods and humans was a significant theme in Greek mythology

This story interwove the Genesis myth with another tradition in which the angels, led this time by Azazel³⁵, gave men knowledge of metals and the manufacture of swords, knives and breastplates; of the art of ornamentation, of astrology, the weather and of astronomy. It was knowledge that could be used for evil as well as good, for *'there arose much godlessness'* and mankind was led astray, and became corrupt. There are several Near Eastern myths about semi-divine culture-bearers of which Aeschylus' story of Prometheus is a prime example.

The Giants consumed all that belonged to mankind, and then started to devour mankind itself and to sin against all animals and to eat the flesh and to drink the blood. As men perished they cried out and their cry went up to heaven where it was heard by the archangels Michael, Raphael, Gabriel and Uriel. These took mankind's case to the *"Lord of the Ages, God of gods and King of Kings"*; he who first instructed Uriel to go to Noah and protect him from the judgement that was to come (although this Noah fragment may be a later insertion).

God instructed Raphael: -

*'Bind Azazel hand and foot and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert...cast him in, and place rough and jagged rocks on him...On the day of judgement he shall be cast into the fire.
Heal the earth that the angels have corrupted'.³⁶*

Azazel may also be the name of the demon to which the eponymous goat was despatched in the ritual of the day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) as described in Leviticus 16. An accurate English rendering of the Leviticus text would state that a goat should be chosen 'for Yahweh' and another 'for Azazel' and that Yahweh's goat should be sacrificed and the other goat sent off alive 'to Azazel' bearing all the sins of the people. The demon Azazel is often eliminated in English texts and the grammar adjusted to fit.³⁷

Gabriel was instructed to proceed against the children of fornication, the offspring of angels and mortal women. He was instructed to send them into battle against one another.

Michael was ordered to bind Semjaza and his associates and throw them into a ravine in the earth for seventy generations: -

³⁴ Enoch 6:1-2. Some interpret Semjaza as Satan, but others note that there are two biblical references to angels descending to earth, this one which refers to Genesis 6:4, and Satan mentioned explicitly in Revelations 12:9

³⁵ In the Hebrew Bible, *azazel* is the word used for the scapegoat onto whom all innocent sins are transferred before the goat was sent off into the wilderness in the annual ceremony of Atonement (Leviticus 16:7-10). The Septuagint translated this as 'scapegoat', but many modern English bibles simply transliterate Azazel. Seventh day Adventists follow Origen in identifying Azazel as Satan. A strict transliteration of the name as used in Enoch would suggest something more like 'Asael' but Enoch 10:8b identifies 'Asael' as Azazel, an identity that is confirmed by fragments from Qumran (Olsen, 2003; p910). R. H. Charles' translation of Enoch uses Azazel for 'Asael' throughout.

³⁶ Enoch 10:4-7

³⁷ For a translation that properly refers to Azazel see the English Standard Version, or Milgrom's translation in his Leviticus 1-16, where his notes discuss the issues involved.

*till the judgement that is for ever and ever is completed. Then they will be led off to the abyss of fire and torment.*³⁸

But not everything was to be set for destruction, for when all evil has been removed from the world: -

*“Then let the plant of truth and righteousness appear...and all the righteous shall escape and shall live till they have thousands of children and they shall complete all the days of their youth and old age in peace...
and the earth shall be cleansed of all defilement and all sin;
and from all punishment and torment;
and I will never send it upon them from generation to generation for ever.”*³⁹

The Septuagint

Ptolemy II Philadelphus was an intellectual; it is plausible that he may have supported his librarian’s suggestion that a Greek translation be made of the scriptures of his Judean subjects⁴⁰. Aristeas, writing after the main work of translation had been completed, gave us the title, “The Septuagint”, for this work. This title was based on his – probably fictional – report that six elders from each of the twelve tribes came from ‘Israel’ to assist the local Alexandrians in the translation. It is more probable that the translation was prepared by the Alexandrian Yahwists for their own use since only a few of them could, by this time, read their scriptures in Hebrew. Whatever the motive, and whoever executed it, it was initially just a translation of the Torah. The result was the Pentateuch, the Greek name for the first five books of the bible.

Translations of other biblical books were added over the next couple of centuries until a Greek version of all the books that would eventually form the Hebrew bible (and some others as well) was accomplished. Just as we now know that there were several different versions of the Hebrew text of the bible available to the reader at the beginning of the Current Era, so there were several different versions in Greek. In part these different versions arose from the use of different Hebrew originals, and in part because the different translations reflected the differing needs of the communities for which they were made. Some translators seem to have edited the material as they went along. For example, the Greek translators of Job omitted the anthropomorphic references to God, and though the Hebrew text is generally thought to have omitted all mention of the afterlife, the Greek text introduced it – as in Job 14:14 which read *“If mortals die, will they live again? All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come”*.⁴¹ The change resulted from the change in philosophy between the time of the writing of Job and the time of its translation in Alexandria – reflecting the influence of the intervening Zoroastrian and Greek cultures.

The Septuagint is important for four main reasons:

- -It is the primary text of the Orthodox churches.
- -It represents the thought of Alexandrian Yahwists in the last three centuries of the pre-Christian era.
- -It, not the Hebrew bible, was the scripture of the early Christian church. It was much later that the Christian churches reverted to the Hebrew text as the primary source for their Old Testament.
- -It is one of the sources that have been used by modern translators to correct the main Hebrew text, the Masoretic text, where this is obscure or perceived to be corrupted.

The translation was needed as the custom had grown up in Egypt for Yahwists to gather to pray together and to study the scriptures. It is in Egypt that the earliest references to a ‘prayer house’ can be found. There is a dedication that reads “For King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice, his sister and wife, and

³⁸ Enoch 10:12b-13a. This may be the origin of the concept of Hell as a pit of fire and torment. The seventy generations between Enoch and Jesus as stated in Luke’s gospel (Luke 3:23-37) may be patterned on the Enochian concept of seventy generations between the fall and the judgement.

³⁹ Enoch 10:15 & 17 & 22

⁴⁰ Greenford (1998) in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, p 426

⁴¹

for their children, the Judeans have dedicated this prayer house⁴². King Ptolemy III to whom this inscription refers reigned from 246 to 221 BCE.

The choice of the Torah as the first material to be translated suggests that it was the Torah that was regarded as scripture and not the prophets or the other writings. The intention is presumed to have been that this text was to be studied and read publicly when Jews gathered for worship. The reading of scripture and the exposition of the word had come to be an acceptable substitute for sacrifice – at least in the Egyptian Diaspora.

Once the work on the Torah had been completed, the translators turned their attentions to other valued Hebrew texts, so that all the Hebrew religious texts were available in Greek, at least to educated Alexandrians, by about 130 BCE. Meanwhile important new works were still being created, though only a few of them would be accepted as Scripture by the Rabbis that selected the contents of the Judaic bible in the second century CE.

Enoch

The book of Enoch is a treasured scripture of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church although the book is not included in any of the Protestant, Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox bibles. Written originally in Aramaic and translated first into Greek, it survives in a further translation into Ethiopian Ge'ez and in some Aramaic fragments from Qumran. It comprises a number of apocalyptic works written between the 3rd Century BCE and the 1st Century CE. Enoch was probably chosen as the pseudographic voice for this work because of the verse in Genesis that states that Enoch walked with God and then he disappeared because God 'took him'⁴³, leading to the belief that Enoch, like Elijah, did not die but entered heaven alive. Enoch would therefore be able to observe heaven and report on it to mortal men. The book in its final form is a collection of a number of separate works, brought together by placing the different parts within a framework of visions and dreams. Olsen considers that the works of as many as twelve authors may have been incorporated into the final book.⁴⁴

Given the multiple layers of translation of translations, it is understandable that the text is occasionally confused. It can be divided into several sections, which in order of composition were:

1. *The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries (Chaps. 72–82)*
2. *The Book of the Watchers (Chaps. 1–36)*
3. *Enoch's Two Dream Visions (Chaps. 83–90)*
4. *Two Pieces of Testamentary Narrative (81:1–82:3; 91)*
5. *The Epistle of Enoch (Chaps. 92–105)*
6. *An Account of Noah's Birth (Chaps. 106–7)*
7. *Another Book by Enoch (Chap. 108)*
8. *The Similitudes (Chaps. 37–71)*
9. *The Book of the Giants (Qumran fragments only)⁴⁵*

Astronomical comments are interspersed within various sections of the book as well as being contained in the Book of Heavenly Luminaries. This astronomical material may date back to the Persian period, although it is also possible that a renewed awareness of Persian astronomy and the solar calendar may stem from Greek interest in Persian culture following Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire.

The book of Heavenly Luminaries described in detail the movements of the sun and moon which justify the solar calendar, concluding: -

And in those days the angel Uriel answered and said to me: 'See, I have shown you everything, Enoch, and I have revealed everything to you that you can see - this sun and this moon, and the leaders of the stars of the heaven and all those who turn them, their tasks and times and departures.'⁴⁶

⁴² D.M.Lewis "The inscriptions of Egypt" Number 1440 (this one) and 1532 (a similar inscription). Quoted in "From The Maccabees to the Mishnah" by S.J.D.Cohen; p111

⁴³ Genesis 5:23

⁴⁴ Daniel C Olsen; *1 Enoch*; from Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible; p 905.

⁴⁵ Nicklesburg, 1992. Note that chapter and verse numbers vary between the available English translations. The numberings here follow those used by R H Charles (1917).

⁴⁶ Enoch 80:1

Enoch was sent back to earth and given a year⁴⁷ in which to pass on this information to his son Methuselah. The righteous are blessed, he explained, when they calculate the days of the year correctly. 14 days were needed from the new moon till the full light falls upon the moon and a further 15 until it sets. But it was not as simple as that for whilst some months had 29 days, others have 30, and one month had 28 days. In a half year there were 177 days but in this time the moon had fallen behind the sun by five days so that the full year is 364 days not 354. In practise this was expressed as twelve periods of 30 days to which were added 4 additional days to separate the seasons – again making 364 days in total. The seasons followed the festivals so the extra days were added in the first, third, fourth and sixth months.⁴⁸ Although not completely accurate, it was an improvement on the lunar calendar which fell out of synchronisation with the seasons more quickly, so that those ‘sinners’ who used the old calendar would find that: -

*their years shall be shortened,
their seed shall be late on their lands and their fields,
All things on the earth shall alter,
and shall not appear in their time:
The rain shall be held back,
the heaven shall withhold it.*⁴⁹

The Essenes adopted the Solar calendar – perhaps as a means of differentiating themselves from what they saw as the corrupted temple cult. By this means the Essenes ensured that their festivals would fall on different days to those that were celebrated in the Temple.

The Book of Watchers⁵⁰

The Book of Watchers deals with the question of how evil came into the world. Copies of the Book of Watchers and of the Heavenly Luminaries have been found in Qumran and can be dated to approximately 200 BCE, therefore suggesting a date of original composition before the end of the third century BCE at the latest. The content is consistent with the economic and political situation during the rule of Ptolemy Philadelphus - mid 3rd century BCE. The author would have been a Palestinian residing in Dan if the choice of that region as Enoch’s earthly base can be taken as evidence of the author’s home⁵¹. A section, the rebellion of the angels, discussed above and now found in chapters 6-11, may have been written earlier than the rest and subsequently incorporated into the main text. Whilst the Book of Watchers is an apocalypse in the sense that it claims to be a revelation, it does not incorporate a great final battle between the forces of good and evil. It is set in a time between the arrival of evil in the world and the final judgement in which evil will be eliminated, but it anticipates a time after that judgement in which the poor will inherit the earth and the righteous live in peace – in harmony within the divine order. The author considered the final judgement to be reasonably imminent.

The Watchers of the title are the ‘children of heaven’ – angels. The main content of the book is described in the introduction thus: -

These are the words of the blessing of Enoch in which he blessed the righteous Elect who will live in the days of tribulation when all the wicked are to be removed.

The concept of the Elect, or the chosen ones, is important in Enoch. The Elect must be righteous, but it is not clear that all the righteous will be members of the Elect. It is clear though, that ‘Enoch’s’ vision was of a future time when: -

*The Holy Great One will come forth from his dwelling -
the eternal God will tread upon the earth on mount Sinai
...and
The earth shall be torn apart*

⁴⁷ Presumably his last year – his 365th, according to Genesis 5:23.

⁴⁸ Enoch 81:5-82:6

⁴⁹ Enoch 80:2 This is part of the poem that is 80:2-6. The poem has probably been misplaced and probably originally occurred after the full explanation of calendar in 81 and 82.

⁵⁰ Enoch 1-36

⁵¹ Enoch 12:6. Enoch goes to Dan to write a petition on behalf of the condemned angels.

*and all that is on the earth shall perish
...and
He will make peace with the righteous,
and will protect the Elect.*⁵²

God will come with 10,000 of the Holy Ones to carry out a judgement on all and destroy the ungodly. Enoch asks those who listen to him to learn from the steadfastness of the created universe; the stars do not change their orbits, the seasons always run regularly one after another and all the works of God go on in this way from year to year.

*But you! You have not been steadfast, nor done the commandments of the Lord,
You have turned away and spoken proud and harsh words from your impure mouths.
You, the hard of heart, shall find no peace...
On you, the godless, there shall be a curse.*

*But for the Elect, there shall be light, grace and peace,
And they shall inherit the earth.*⁵³

In Enoch, it is the spirit of the law that is to be observed. There are no lists of detailed laws to be obeyed. For the righteous Elect there will be forgiveness of sins, but for the hard-hearted there will be a curse.

The redactor inserted the stories of the fallen angels, observing that during these events Enoch was in heaven blessing the ‘*Lord of Majesty and the King of Ages*’: no-one on Earth knew where he was. In the story, Enoch was called to go to the fallen angels and inform them of their sentence. When the fallen ones heard what their probable punishment was to be, they begged Enoch to draw up a petition for them - for they themselves could no longer lift up their eyes to Heaven.

Enoch went to Dan (the cult site furthest from Jerusalem) and there prepared and read a petition for mercy on behalf of the fallen angels. Falling asleep, he saw in a vision that the petition would never be granted ‘*throughout all the days of eternity*’. In a passage that may have been inspired by Ezekiel’s vision of his calling, Enoch dreamt that he was lifted to Heaven by the winds - to a citadel of crystals and fire - and thence into the presence of the Great Glory, where even angels were not able to go.⁵⁴ There he was commanded to go to the fallen angels and convey to them God’s response. He was to say: -

*‘You should intercede for men, not men for you...you were formerly spiritual, living the eternal life, and immortal for all generations of the world.’*⁵⁵

That was why they were not to have wives. They were spiritual beings and therefore they were to live in Heaven. A similar point is made in Luke’s gospel, where Jesus says that whilst the children of this world may marry, those who are worthy of resurrection, “neither marry nor are given in marriage. Nor can they die any more, for they are like angels and the children of God, being children of the resurrection.”⁵⁶

Enoch was to explain to the fallen angels the full extent of the damage they had done as a result of their union with the women of earth. The offspring of that union, the giants would be evil spirits and would remain on earth.

*The spirits of the giants shall afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle, cause trouble and work destruction upon the earth. They take no food, but nevertheless hunger. They are the cause of offences. They will rise up against the children of men, and against the women, since they proceeded from them.*⁵⁷

⁵² Enoch 1:1 - 9

⁵³ Enoch 5:4 & 7 Compare Mathew 5:5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

⁵⁴ Ezekiel 1-2. Compare with Enoch 14:8-25

⁵⁵ Enoch 15:2

⁵⁶ Luke 20:34-36

⁵⁷ Enoch 15:8-12 The evil spirits would remain in the world for the 70 generations that the fallen angels would pass in the abyss of fire prior to receiving final judgement. In Mathew’s Gospel the demons accuse Jesus of arriving ‘before’ their time was up (Mathew 8:29). In this gospel, Jesus’ exorcisms were taken as evidence that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

That was the main cause of the presence of evil in the world. But it could have been worse, for Enoch was further told to say: -

*You have been in heaven, but all the mysteries had not been revealed to you. You knew worthless ones and these, in the hardness of your hearts, you have made known to the women. Through these mysteries men and women do much evil on earth. ... therefore you will have no peace*⁵⁸

The writers of Enoch were aware of the Genesis story, but did not attribute the presence of evil to Eve's actions but rather to the fallen angels⁵⁹.

His message delivered, Enoch was taken by the archangels on a series of journeys where he saw the origin of humanity, of the world and of evil. The first journey began with this stunning description:

*They took me to a place where those who were there were like flaming fire who, when they wished, appeared like men.
They brought me to a place of darkness
and to a mountain whose summit reached the heaven.
I saw the places of the stars and the place of thunder in the uttermost depths.
There were bows with arrows in their quivers, and a fiery sword and all the lightning.*

*They took me to the living waters
and to the western fire, which receives every setting of the sun,
and I came to a river of fire which flows like water into the great western sea.
I saw great rivers and I came to the deep darkness
and went to the place where no flesh walks.
I saw the mountains of the darkness of winter
and the source of the waters of the primeval deep.*⁶⁰

He saw the source of all the winds; the corner-stone of the earth, the seven mountains of precious stones, the ends of the earth and the place where the heavens were completed. And he saw a great abyss with columns of falling fire of immeasurable height and depth and beyond the abyss he saw a place with no heaven above and no earth beneath – a place with no water and no birds – a waste land, a desolation. And in this place were seven great burning stars. The angel said to him “*This place is the end of heaven and earth. The stars which roll in the fire are those that transgressed the commandment of the Lord, because they did not rise at their appointed times*”. This was the place where the angels who had had intercourse with women and whose spirits continued to defile mankind would remain till the great judgement when they would be punished ‘*until they are consumed*’.⁶¹

The account of this journey ended with the comment, “*I, Enoch, I alone saw the vision, the end of all things. No one shall see what I have seen*”.

The account of the second journey began with another visit to the places of terrible chaos – the prisons of the failed stars and the fallen angels. From there he was taken by Raphael to the place where the spirits of the souls of the dead would be assembled to await the day of their Judgement. Enoch noticed that there was a man making an argument before heaven, and was told that this was the spirit of Abel, who was making the case against Cain, his murderer, in order that Cain's descendants should be destroyed and Cain's seed eliminated from the seed of the human race.

Raphael explained that this place was divided into three hollows⁶². In the first there was a bright spring of water; this hollow was reserved for the righteous. The second hollow was for sinners who had not been punished in their lifetime; here they would wait in great pain until the day of judgement. The third hollow was similar, but was reserved for those sinners who make disclosures concerning how they

⁵⁸ Enoch 16:3-4, a reference to Isaiah 48:22, “There is no peace”, says Yahweh,” for the wicked”.

⁵⁹ The Christian concept of original sin resulting from eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was developed by Irenaeus and expanded by Augustine of Hippo. There is no doctrine of original sin in Judaism.

⁶⁰ Enoch 17:1-8

⁶¹ Enoch 18:14-19:1

⁶² Some texts suggest there were four hollows; but even if this is correct, the purpose of the fourth is not made clear by the available texts.

were slain. They would be kept together with the lawless who they accuse. They would not be punished on the day of judgement; but neither would they be released.

Then, after a brief visit to the incessant fire of all the stars, Enoch is taken again to see the seven mountains of precious stones. There he saw a tree with a scent beyond all scents; with leaves, flowers and bark that never wither; and with a beautiful fruit resembling a cluster of dates. The archangel Michael told him that no mortal may touch this tree until after the day of judgement when it would be transplanted to the holy place, the temple of the eternal King.

Enoch went to the middle of the earth and was shown a blessed place and a holy mountain with streams flowing beneath it. And he saw other marvellous mountains and valleys but within this blessed land was a treeless ravine of hard rock. The archangel Uriel explained that this accursed valley was the prison of those who had uttered unseemly words against the Lord and harsh things about his glory: there in the last days they will receive judgement in the presence of the righteous.⁶³

He was shown the place where the Elect would be saved: -

*I saw a special place, full of trees and plants with water gushing forth from above ...
I saw aromatic trees with the scent of frankincense and myrrh; and trees like the almond...
And I came to the Garden of Righteousness and saw beyond many great scented trees growing there, very beautiful and glorious,
And there was the tree of wisdom – of great wisdom for those who eat of it.*⁶⁴

Raphael explained,

“This is the tree from which your father of old and your aged mother, who was before you, have eaten and learnt wisdom. Their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked and they were driven from the garden.”

The acquisition of wisdom was not here treated as a fundamental sin – although it was recognised that continued residence in the garden had become inappropriate once they eaten from the tree.

From there Enoch went to the ends of the earth – East, North, West, South and East again. And in each place he saw the great gateways of heaven through which the stars move, the winds blow, and the weather comes. Enoch blessed the Lord of Glory who had made these great and glorious wonders *to show to the angels, to the spirits and to men - so that they might praise his work and all his creation.*⁶⁵

The ideas of angels being free to choose good or evil, of retribution in the afterlife, of a hell for the accursed and of a paradise for the righteous were new to Judaism, but central to Zoroastrianism. The idea of a journey to the underworld was familiar from Greek Mythology.

Daniel: The Stories

Stories involving Daniel, or Dan’el, circulated in Ancient Canaan as early as the second millennium BCE. Examples have been found in the great library at Ugarit⁶⁶ and in fragments of extra-canonical material found amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls⁶⁷. Ezekiel mentioned Daniel along with Noah and Job as examples of good men⁶⁸. In all these stories, Daniel was the archetypal righteous man. In the biblical Book of Daniel he was associated with Nebuchadnezzar who, by the third century BCE, had become the archetypal foreign ruler and would appear in numerous stories in that role. One reason for his popularity may be the idea, emanating from Jeremiah, that Nebuchadnezzar was the ‘servant of Yahweh’⁶⁹.

The twelve-chapter Masoretic text of the book of Daniel has come down to us partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic. The evidence points to Aramaic as being the original language throughout whilst

⁶³ Enoch 27. The description of the ‘Middle of the Earth’ suggests the site of Jerusalem, although the author avoids the anachronism of having a city there in Enoch’s time. The accursed valley suggests the valley of Hinnon, or ‘Gehenna’ in Greek. All the material in Enoch 25-28 could depend to some extent on Ezekiel’s vision of a New Jerusalem (Ezekiel 47) albeit with the Ezekiel’s many trees replaced by the ‘Tree of Life’ from Genesis – a modification that will be repeated in Revelations 22.

⁶⁴ Enoch 26:5 – 32:3

⁶⁵ Enoch 36:4

⁶⁶ See the paragraph on the ‘Canaanite Inheritance’ in Chapter 1 above.

⁶⁷ Cambridge p 274 & Vermes ‘The dead sea scrolls in English’ p 229

⁶⁸ Ezekiel 14:14

⁶⁹ Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6 & 43:10

the Hebrew was a later translation, prepared perhaps to make the book worthier of being seen as 'Scripture'.⁷⁰ There is no obvious explanation for the omission of a Hebrew translation for the retained Aramaic section (2:4b-7:28). The Aramaic begins in mid-sentence; it excludes the introduction to the stories, but includes the first vision in chapter 7 which was linked to the first story in several ways.

The parts of these stories that have been found in the Masoretic text are regarded as canonical in all traditions. There are additional stories whose earliest manuscripts have been found only in the Greek translations. In the case of Daniel, the early church substituted the Septuagint with a later Greek translation produced by Theodotion of Ephesus in the second century CE – probably because where they could compare the Greek translations with the original texts, they found Theodotion's version to be more reliable. The Greek extensions were relegated to the Apocrypha by the Western Protestant churches at the time of the reformation; the Roman Catholic church treats the extra material as Deutero-canonical. Verse numbering is not consistent amongst all traditions: here it conforms to that used in the King James Version.

The Masoretic text divides into two main parts – the stories of chapters 2 to 6 and the visions of chapters 8 to 12. The visions can be dated fairly precisely to 168-165 BCE from the dramatic events of those years, but since no echo of those events are found in the stories it is probable these were composed earlier. The general understanding of the dream interpretation in Daniel 2 envisages a four-kingdom sequence ending with the fractured Greek empires of Alexander's generals, which would suggest a third century date for the composition of the stories. The third century is also consistent with the nature of the Aramaic used and with the Greek names for the particular musical instruments mentioned in the story of Belshazzar's feast.⁷¹ The stories were not necessarily all written down at the same time, and they were probably subjected to the usual editorial insertions which makes dating complicated. Apart from the insertions, the stories display a pleasing simplicity of language and style and tell of Daniel in the third person, whereas the visions are written in the first person and in more complex language.

The stories reflect the courtly customs of the Persians. The relationships between the various rulers mentioned are not historically accurate, but rather adopt a re-arrangement of history which seems to have satisfied the artistic requirements of a number of story tellers in the third and second centuries. In these Daniel stories, Belshazzar was the son of the brilliant general Nebuchadrezzar (not the incompetent Nabonidus), and Darius was the son (not the father) of Xerxes. To enjoy the stories, it is sensible to suspend disbelief in certain aspects of their historicity!

The setting for these particular stories was provided in the opening chapter. Nebuchadrezzar ordered his chief of staff to select some young aristocratic Israelites and bring them to Babylon to serve in the royal court. They were to be flawless and handsome young men, witty and clever, quick to learn and to understand. They would receive three years training and a daily allowance of food and wine from the royal menu. Amongst those selected were Daniel and his three companions, whom the chief of staff renamed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

In the first story, Nebuchadrezzar had a dream for which he sought interpretation. He consulted the seers and wise-men of his kingdom, but refused to tell them the dream, reasoning that they will make up '*lying and deceitful words*' if he does. But he reasoned that if they can tell him both the dream and the interpretation then he will know that the interpretation is valid.⁷² The seers insisted that such a thing was impossible. The king was about to execute all seers as a waste of space when Daniel agreed to do just what the king required. The king, he said, had seen a great statue in his dream: the statue had a head of gold; a chest and arms of silver; a belly and hips of bronze with legs of iron, but with feet partly of iron and partly of clay. A stone struck the feet of clay, crushing them and causing the whole statue to fall and disintegrate into tiny pieces which were blown away by the wind - but the stone became a great mountain.

Daniel interpreted the dream, saying to the king: -

'You are the head of gold.

After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours.

Next there will be a third kingdom, of bronze, which will rule over the whole earth

⁷⁰ Hartman and Di Lella (2005). Pp 14-15. The occasional transliterations reveal the Aramaic plural ending '-in' rather than the Hebrew '-im' (e.g. 'Cherubin' rather than 'Cherubim').

⁷¹ Ginsberg suggests a date between 292 and 261 BCE for the composition of Daniel 2, based on his conjecture that the text implies that remnants of all four empires coexisted at the time (Hartman, 2005, pp. 151-2)

⁷² The change from Hebrew to Aramaic occurs when the seers ask the king to tell them the dream. The remainder of this story and all the others are in Aramaic).

Then there will be a fourth kingdom, as strong as iron. Just as iron crushes and destroys everything, so it will crush and destroy all these others. But just as you saw, the feet were partly clay and partly iron; so it will be a divided kingdom with some iron in it. In the days of these kings, the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it ever be delivered up to another people... It will stand forever.⁷³

For this interpretation Daniel was rewarded with the governorship of the province of Babylon and the leadership of the seers.

The text that is summarised above is one of two versions of the story which in today's bible have been woven around each other⁷⁴. The second version placed emphasis on God's deliberate actions in revealing the future to Nebuchadrezzar. It enters at verse 13 where it states that not only were the Babylonian seers to be put to death, so also were Daniel and his companions. Then, after Daniel had successfully secured a short stay of execution, Daniel and his companions prayed for a revelation, which they received. Afterwards Daniel gave thanks saying;

*May the name of God be blessed, for all eternity and forever,
for wisdom and power are his*

...
*To you, God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise
for you have given me wisdom and power
And now you have shown me what we asked of you
And have made known to us what concerns the king.⁷⁵*

Then when he meets the king, Daniel explains that it was God (Aramaic 'Elah') who gave the King a picture of the future and God who gave the interpretation to Daniel so that he could reveal it to the King. As a result, the King worshipped the God of the Judeans through Daniel and acknowledged their god as the 'God of gods.'⁷⁶

It is possible that the 'feet of clay' image was further developed by later contributors. Each development was introduced with the phrase "*Just as you saw...*"⁷⁷. One such contributor suggested that the iron and clay was brought about by inter-marriage (literally by '*the mingling of the seed of men*'). The most probable reference was to the marriage of Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II, and Antiochus II – a marriage that ended in domestic murder. If the marriage allusion is correct and, as seems likely, this was a late insertion, then the primary text could have been written sometime before 250 BCE, when the marriage took place, and the allusion that must have been added afterwards. Another '*Just as you saw...*' addition suggested that the clay part was just the toes – in which case the ten toes may be an allusion to ten rulers - Alexander the great, his son Alexander Aegis and the eight Syrian Greek rulers, Seleucus I-IV and Antiochus I-IV.

Links exist between each pair of stories. Thus the stories of chapters three and six are thematically similar. Whereas in the furnace pit story it was just the companions who were the heroes, in the lion's pit story it was just Daniel, and whereas the king in the former case was Nebuchadrezzar, it was Darius in the latter. But in both cases, the king was tricked into issuing a proclamation that all true worshippers of Yahweh would be bound to disobey. In both cases the inevitable disobedience was observed and the 'culprit' or 'culprits' brought to trial before the king, who however regretfully, had to enforce his own edict. In the first, the trap was set for Daniel's friends by those jealous of the friend's sudden rise to power, in the second the trap was set for Daniel by a similar group of jealous ministers. In

⁷³ Daniel 2:38b-40a & 40c-41a & 41c & 44.

⁷⁴ There are differences in style, vocabulary and content between the version. The differences of content include the facts that in second version Arioch, the executioner, goes to Daniel and Daniel goes to the King without the need to seek an audience whereas in the primary version Daniel goes to Arioch and has to seek an audience with the king; in the primary version Daniel is able to immediately interpret the dream, whereas in the secondary version he needs time and prayer.

⁷⁵ Daniel 2:20-22.

⁷⁶ The verses that may be attributed to the second version are 13-23 and 29-30 (Hartman, 2005, p. 139) and possibly also 46-47 when Yahweh's name as the Revealer of Mysteries is repeated from verse 29; and 49 since Daniel's companions are only mentioned in the second version. The primary core version comprises verses 1-12, 24-28, 31-40, 44-45 and 48. There are late additions in 41-43 that will be discussed later when the overall book is reviewed.

⁷⁷ Daniel 2:42-43

both, the king was pleased with the survival of the heroes of the story; and in both the king ended by recognising the power of the Judean's god. The stories differed only in the details. In the first, the companions readily admit their offence, but say

"We have no need to present a defence to you in this matter. If there is a god able to save us, such as our god whom we serve, he will save us from the blazing furnace and from your hand, O king. But if not, know for sure, O king, that we will not serve your gods..."⁷⁸

The storyteller built the tension by observing that the furnace was so hot that those who were charged with throwing the companions into the furnace were themselves killed by the intensity of the heat as they approached it. By contrast the three companions thrown into the furnace were joined by a divine being and all four were seen wandering about in the flames completely unharmed. The Greek version of this story would include a prayer placed in the mouth of Azariah (aka Abednego) as they walked about in the flames. And then when the angel came and cooled the inside of the furnace, making it feel as if a 'dew-laden breeze' was blowing through it, the three companions sang a liturgy of praise calling on all in earth and heaven to bless the Lord. It culminated with the words: -

*Give thanks to the Lord for he is good
His mercy endures forever
Bless the God of gods, all you who fear the Lord
Praise him and give him thanks
For his mercy endures forever⁷⁹*

Finally, when Nebuchadrezzar invited the companions out of the furnace he said: -

Blessed be the god of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, because he sent his angel and rescued his servants for they trusted in god and disregarded the orders of the king.⁸⁰

And the king issued a proclamation that anyone who blasphemed against the god of the Judeans would be torn limb from limb and their house destroyed.

In the lion's pit story, the king himself prayed that Daniel would survive. His prayer was granted and when Daniel left the pit unharmed, the king ordered that those who had denounced Daniel, together with their innocent wives and children, should be thrown to the lion's pit in his place – "and before they reached the bottom, the lions overpowered them and crushed their bones to pieces⁸¹." As a result, the King wrote to the whole world requiring that the god of Daniel be revered. And he added this doxology:

*"He is the living God, enduring forever,
His kingdom will never be destroyed,
His dominion will never end."*

By pairing up all the stories in this way, the author or editor created the following chiasmus

The four empires allegorized as four metals (2:1-49)
Refusal to worship the golden image and the committal to the furnace pit (3:1-30)
Nebuchadrezzar's madness (3:31-4:34)
Belshazzar's feast and the writing on the wall (5:1-17 & 25-6:1)
Nebuchadrezzar's madness recalled (5:18-24)
Refusal to worship and committal to the lion's pit (6:2-29)
The four empires allegorized as four beasts. (7:1-7 & 9-20 & 23-24 & 26-28)

The story of Nebuchadrezzar's madness was included before the story of the 'Writing on the Wall' and then recapitulated as part of that story, thus making the core 'Writing on Wall' the heart of the chiasmus. The madness story began as another dream interpretation problem. The author put the story

⁷⁸ Daniel 3:16-18

⁷⁹ Daniel 3:24-90 The Prayer of Azariah and the Hymn of the Three Judeans – now to be found in the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles.

⁸⁰ Daniel 3:28

⁸¹ Daniel 6:25 using the rare verb 'daqaq' for to crush to pieces. It only occurs in these Daniel texts.

into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar himself in the form of a letter from the king to all the people of every nation. He wrote, *“I am happy to make known the signs and wonders with which the highest god (Aramaic ‘illahee elah’) has favoured me. How great are his miracles! How mighty his wonders! ...In the vision that came to my mind as I lay in bed, I saw a tree in the middle of the world. It was very tall; it grew taller and stronger until its top reached the sky...In it was food for all”*. But later a watcher came down from heaven and cried: -

*“Cut down the tree; lop off his branches,
strip off his leaves: throw away his fruit,
Let the animals flee from beneath him,
and the birds from his branches
But leave his stump and roots in the ground,
with a band of iron and bronze,

In the tender grass of the field. let him be washed by the dew of heaven,
his food the herbs of the earth shared with the beasts.
Let his heart be changed from that of a man
and the heart of a beast be given him. whilst seven years pass over him”⁸²*

The king asked Belshazzar (aka Daniel) to interpret the dream, which he did, explaining: -

*“You, O King, are the tree. You have grown great and powerful...
You shall be driven away from human society and will make your home with wild animals...until
you have learnt that the Most High rules over human dominion and he gives it to whom he
pleases.
May it please the king to take my advice: -
Seek redemption for your sins by good deeds and for your crimes by showing mercy to the poor,
And so live long and happily.”⁸³*

Then the text switches to the third person as the author comments: -

*All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as he was walking in the
garden on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, the king mused ‘Great Babylon! Was it not
built by me as a royal residence, by the force of my might and for the majesty of my glory? ...’
Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when a voice spoke from heaven saying, “This is
decreed: King Nebuchadnezzar, your kingdom is taken from you. You shall be driven away from
the company of men”
And at that moment the word was fulfilled.*

Nebuchadnezzar suffered his insanity for a period, but then the text reverted to Nebuchadnezzar’s voice as he says: -

*“At the end of this time, I, Nebuchadnezzar raised my eyes to heaven, my reason was restored
to me and I blessed the Most High.*

He confirms that the Kingdom was restored to him, and that he became greater than before. And he ends by glorifying the King in Heaven: -

“All his deeds are right. All his ways are just. He humbles those who walk in pride.”

This story may have drawn its inspiration from the fact that the Babylonian ruler Nabonidus did disappear from Babylon for about ten years. He probably went into the Arabian Desert at Tema, leaving his son in charge in Babylon⁸⁴. The discovery amongst the Dead Sea scrolls of ‘The Prayer of Nabonidus’ confirmed that this event was probably the source of the tradition about the king’s madness.

The central story concerned Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall. At a feast where

⁸² Daniel 4:13b–16

⁸³ Daniel 4:22 to the end of the chapter.

⁸⁴ See the section on ‘Medes and Persians’ from the earlier chapter entitled “Scattered”

Belshazzar's wives and concubines drank wine from the gold and silver cups taken from the Jerusalem temple, a moving hand appeared and wrote upon the plaster, 'MENE, TEKEL, PERES'⁸⁵. These were units of weight; specifically, 50 shekels, 1 shekel, and 25 shekels. A shekel was the standard unit of weight, used especially for money. A shekel would be about 11 grams (a third of an ounce). So one implication was that Belshazzar was distinctly lightweight. Daniel was called and eventually interpreted the dream, saying: -

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end

Tekel: You have been weighed in the scales and found wanting

Peres: Your kingdom has been divided up and given to the Medes and Persians.

A clue to the interpretation is that each line contained a wordplay on the unit of weight that it interprets. Thus *menah* ('has numbered') is a wordplay on *Mene*; *teguiltah* ('you have been weighed') played on *Teqel*; and *perisat* ('has been divided') played on *Peres*. But before Daniel interpreted the dream, he took the opportunity to lecture the king on the danger of excessive pride, employing the story of Nebuchadnezzar's madness to make his point. The story of the writing on the wall is thus encompassed by the tale of king's madness using much the same words in both instances. In this and all the stories, the king rewarded Daniel or his companions or both with promotion to high office and increased authority.⁸⁶

All the stories are variants on the 'faithful courtier' theme: a faithful and intelligent Judean courtier to a foreign ruler excites the jealousy of the local, but less able, courtiers who plot to have him removed; the Judean's faith in his god saves him, and results in the fate planned for the Judean being visited on his opponents - whilst he is promoted to higher things. These particular stories employ the devices of oral folktales - much repetition, stereotypical characters, simple language, semi-poetic lines and standard plot development. Their attractiveness was enhanced by their loose connection to real historical characters and situations, even if these ingredients were remixed by the storyteller. There certainly were Judeans who achieved high office in the service of foreign rulers, and there certainly were situations in which loyalty to the regime would have clashed with the practice of Judean religion. These stories are attractive fantasies concerning how such difficulties might be resolved.

Josephus quoted many of the Daniel stories as if they were history. Sadly, this points out how unreliable he was when dealing with events distant from his own time.

'Ezra'; the second edition

It was probably around the turn of the century when the Book of Ezra had its first six chapters added. In these chapters the author of the addition refers to the house of god '*in Jerusalem*', or the temple '*in Jerusalem*', implying that there was at least one other temple from which the author wished to distinguish the Jerusalem temple. In these chapters, and only these, the author always added the phrase '*in Jerusalem*' unless it was otherwise clear from the context that the Jerusalem temple was the one to which he was referring. In the rest of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles this clarification was never used. The first six chapters were therefore probably written after 330 BCE when the Samaritan Temple was built.

These six chapters were written to describe the process of re-building the Jerusalem temple and to provide a link between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. He re-used the last words of Chronicles as his opening;

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that Yahweh's word through Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus ...

This linkage has led some scholars to believe that the whole of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah was originally one work - an idea given credence by the fact that the Apocryphal book of I Esdras included a translation into Greek of a text that ran from II Chronicles 35 to Ezra 10, albeit with an insertion in

⁸⁵ Daniel 5:24. In some traditions the initial 'MENE' is repeated. This may have originated in a scribal error, but has been retained because of its dramatic impact. For different versions of the words and their meaning see Hartman and Di Lella (2005) pp 183 and 185.

⁸⁶ Daniel 5:29. This recognition of Daniel did Belshazzar no good for, in the story, he died that very night and Darius the Mede succeeded to the Kingdom.

Esdras 3 to 5 of a debate concerning what was the strongest thing in the world (answer 'truth'). This is however merely evidence that Ezra 1-6 was written before I Esdras; and since this Greek work is thought to be 2nd century, that point is not disputed. The idea that Ezra 1-6 was written at the same time as Chronicles and the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah is inconsistent with the dating evidence discussed above and in the previous chapter which indicated that Chronicles was written before 370 at the latest and that Ezra 1-6 was written after 330 at the earliest.

Amongst the source material assembled in Ezra 1-6 was the decree of Cyrus (both in its original Aramaic and as translated into Hebrew); an inventory of Temple vessels (allegedly all brought back from Babylon by the returnees), a list of those who returned from the Exile with Zerubbabel (also found in Nehemiah); letters in Aramaic from Rehum to Artaxerxes and Artaxerxes' reply; and letters from Tattenai to Darius and Darius' reply. The exchange between Rehum, a local official and Artaxerxes concerned the rights of the citizens of Jehud to repair their walls. This right was denied by Artaxerxes. The letter exchange with Darius concerned their right to build the temple. This was approved. Darius was presumably Darius II (423 – 404 BCE). Inserted between these two exchanges in today's bible there is a reference to the campaigns of Haggai and Zechariah promoting the re-building of the Jerusalem temple.

In the third chapter in today's bible, there is a description of an attempt to start the building of the temple shortly after the arrival of Zerubbabel's returnees, and the qualified celebrations that took place when the foundation was laid.

*All the people responded with a great shout of praise to Yahweh when the foundation of the house of Yahweh was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept out loud when they saw this house,*⁸⁷

The second letter exchange followed and, with permission to build the temple secured, the sixth chapter concluded with an editorial comment concerning the completion of the temple and the celebration of the Passover.

The first edition was then linked in by the introduction of the words 'After this...' and the original text that followed then went on to describe Ezra's commissioning.⁸⁸

Judea under Alexandria

When in 246 BCE Ptolemy III Euergetes ('the Benefactor') inherited the Egyptian Greek Empire he may have originally intended to continue his father's successful economic and political policies. He did, however, feel compelled to invade Syria to avenge the murder of his sister Berenice, the abandoned second wife and widow of the Seleucid king Antiochus II Theos ('the God').⁸⁹ Berenice had been murdered by agents of Laodice, the first wife of Antiochus Theos who at the same time contrived to poison her husband in order to secure the empire for her elder son, whom she proclaimed king as Seleucus II. Ptolemy III was initially successful: his Navy reached the Hellespont, and his army Seleucia on the Tigris (near Babylon). Unfortunately, Ptolemy was forced to return to Egypt by a number of factors including famine caused by a low Nile, and the entry into the fray of Antiochus Hierax, the brother of Seleucid II. Antiochus Hierax intervened ostensibly in support of his older brother, but probably seeking power for himself. In 240 BCE Ptolemy negotiated a peace in which he kept Judea, the Orontes river valley, parts of Asia Minor, and Thrace.

During his reign, Ptolemy the 'Benefactor' oversaw the publication of the first modern calendar with its standard year of 365 days with an extra day being added every fourth year. It did not, however, catch on immediately. Ptolemy may have restored the statues taken from the temples during the Persian

⁸⁷ Ezra 3:11b-12a. It is sometimes argued that this verse, with its reference to the old temple, assumed that the reader had just read of the destruction of the first temple in Chronicles, and understood the glory of the old temple.

⁸⁸ This is not the only hypothesis for the creation of 'Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah'. F.M. Cross proposes a three-stage composition of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. In the first stage the composition takes us from Saul's death (I Chronicles 1) to the restoration of the walls (Ezra 3:13). In the next stage, the rest of 'Ezra' as far as Nehemiah 9 (the national confession) was added; and in the final stage the remainder of the Nehemiah tradition was added.

⁸⁹ This marriage may lie behind the insertion in Daniel 2:43 that "just as iron does not blend with clay so the two will be mixed together in human seed, (a possible reference to inter-marriage), but will not hold together".

period, initiated the construction of a new temple at Edfu and made donations to other temples. He kept Egypt out of the wars involving the Greek empires of Syria and Macedonia, focusing instead on maintaining a balance of power that kept his own empire safe. When he died in 221 BCE, Egypt was prosperous and stable.

By this time Rome and Carthage were nearing the end of a seventy-year struggle for control of the Western Mediterranean. Rome had secured Sicily and, more significantly, had established her fleet as the dominant navy. Corsica and Sardinia had been prised away from the Carthaginians, who had been heavily engaged in restraining the Berbers in the south. But the last phase of the struggle was to prove the most intense.

No governor of Judea is mentioned in Egyptian Greek times. The rulers seemed to have been content to use the High Priest in Jerusalem as their main local contact. Temple revenues gave the high priest access to the funds needed to pay taxes on behalf of the people.

The people of the Levant had been interested in Greek culture from Persian days. With the establishment of the Greek empires, Greek culture and learning came to dominate the life of the rich and fashionable through major universities, such as the one in Alexandria, and Gymnasia such as the one formed in Jerusalem. Greek philosophical ideas, including those of the Cynics and the Stoics permeated educated Judea. The renewed interest in philosophy expressed itself in the writing of two books in the wisdom tradition, Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Ben Sira; the first of which was probably compiled in the latter half of the 3rd century BCE.

The Hellenisation of the Near East was a great economic and cultural success. Syria, Anatolia, Egypt and the Greek mainland comprised the largest economic unit thus far created – a unit that spawned massive cities of over 100,000 people in Antioch and Alexandria. Trade increased considerably and thus also the opportunity for the moneyed classes to increase their wealth. Judea produced a stream of writings, many of which retold biblical stories in new forms, suitable for the Hellenic Judean audience. New works were created that interpreted the ancient Hebrew texts in ways that were more relevant to the situation of the day.⁹⁰

Economic conditions in Judea reflected the general increase in wealth. Access to the wealth to their south enabled the entrepreneurial talent in Judea to flourish. The rich got richer. The Zenon Papyri, which dealt with a tour of inspection of parts of Galilee in the mid-3rd Century BCE described the large estates that had emerged in the land. Other papyri dealt with the intensification of production, the provision of a proper water supply, and the development of housing for the tenants of these large estates.

Qohelet or Ecclesiastes (ca 240)

The author of this book boasts:

I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the growing forest of trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem; and I gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and the delights of the flesh, and many concubines. ...⁹¹

The author adopted the name ‘Qohelet’ in Hebrew. The word has no satisfactory translation. ‘Preacher’ has been traditionally used, but the NRSV prefers ‘teacher’; ‘philosopher’ is also possible. The noun is feminine and has a common root with ‘qahal’ – meaning a gathering or assembly. The author is generally considered masculine from the comments and the context, but it is perhaps wise to allow either gender and to recognise that a female writer could have been satirising a male point of view. The language he or she used was Hebrew with a good deal of Aramaic phraseology in it, and a scattering of Persian loan words. There does not appear to be much Greek influence. This suggests a mid-3rd century date. Ben Sira probably used the book in preparing his own work around 180 BCE. Fragments of manuscripts found in Qumran have been dated to the mid second century. Meagre internal evidence such as that cited above suggests a time when Judea generated an ostentatiously wealthy upper class – somewhere between 250 and 225 BCE or thereabouts.

The author claims to have formed some of ‘his’ views “when king over Israel in Jerusalem”, but this was not a time of royal power. The leader of the Judeans was the High Priest. The author is taking

⁹⁰ Cambridge p 301

⁹¹ Ecclesiastes 2:4b-8

on a persona other than himself, or herself, for the purpose of writing⁹². Nevertheless ‘Qohelet’ probably mingled with the wealthy - as a teacher of their children perhaps. The author’s persona, having made a test of pleasure and having tasted the delights of the flesh, concluded: -

*All was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*⁹³

Many memorable phrases that appeal to our modern condition come from this ‘teacher’

- 1: 2 *Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*
 1: 9 *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done and there is nothing new under the sun.*
 3:1 *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*
 A time to be born and a time to die;
 A time to plant, and a time to root up;
 A time to kill and a time to heal;
 A time to break down and a time to build up;
 5:4 *When you make a vow before God, do not delay in fulfilling it; for he does not suffer fools gladly.*
 7:8 *Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;*
 7:9 *Do not be quick to anger; for anger lodges in the breast of fools.*
 7:10 *Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” for it is not from wisdom that you ask this.*
 9:7 *Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do.*
 11:1 *Send out your bread upon the waters, for it will return to you in due season*

Qohelet may have made a collection of ancient wisdom from other sources. From ancient Sumer, via the tale of Gilgamesh, we have the following example.

Qohelet

- 5:18 *...It is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils ...*
 9:8 *Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love..., because that is your portion in life ...*
 2:16 *How can the wise die just like fools? So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind.*

Gilgamesh

- IX (iii) 7: ‘Make merry by day and by night. Of each day make a feast of rejoicing.’
 IX (iii) 10: ‘Let your garments be sparkling white; your head be washed; bathe in water. Pay heed to the little one that holds your hand. Let your spouse delight in your embrace, for this is the work of humankind.’
 III (i) 5: ‘Only the gods live forever under the sun. As for humans, numbered are their days; whatever they achieve is but the wind.’

Qohelet valued wisdom, but not to excess; she valued the pleasures of life, but not to the point of self-indulgence; she valued making the act appropriate to the time, she valued friendship, reverence, humility, living for the moment, the avoidance of excessive desire; she stressed the importance of diligence and obedience to king and God.

It is unlikely that this author escaped the editing that impacted nearly all books in the bible. Some scholars detect the works of two hands, one less cynical and more spiritual than the other. Perhaps it was this latter who wrote the final lines:

Of anything beyond these, my child, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter: all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.

Proverbs: The Collection Completed

⁹² Perhaps the legendary Solomon; but such speculation is left to the reader.

⁹³ Ecclesiastes 2:11

Proverbs is essentially a secular book comprising six collections of sayings and poems which offer advice on how to live – but without drawing this advice from a particular theology. There is evidence from Rabbinic tradition that there were doubts as to whether the book should be included in the Hebrew Canon⁹⁴, but it was eventually grouped together with the psalms and Job as books of poetry within the ‘Writings’. It is included as canonical in all traditions, although the Ethiopic church divides it into two books.

As might be expected for a collection of proverbs, the Book is one of those associated with the Solomon wisdom brand. It is, however, improbable that many, or indeed any, of its contents would have been used by King David for the instruction of his son.⁹⁵ Although the social settings of the collections are varied, none are appropriate to the instruction of a 10th century ruler of a small and undeveloped tribal group. The collections are best seen as part of the wisdom tradition of the Ancient Levant stretching from Mesopotamia to Israel; as has been discussed earlier, some of the sayings have foreign origins. The first section of the book of Proverbs (chapters 1-9) contains some Aramaic usages whilst chapter 8 may also have been influenced by Greek philosophy. If so, the final compilation of the book can be roughly dated to the third century BCE.

It begins by listing the purposes of the compiler.⁹⁶ He had in mind that the book could be used

- to understand wisdom and learn self-discipline
- to absorb the discipline of insight, righteousness and justice
- to give shrewdness to the simple, and prudence to the young
- to help the wise man gain further instruction, and the discerning acquire skill
- to promote the understanding of proverbs, epigrams and enigmas

Its motto was “*To be in awe of Yahweh is the first principle of wisdom*”⁹⁷. This precept is repeated at beginning and the end of the introductory section. The introductory section comprised ten short ‘lectures’, ostensibly from a father to his sons, largely concerned with the sort of company they should keep. Each one began with a demand for an attentive obedience such as this from the first lecture:

*Hear, my son, your father’s instruction,
and do not reject your mother’s teaching;
for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck*⁹⁸.

The second lecture, with its 22 verses, lays out the subjects more specifically dealt with in the other lectures. The next (3:1-12) develops the theme of the books motto: the son is advised to trust in Yahweh with all his heart and to give Yahweh the first returns of his produce. In lecture 4 (3:19-26 & 31-35) he is advised to cherish foresight and not to follow the way of any ruffian. The lecture is interrupted by four prohibitions such as ‘Do not refuse help to one who has need of it’. In the fifth lecture (4:1-9), the son is advised to follow wisdom, here personified as a woman, for its own sake - as his father did before him. He is to avoid the ways of the wicked ‘for they drink violence like wine’ (lecture 6), but remain on the straightforward way (lecture 7; 4:20-27 concluded in 5:21-23) whilst staying clear of adulteresses (lectures 8; 5:1-14). The theme of marital fidelity is further developed in lecture 9 (6:20-21 & 23-35) and lecture 10 warns of the dangers posed by ‘*strange women*’ in a remarkably vivid passage describing a seduction that the father observed from his window (8:1-27)

Each lecture ends with a statement of the disastrous consequences of not following the advice given. For example, lecture 9 concludes

*He who commits adultery with a woman has no sense;
he who violates her destroys himself.
He will get wounds and dishonour,
and his disgrace will not be wiped away.*

⁹⁴ Fox (2000) p. 4

⁹⁵ Fox (2000) p. 56

⁹⁶ Proverbs 1:2-6

⁹⁷ Proverbs 1:7 & 9:10. This translation uses ‘first principle’ to translate the Hebrew *t’helah* rather than the usual ‘beginning’; this is because ‘beginning’ is commonly used to translate the Hebrew *reshit* as in Genesis 1:1.

⁹⁸ proverbs 1:8-9

*For jealousy arouses a husband's fury,
who will show no restraint when he takes revenge.
He will not look at any compensation,
nor be mollified by any gifts - no matter how great.*

These lectures are lightened with a number of short poems and four proverbs. The concern with adultery which is apparent from the last three lectures is balanced by a delightful poem-proverb on marital fidelity:

*"Drink water from your own cistern,
fresh water from your own well".
Should your springs overflow,
streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for sharing with strangers.
Let your fountain be blessed,
Rejoice in the wife of your youth,
A lovable deer, a graceful doe.
May her breasts delight you always;
may her love intoxicate you for ever.
Whatever you do she will help you
When you lie down to rest she will cherish you
And when you awake she will talk with you."⁹⁹*

Whilst the lectures reflect a logic and structure that may reflect Greek influence and the establishment of Yahwism as the state religion, the poems seem to reflect Canaanite images and ideas as carried forward into popular religion. Whilst in the third lecture, the son is advised to, 'Trust in Yahweh with all your heart' (3:5), the poems contain the depiction of wisdom as a woman with many of the attributes of the Canaanite Asherah¹⁰⁰. We meet her just where Asherah poles are found, that is 'in the streets, in the squares, in the busiest corners, at the city gates' (1:20) and she is described, like Asherah, as 'the tree of life' (3:18). Just as Asherah was the consort of the Canaanite El, so here 'Wisdom' appears as the consort of Yahweh. In Proverbs 8 she assists in the acts of creation: -

*Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of his work
before any of his acts
....
I was there when he established the heavens,
when he drew a horizon on the face of the deep,
when he made the clouds above,
and fixed the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned the sea its boundary,
so that the waters might not exceed his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

I was beside him then as his craftsman,
and was daily his delight,
playing always before his sight,
rejoicing in his world
and delighting in the sons of men.¹⁰¹*

In chapter 9, another poem begins:

*Wisdom has built her house,
she has set up her seven pillars.*

⁹⁹ Proverbs 5:15-19 & 6:22. The last line is restored from chapter 6 to where it had been displaced, presumably by copyists error. Scott(1965) . The pronouns don't fit in chapter 6.

¹⁰⁰ Scott comments that Canaanite words and spellings persist in these writings. Scott (1965) p 73

¹⁰¹ Proverbs 8:22-31

*She has slaughtered her sacrifice
she has mixed her wine, and prepared her table.*

And she says,

*“Come, eat of my bread
drink of the wine I have mixed.
Forsake your ignorance and live,
and walk straight on to understanding”*

*To be in awe of Yahweh is the first principle of wisdom
and knowledge of the Holy is insight¹⁰².*

Thus the compiler of the introduction ends his contribution with a reminder of the motto he set out as the theme for his work.

Late Psalms

The motto of Proverbs also found its way into psalm 111:

*Praise Yah!
I will thank Yahweh with all my heart,
in the company of the upright, and the assembly.
Great are the works Yahweh,
to be studied by all who delight in them.*

...
*The beginning of Wisdom
is to be in awe of Yahweh;
The understanding of Goodness
belongs to all who practise it.
May his praise endure for ever.¹⁰³*

The same author may also have been responsible for another acrostic ‘Hallelu Yah’ psalm

*Praise Yah!
Happy is the man who fears Yahweh,
Who greatly delights in his commandments.*

...
*Of an evil report,
he has no fear
Firm in his heart,
he trusts in Yahweh
Steady in his heart
he does not fear
Perpetually happy
He rejoices over his foes
He scatters, he gives;
his generosity endures for ever
His head will be raised in glory
The wicked see it and are angry;
They gnash their teeth and melt away;
The desire of the wicked comes to nothing.¹⁰⁴*

¹⁰² Proverbs 9:1-2 & 5-6 & 10-11.

¹⁰³ Psalm 111: 1 & 10. This is an acrostic poem in which verse 10 needed to begin with the letter ‘Reish’; hence ‘reshit’ (the beginning) replaces the ‘t’helah’ (first principle) of the proverb and the order of the phrases are reversed to bring ‘reshit’ to the front.

¹⁰⁴ Psalm 112:1 & 7-10 - adopting many of Dahood’s suggested translations.

Further psalms, not included in the 5 books, have been found amongst the Dead Sea scrolls. Two of these may have been combined to form the single extra psalm that the translators who compiled the Septuagint included in their psalter. In today's bibles this psalm is declared as psalm 151 and placed within the Apocrypha.

Psalm 151

The psalm draws heavily on the first book of Samuel, especially chapters 16-17. It is written as if by David after his victory over Goliath

*I was smaller than my brothers,
the youngest in my father's house.
He made me a shepherd over his flock
a ruler over his kids.
My fingers made a pipe
and my hands a lyre.
I have rendered glory to the Lord
I have said so in my soul,
...
My brothers were tall and beautiful,
but the Lord did not choose them
I went out to meet the Philistine.
He cursed me by his idols.
But I drew his own sword and removed his head -
and from the people of Israel I removed disgrace.¹⁰⁵*

A late third century date is plausible for the composition of this psalm.

It is reasonable to conclude that any further spiritual songs that were created after this were composed in the vernacular, and were therefore excluded from the psalter we know today. Even so, the span of dates over which the psalms were composed was considerable. In Chapter 2 it was noted that psalm 104 may have had its origins in a hymn to Aten composed in Egypt in the 14th century BCE. It travelled via Byblos before being inherited by the worshippers in Canaan and eventually written down in Hebrew many centuries later. If the final psalm of the psalter can be fairly dated to the 3rd century BCE, then the compositions cover more than a millennium and survived transcriptions through a variety of scripts and in some cases translations across several dialects if not languages.

From Egypt to Antioch (225 – 190 BCE)

Towards the end of the 3rd century BCE, three young leaders came to the thrones of the great kingdoms bequeathed by the conquests of Alexander the Great: -

- In Antioch the Syrian Greek leader Antiochus III (223- 187) came to the throne at the age of 18. An impetuous military leader, he would be described as the 'king of the north' in the historical passage in Daniel 11.¹⁰⁶ He would later be called Antiochus the Great.
- Two years later Egypt's Ptolemy III died and the future Ptolemy IV, in his early 20's, arranged to have his mother poisoned, his brother scalded to death and his uncle murdered in order to secure his claim to Alexandrian throne¹⁰⁷.
- In the following year Philip V succeeded to the throne of Macedonia at the age of 18.

¹⁰⁵ Psalm 151. The first set of lines are based on the translation by G. Vermes (1998) of the Dead Sea fragment. The latter is an interpretation of the Greek text.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel 11:11-21 The 'King of the North' mentioned in these verses was probably Antiochus III. The 'King of the South' was probably Ptolemy V. Antiochus may also be referred to as the king with 'legs of iron' in the vision of Daniel 2:33, whilst the 'feet of clay' in the same verse may allude to the young Ptolemy V who was to come to the throne in 203.

¹⁰⁷ E R Bevan;1927, "The House of Ptolemy". p 221

Antiochus III proved to be a more competent general than his predecessors; he was able to deal with the problems on his northern borders caused by the Armenians, Parthians and Bactrians. But in Egypt, Ptolemy IV preferred a life of ease and aesthetic sensuality, and allowed his state to be governed by his ambitious favourite Socibius whilst he himself indulged in the delights offered by some unscrupulous companions.

Antiochus made a serious attempt to wrest Judea and the neighbouring states from the Egyptian Greeks and by the end of 218 had secured the land as far South as Gaza. To counter this threat, the wealthy Egyptian Greek administration mustered a substantial mercenary army during 219 and 218 and with this Ptolemy IV set out to stop Antiochus. The two armies met at Raphia in 217 BCE and on this occasion the aggressive and impetuous Antiochus was defeated and forced to retire north relinquishing his conquests in Judea and the surrounding territory.

In 219 BCE, Simon the II (known as 'The Just') became High Priest in Jerusalem. He was highly regarded for his piety throughout the 20 turbulent years during which he was to lead his country. At some stage the Egyptian Greek leaders were persuaded by a certain Joseph Tobiad to grant his family firm the exclusive right to tax 'farming' in a large part of the northern Ptolemaic territories. He did this by offering to secure a high tax yield to be extracted, where necessary, with the aid of enforcement militias. Tax payment was thus taken out of the hands of priesthood, commercialised and made harsher. The Tobiad family was last encountered in Judean history as opponents to Nehemiah; one even secured an office in the temple precincts during Nehemiah's temporary absence in Susa, and had to be thrown out on his return. Joseph Tobiad and Sons would retain the tax farming concession until control of their part of the Levant past to the Syrian Greeks. They put an end to the relatively generous treatment that had been the policy of the earlier Ptolemy II Philadelphus and Ptolemy III Euergetes (the Benefactor), both of whom had made donations to the Jerusalem temple.¹⁰⁸

The Third book of Maccabees¹⁰⁹ began with a plausible story of a visit to Jerusalem made by Ptolemy IV after his victory at Raphia in which the young king was offended when denied permission to enter the Holy of Holies. The story went on to suggest that, angered by this denial and of unstable mind, he initiated a series of persecutions of the Jews, both in Alexandria and 'still more bitterly against those in the countryside'.¹¹⁰ There is however no other evidence of this persecution. The book should perhaps be regarded as a historical novella in which some fantasy has been embedded into the lives of real historical people. Ptolemy IV, his wife Arsine and the High Priest Simon were all correctly identified and linked to the battle of Raphia. Raphia is on the route from Alexander to Jerusalem and so a visit there by Ptolemy would not have been unexpected. Ptolemy's dissolute life-style and mental instability which feature in the dramatic story of the persecutions, are recognised in other sources. The reference to the persecutions 'in the countryside' has been taken by some scholars to refer to Fayum (80 miles south of Cairo) where archaeological evidence of a Jewish settlement has been found.

In 219 BCE, at the other end of the Mediterranean, Carthage responded to the earlier loss of Corsica and Sardinia with a sustained and successful campaign into southern Spain. Rome attempted to contain the situation politically, but this provoked the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, into a series of moves resulting in his surprise crossing of the Alps and the sifting of the next phase of the struggle uncomfortably close to Rome. At Cannae, in 216, Hannibal annihilated four Roman legions, but was unable to press home his advantage for lack of effective siege weaponry. The Romans retired to their cities and refused to engage the master in open battle.

Seeking to take advantage of the situation, Phillip V of Macedonia declared himself to be an ally of Hannibal. Between 214 and 212 Philip attempted twice to invade Illyria by sea albeit without success. He fared better by land, capturing Lissus in the north of modern Albania. Rome managed to send a small force to support the Aetolian league and contain Phillip. Their involvement came to an end in 205 with the Treaty of Phoenice which allowed Phillip to retain Illyria but required him to repudiate his alliance with Hannibal. More strategically Rome invaded Spain in 210. By 206, under the leadership of Publius Cornelius Scipio, Rome had defeated or expelled all the Carthaginian armies in Spain and created a base from which Scipio could invade Carthage's African territories. Hannibal, effectively

¹⁰⁸ The New Jerusalem Bible; Scholars edition. P 721. Note c on 2 Maccabees 3:3.

¹⁰⁹ The Third book of Maccabees has little to do with the Maccabees, possibly acquiring the title by virtue of its position in the orthodox canon. It appears to have been unknown to the western churches prior to the reformation. It was typical of the romantic Hellenistic stories that were written for the entertainment of the expatriate Judean communities. Like Esther it involved much feasting, the drunkenness of the villain and the eventual triumph of the god's faithful people. It was probably written sometime in the late second or early first century BCE.

¹¹⁰ 3 Maccabees 3:1

neutralised in the toe of Italy, was recalled to Africa where he was defeated in 202. With the ending of the second Punic War¹¹¹, Rome was able to concentrate her resources on the East.

Ptolemy IV died in 203. He had married his sister Arsinoe shortly after his return from Raphia and she had presented her brother with a son, the future Ptolemy V who was five years old at the time of his father's death¹¹². It would have been logical to expect that Queen Arsinoe would rule until her son came of age, but she also died and the administrators declared the deaths of both husband and wife in the same public ceremony. The public suspected foul play. For the previous several years there had been native Egyptian revolts against their Greek overlords but these had largely been confined to the South. Now, however, the administrators in Alexandria had to face discontent in their capital at the same time as Philip of Macedonia and Antiochus III were seizing the opportunities created by the death of Ptolemy IV. The boy-king was induced to indicate that he wished that his mother's murder should be avenged. This unleashed such an orgy of lynching that the suspected murderers were torn limb from limb in the streets¹¹³.

In 201 Antiochus III took Gaza after a long siege. The Egyptian Greeks appointed the experienced general Scopus to lead their response and he succeeded in driving Antiochus back. Josephus described Judea as being 'like a ship in a storm, tossed by the waves on both sides'.¹¹⁴ Judeans were themselves divided as to where their allegiances should lie. The high priest Simon favoured Antioch: the Tobiads naturally favoured their patrons in Alexandria.

Antiochus defeated the Egyptian Greek general Scopus at the battle of Panion, near the source of the Jordan, around 198 BCE. The gates of Jerusalem were subsequently opened to the Syrian Greeks by their supporters in Jerusalem whilst the remaining pro-Egyptian Judeans left for Alexandria where they joined the already substantial Judean community there. The Egyptian Greek rulers never again challenged Antioch for the dominion of Judea.¹¹⁵ Josephus records that Antiochus III rewarded the Judeans that had supported him, and perhaps fought for him, with grants for building work on the Temple, grants for its operational costs, a tax cut and with the right to live under their own laws.¹¹⁶

After the battle of Panion, Rome did not look kindly on further growth in the scope of Antioch's power, and by 196 had indicated they were prepared to enforce this position. Antiochus III therefore wisely agreed to make peace with Ptolemy IV and in earnest of this intention proposed that his daughter Cleopatra should be married to the son of Ptolemy. The two young people were betrothed in 195 and married in 193 at the border town of Raphia¹¹⁷

Macedonia had seized the opportunity to move against the Egyptian Greek possessions bordering the Ionian Sea whilst Antiochus had annexed the coast of southern Anatolia in modern Turkey. Rhodes and Pergamum (a small independent state located in western Turkey) had appealed to Rome for help, representing the actions of these two Greek empires as coordinated moves aimed ultimately at Rome herself. Rome decided to go to war, perhaps persuaded by this appeal, but also perhaps because Hannibal, now free-lancing as a military adviser, had turned up on Antiochus' team. Antiochus III responded by sending an army into mainland Greece. Antiochus was defeated at Thermopylae in 192 BCE, where 300 years earlier a large Persian army had been held up by a heroic Greek force. Finally, in 190 at the decisive battle of Magnesia, Antiochus was compelled to accept humiliating peace terms and Hannibal fled to Armenia and thence to Bithynia where he achieved a naval victory against a fleet from Pergamon; he was eventually betrayed to the Romans and committed suicide sometime around 183-181

¹¹¹ The Punic Wars are so-called in recognition of Phoenician origins of the Carthaginians.

¹¹² The endowing of the 5-year-old king with the powers to be bestowed upon him as Pharaoh by the gods took place in a ceremony in Memphis about 4 months after the death of his parents. This ceremony is the subject of the Rosetta stone which, being written in both Egyptian Hieroglyphics and Greek, enabled scholars to decode the Hieroglyphics.

¹¹³ E R Bevan; *The House of Ptolemy*. p 255. Polybius provides the source material for this account, presumably as a result of interviewing eye-witnesses, for Polybius believed that historians should only relate accounts of events whose participants they were able to talk to.

¹¹⁴ Josephus 'Antiquities'; Book 12 Chapter 3:3 (130)

¹¹⁵ E R Bevan "The House of Ptolemy. p 250 ff.

¹¹⁶ Josephus 'Antiquities': Book 12 Chapter 3:3 (135-144). Josephus quotes Polybius of Megalopolis, Arcadia in support of his account of the struggle between Antiochus and Scopas.. Josephus quotes various letters and decrees of Antiochus in support of his account of the rewards Antiochus gives to the Judeans who supported him.

¹¹⁷ Like the earlier marriage of Berenice to Antiochus II, this marriage is also sometimes considered to lie behind the comment in Daniel 2:43 that 'just as iron does not blend with clay, so they will be blended by intermarriage, but will not hold together'.

BCE. There is a possibly reference to Antiochus' humiliation in the book of Daniel.¹¹⁸

Antiochus' treatment of Jerusalem remained favourable even when Rome required almost impossible amounts of tribute from Antiochus; although he raided other religious centres for money and treasure, there is no mention of the Jerusalem temple ever being subjected to this indignity under his reign. The beneficial rule of Judea by the Syrian Greeks may have continued throughout the rest of his life and possibly also throughout the reign of his son Seleucus IV - until 175 BCE¹¹⁹.

Simon the Just had died in 199. Several miracles are associated with the rule of this High Priest who is said to have strengthened the walls of Jerusalem and repaired earlier damage done to the temple, although this may have been done, or at least continued, using money from Antiochus after his victory in 198. After Simon's reign, pious Judeans ceased to speak the name of god out loud, replacing it where it occurred in the scriptures with the word 'Adonai' – a custom which has been perpetuated in most English bibles by the use of 'the LORD' and not 'Yahweh' wherever the tetragram YHWH occurs in the Hebrew text.

Simon was succeeded by his son Onias III, another pious priest who remained in post until forced out when the reign of Seleucus IV came to an end. Thus Judea remained at peace for a generation, enjoying religious freedom under benevolent overlords. Conditions in the Diaspora inspired a number of new works in Greek. Amongst these were Tobit, Judith and a Greek adaptation of Esther. All are historical novellas - fictional works set in earlier times. They follow the form of similar Greek works of the same period. Within this form, they dealt with issues of importance to the Diaspora - such as how to maintain the faith in a foreign, and possibly unsympathetic, culture. Tobit and Judith became part of the Greek biblical canon and remain so in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions to this day.

It may be legitimate to take from these works some insights into the relationships between the Judean communities in the Diaspora and the citizens of their host countries. If so, we may guess that members of the Diaspora sometimes reached high rank, were often commercially successful, were reluctant to inter-marry with the local population, kept their own customs, and occasionally became the targets for oppression by ambitious indigenous politicians and generals. These latter may have been the models for Haman in Esther (ca 350 BCE), for the Ninevite in Tobit (ca 200 BCE), and for Holofernes in Judith (ca 100 BCE)

Tobit (ca 200 BCE)

Tobit is a short story; it was set in Assyrian Nineveh around the 7th century BCE. It was probably written somewhere in the diaspora more than four centuries later - between 225 and 175 BCE. It was likely to have been written in Aramaic and subsequently translated into Greek. It is canonical in the Orthodox church, deuterocanonical to Roman Catholics and has been relegated to the Apocrypha of Protestant bibles. Aramaic and Hebrew texts of Tobit have been found in Qumran, and versions exist in the Syriac and in the Ethiopian scriptures. It is not canonical in Judaism. The message of Tobit is that Yahweh will care for those Israelites in foreign lands who live according to the Judaic laws despite pressure to conform to local laws and customs. The book was composed in the first person as if Tobit was writing. It is an entertaining comedic fantasy. 'Tobit' began by establishing Truth and Righteousness as his lifelong guides.

In the days of Shalmaneser I performed many acts of charity to my kindred, those of my tribe. I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it,

As a result of his charitable work, he earned the admiration of the King, who gave him some money and the freedom of his empire. Once when travelling through Media he came across a man of his own tribe who was in need and he loaned him 10 talents of silver. But Shalmaneser died and was succeeded by his son Sennacherib (sic.) who had no love of the Judeans, especially after what the author regards as his defeat by Judah in the matter of the siege of Jerusalem. On his return Sennacherib took vengeance on the Judeans in Nineveh, killing many whom Tobit conscientiously buried. For these actions Tobit was hounded naked out of his home and all his property confiscated.

After the death of Sennacherib, he was brought back to Nineveh by the kindness of an official;

¹¹⁸ cf. Dan 11:18 "Afterward he shall turn to the coastlands, and shall capture many. But a commander shall put an end to his insolence."

¹¹⁹ 2 Maccabees 3:3 says of Seleucus that he defrayed from his own revenues all the expenses of the sacrificial liturgy.

but he persisted in acting in accordance with his faith. He became accidentally blind, so he and his wife Anna had to survive on what Anna could earn. He prayed for help. It happened that his prayers were heard in heaven at the same time as the prayers of a woman called Sarah who lived far away in Ecbatana in Medea. Sarah, who had been married seven times, was possessed by the demon Asmodeus. This demon had led her to kill each of her husbands on their wedding night. The angel Raphael was sent to resolve both matters – Tobit’s blindness and Sarah’s possession.

Raphael disguised himself as a young man seeking work and contrived to bump into Tobit’s son Tobias, who was about to set out on a journey to Medea to recover the 10 talents of silver his father had loaned all those years ago. Tobias mentioned that he was seeking a companion for his long journey and the disguised Raphael proposed himself.

So Tobias asked, “*Do you know the way to Media?*”

“*Yes*”, replied the archangel, “*I have been there many times*”

But the author would not let it be as simple as that. He entertained his readers by having Tobit insist on giving the archangel a job interview and checking out his family background. The archangel got the job and the set off to Ecbatana with the son. On the way Tobias caught a fish and was advised by his companion to keep the gall, the liver and the heart because of their medicinal values. In answer to Tobias’ queries, the archangel explained that “*with regard to the fish’s heart and liver, you can burn them to make a smoke in the presence of a man or woman afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, and every affliction will flee away.... As for the gall, anoint a person’s eyes where white films have appeared on them; then blow upon them, and the eyes will be healed.*”¹²⁰

When they reached Ecbatana, the angel insisted they stay at Sarah’s house. He even suggested that it would be good idea if Tobias was to marry Sarah for, he claimed, according to the Law of Moses, Tobias had a greater right to marry this beautiful woman than any other man. Despite Tobias’ understandable reluctance to contemplate marriage to a husband-murderer, he was persuaded to stay the night in her father’s house and Tobias fell in love. Tobias married Sarah against the advice of Sarah’s father and the couple went off to bed. Whilst the couple were in the marriage bed, the old man started digging a grave to quietly accommodate the anticipated death of the eighth husband, but Tobias got out the heart and liver of the fish. These gave off such a disgusting smell that the demon ran away and was captured and bound by Raphael. In the morning, amazed to find the bridegroom to be still alive, the father called out to Yahweh:

Blessed are you because you had compassion on two lonely children.

Be merciful to them, O Master, and keep them safe.

Bring their lives to fulfilment in happiness and mercy.”¹²¹

He ordered his servants to fill in the grave as quickly as possible - before anyone noticed! There was much celebration, but eventually the married couple returned to Nineveh. There Tobias was able to restore his father’s sight with the gall of the fish, and there were yet more celebrations. Ahikar, the man who had tried to protect Tobit, came along and joined in with all the Judeans in Nineveh. Finally Raphael revealed who he was, for “*A king’s secret ought to be kept, but the works of God should be publicly honoured*”.¹²² Tobit sang a hymn of praise which urged the open worship of Yahweh even under the oppression of exile.

Acknowledge him before the nations, O children of Israel;

for he has scattered you among them.

He has shown you his greatness even there.

Exalt him in the presence of every living being,

Because he is Yahweh and he is our God;

*he is our Father and he is God forever.*¹²³

The book made great use of a number of folktales from the Ancient Near East. These include “The Grateful Dead”, “The Monster in the Bridal Chamber,” and “The Story of Ahikar.” The “Grateful Dead” was a story of someone being rewarded for burying a corpse, the basis of the Tobit story; “The Monster in the Bridal Chamber” concerned a woman whose husbands die because of the evil spirit within

¹²⁰ Tobit 5:8-9

¹²¹ Tobit 8:17

¹²² Tobit 12:7

¹²³ Tobit 13:3-4

her. “The Story of Ahikar.” is an Egyptian story (the text was found in Elephantine) about an Assyrian official who passed on his wisdom to a nephew who betrays him. However, the official persuaded his executioner to save him, and was brought back to the service of his country in a time of crisis. Wisdom comments from Ahikar find their way into Proverbs and Sirach

The demon Asmodeus that possessed Sarah on her wedding night was derived from Aeshma Daeva, the Zoroastrian evil spirit, who was a personification of wrath. The story starred the archangel Raphael, whose name means ‘God heals’.

1 Esdras (ca 200 BCE)

From the third century BCE until the second century CE, there were over 60 books written in the names of famous Jewish figures, such as Daniel, Ezra, Baruch and Enoch.¹²⁴ They are mainly re-writings of earlier scripture, testaments and, especially in the CE, revelations. Various books attributed to Esdras are amongst this number.

1 Esdras now exists only in its Greek translation, but there are formulations that betray a Western Semitic original. There are a number of ‘Esdras’ books, all with different numberings in the different traditions¹²⁵ and with varying levels of interconnection - or none. The translation employed a form of Greek that was in use in the 2nd Century BCE; it is similar to that of the Greek addition to Esther, to Daniel and to the Papyri of that time. The text quoted large sections of Chronicles and Ezra, but whilst it apparently used the same Hebrew source, it did not simply copy the existing Septuagint translation, but rather provided a more fluent alternative. If the translation was made in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, the Semitic original must have been earlier than that. Some scholars consider that the description of the royal banquet in Esther lies behind the banquet scene in 1 Esdras. If so then the original Esdras text would have been later than the Hebrew edition of Esther (ca 330 BCE). The author of Esdras imagined a time when relations between Judeans and the ruler of the empire of which Judea was a part were close and amicable. A date around 200 BCE is thus plausible.¹²⁶ The original was probably created in a Jerusalem whose citizens were well treated by Antiochus III. It is included in the Eastern Orthodox bible, but is not in the Roman Catholic Canon. Protestant bibles place it in the Apocrypha.¹²⁷

The Text

The book comprised another history of the people of Judah and Israel, following the Deuteronomic History and Chronicles/Ezra. The majority of the book followed Chronicles and Ezra quite strictly as the following table shows. Additional material in Esdras which is not present in Chronicles or Ezra is shown in italics: -

| <u>Esdras Reference</u> | <u>Contents of Esdras</u> | <u>Source</u> |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 1:1 -1:58 | Josiah keeps the Passover. | 2 Chronicles 35:1 -19 |
| <i>1:23-24</i> | <i>Josiah’s godliness praised. Author refers to ancient records of his reign.</i> | <i>Short insert by compiler</i> |

¹²⁴ Cambridge p 294.

¹²⁵ This book is known as 1 Esdras in the Vulgate. It is known as Ezra – the same name as the canonical book – in the Geneva Bible and many English bibles subsequently. Lagarde in 1883 called it 2 Esdras or Esdras B to distinguish it from Ezra-Nehemiah which he called 1 Esdras. In the Great Bible of 1539 it is called 3 Esdras. Another work, the ‘Apocalypse of Ezra’ is also known as the second book of Esdras, or sometimes 4 Esdras to fit in with the Great Bibles nomenclature. In some Christian contexts, chapters 1-3 of 4 Esdras are known as 2 Ezra, whilst chapters 3-14 are known as 4 Ezra (3 Ezra being used for the Esdras translation of Chronicles-Ezra). 5 Ezra then becomes the rest the Apocalyptic work of 4 Esdras. Confused?

¹²⁶ See Japhet; Oxford Bible Commentary; *1 Esdras*. Also William R Goodman; Anchor Bible Dictionary; *Esdras, First book of*.

¹²⁷ Article 6 of the 39 articles of the Anglican tradition excludes the books in the protestant Apocrypha from the list of books that may be used for the establishment of doctrine. They are retained only as ‘examples of life and for the instruction of manners’.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1: 25 – 58 Esdras omits the last two verses of Chronicles because they are identical with the first two of Ezra which follow. | Josiah intercepts the Egyptian army at Megiddo, is fatally injured and is returned to Jerusalem. Jehoahaz' appointment as king by the people of the land. Judah made vassal by Necho who appoints Jehoiakim as king. Nebuchadrezzar makes war on Judah, destroys both city and temple, and takes the temple treasures. He takes King Jehoiakim and many others as slaves to Babylon. | 2 Chronicles 35:20- 36:21 |
| 2:1-15 | Cyrus issues the decree of release. The elders who were inspired by the spirit return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. They take the temple treasure released by Cyrus. | Ezra 1:1- 11 |
| 2:16-30 This passage brought forward from Ezra 4, and reworked | The exchange of correspondence between Samaria and Babylon's Artaxerxes concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Samaria causes the re-building to cease. | Ezra 4:7-24 |
| 3:1-5:6 | <i>Under Persia's Darius, three of his young servants had a competition to decide what was the strongest thing in the world. Zerubbabel won when he suggested women, but added that stronger still is truth. His reward was to be promoted to kinsman, and to lead a great return to Jerusalem together with temple treasure, letters of authority and a subsidy for running and building the temple.</i> | <i>Original Esdras material without parallel</i> |
| 5:7-46 Lists differ in detail from those in Ezra. | Lists of the returning exiles. | Ezra 2:1-70 (Esdras picks up Ezra from where it left off earlier) |
| 5:47-73 | Worship begins again. The foundations of the temple laid. The enemies of Judah and Benjamin offer to help build the temple, but are rejected by Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Enemies frustrate the temple building project until the end of Cyrus reign. | Ezra 3:1-4:5 |
| 6:1-7:15 | Work on the temple commences during the Reign of Darius. Sisinnus the governor of Syria and Phoenicia writes to Darius enquiring if permission had been granted. Darius confirms that it had. The temple is completed with Sisinnus assistance. The Passover is celebrated | Ezra: 4:24-6:22. (Ezra 4:7-23 omitted here because it was included earlier as source for Esdras 2:16-30) |
| 8:1-9:36 | Ezra goes to Jerusalem, with the King's mandate. King Artaxerxes mandate reproduced. Lists of those who returned with Ezra. Description of the preparations made for the return – fasting and gifts. Description of the journey. On arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra horrified to discover mixed marriages have taken place. Ezra prays. Plan for dissolving mixed marriages made. Plan executed. | Ezra 7:1-10:44 |
| 9:37-9:55 | Ezra reads to the law to the people. Priests help interpret it. The people celebrate. | Nehemiah 7:73-8:12 |

The main differences between Esdras and Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah were:

- The continuity of the story. There is almost no interest at all in the time between the exile and return. In this respect it follows Chronicles/Ezra if they are regarded as continuous. The 1 Esdras text reads:

[Nebuchadrezzar] led away those that were not killed to Babylon, and they were servants to him and to his sons until the Persians began to reign, in fulfilment of the word of the Lord through the mouth of Jeremiah: 'Until the land has enjoyed its Sabbaths, it shall keep Sabbath all the time of its desolation - for seventy years'. In the first year of Cyrus as king of the Persians, so that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord moved the spirit of King Cyrus of the Persians, and he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom [that the Judeans could return to their land] ¹²⁸

- The unity of the temple and city rebuilding projects. The other sources show that the city was rebuilt first and that it was only later, when the people were shamed by the prophets, that the temple was rebuilt. In Esdras the city and the temple are rebuilt together.
- The emphasis on Zerubbabel. Elsewhere Zerubbabel's influence on the return seems relatively small, but Zerubbabel is the hero of 1 Esdras; he has the leading role in the return and in the restoration of city and temple - whereas all mention of the governorship of Nehemiah is omitted. The list of returnees in 1 Esdras identified Zerubbabel as a descendant of the house of David – something that Chronicles/Ezra did not do.
- The story of the three young men, servants of Darius.
The story of the three youths is the major innovation of Esdras. It is based upon a traditional form of the wisdom-riddle. This particular riddle was probably known to the author in Hebrew or Aramaic since scholars detect undertones of Semitic language in the text. In its original form the riddle's question was "What is the strongest thing on earth". The initial answers of the three young men were: -
 - "wine", because it leads astray the minds of all who drink it",
 - "kings", because they cause all men to obey them
 - "women", because they give birth to kings and all men, and they can make men lose their minds for the love of them.

The three young men challenged each other to see which answer the King preferred. The author introduced a banquet scene, possibly taking the description from Esther¹²⁹ and then, whilst the king slept after the banquet, the young men put their answers under his pillow. But the king suffered from sleeplessness (following Esther again) and picked up the answers. He decided to have the young men present their arguments before the court. At this point the author introduced a fourth answer and attributed this to Zerubbabel. The fourth answer was 'truth', for wine, kings and women are all unrighteous and will perish, whilst 'truth' comes from god and will endure for ever. All the people applauded and granted that 'truth' was greatest of all. Darius promoted Zerubbabel and offered to give him anything he could wish for without constraint (Esther's influence yet again?). The author had Zerubbabel ask that Darius would rebuild Jerusalem and return all the treasures. Darius granted this and more – even providing regular income to the new temple for sacrifice – just as, in the author's time, Antiochus III had done.

The text attributed the destruction of the temple explicitly to the Edomites. In the account given by the Deuteronomic Historian of this event it had been stated that Nebuchadrezzar destroyed the temple; in Obadiah, Edom had been rebuked for entering the gates of Jerusalem on the day of its distress, but not for destroying the temple; in the psalm "By the waters of Babylon", a psalm of the returnees, Edom was accused of calling for the destruction of the temple; but it was only in Esdras that Edom was accused of its actual destruction. It seems that 'history' was gradually being modified in the minds of the Judeans to Edom's disadvantage.

The decline of Antioch (190 -178 BCE)

¹²⁸ 1 Esdras 1:56-2:2

¹²⁹ Compare 1 Esdras 3:1-2 with Esther 1:1-4

Rome's intervention in the struggles between the Greek empires had resulted, in 190 BCE, in the decisive defeat of Antiochus III at Magnesia. Although Rome took no land for herself, merely extending the territories of her allies, she did impose a crippling tribute on Antiochus for a decade, thereby crucially limiting his power. One of his sons, Mithradates, was kept by the Romans as a hostage for the good behaviour of the king. Usual revenues proved inadequate to fund the extortionate tribute, and thus Antiochus resorted to the forcible extraction of treasure from the religious centres in his territories. He was assassinated in 187 whilst raiding the treasury of Bel, one of his own gods, in order to acquire the gold and silver he needed to pay Rome. He was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV (187–175). When this happened, Rome released Mithradates, the son of Antiochus III and brother of Seleucus, and replaced him as hostage in Rome with Seleucus' son Demetrius, believing that sons are more effective hostages than brothers. The Seleucid Greek Empire came under pressure on all fronts. In the west, the kingdom of Pergamum had expanded to control most of southern Anatolia (Turkey). In the east, the Parthians had rejected Seleucid dominion following the defeat of the Seleucids in faraway Magnesia and went on to acquire Elam and Persia pushed the Seleucid border back to the Mesopotamian rivers. In the north, Armenia had also declared its independence.

The Seleucid Princess Cleopatra had married Ptolemy V in 193. Seven years later, aged about 18, Cleopatra presented her husband with a son. Cleopatra, whose name means 'her father was glorious' was the first of a long line of queens of that name who would be part of the ruling family in Alexandria for many years to come. When her husband died at the age of 27, her son, Ptolemy VI 'Philometor' (meaning 'mother loving') came to the throne when just a boy. Cleopatra effectively ruled as regent from 181 until her death a few years later. During this time there was peace between the two major Greek empires. Whatever may have been the plans of her father, Cleopatra did not use her unexpected position of power to do anything that would have made Alexandria subservient to Antioch.

Daniel: Bel and the Snake

It may have been the death of Antiochus whilst pillaging a temple of Bel that inspired the creation of a satire on the absurdity of worshipping Mesopotamian idols such as a snake or a glutinous bit of clay. This satire was one of the three additions to Daniel in the Theodotion translation which came to be regarded as canonical by the Christian Church although, as far as can be told, they never formed part of the Jewish Canon. In the protestant churches they were removed to the Apocrypha at the time of the reformation whilst the Roman Catholic church affirmed them as Deuterocanonical at the council of Trent (1546). No Semitic version of 'Bel and the Snake' has so far been found, so the dating of the story is difficult. The inclusion of the stories at this point in the history is justified only as a comment on the history that might have inspired their creation. The Theodotion translation itself probably dates to the last century BCE, although it could be up to a century later.¹³⁰

Bel was a food-eating, wine-drinking 'god' of bronze and clay. In this story Daniel was the most honoured guest of Cyrus. When the king asked Daniel why he did not worship Bel, Daniel responded that he does not worship man-made idols but only the living god. But the king asks, "*Doesn't Bel seem to you to be living? Just look how much he eats and drinks!*" Daniel smiled and commented that Bel had never eaten anything. The king, angered, called for the priests and said to them, "*If you don't tell me who is eating up all these expenses, you shall die; but if you prove that Bel eats all these things, then Daniel shall die!*" So they conducted a test by sealing the temple overnight - with food inside. But before sealing the temple Daniel's servants scattered fine ash over the floor of the temple. In the morning the food was gone, but Daniel laughed and pointing to footprints in the ashes asked, "Whose are these?". This led to the discovery of a secret entrance to the temple by which the priests, their wives and children came in nightly to eat all that was so faithfully and expensively laid out. Thus, in accordance with his word, the king executed the priests and their families: and he gave the temple to Daniel, who destroyed it.

There was also a great snake in that place, and the king said, "*You can't say that the snake is not alive. Adore him!*". But Daniel fed the snake with cakes that made it burst in a most un-divine way. Destroying two local gods made Daniel unpopular with the locals, so much so that they demanded that the king hand over Daniel to them – even threatening to kill the king and his family if their wishes were denied. So the king complied. Daniel was thrown into a pit with seven lions in it, lions who were normally fed two humans and two sheep each day, but who had been starved for the six days preceding Daniel's descent into the pit. At this point, God sent an angel to the prophet Habakkuk, who happened to be taking a stew and some bread to harvesters working in the fields of Judea at the time. Seizing him by his hair

¹³⁰ Daniel, Additions to: ABD article by Carey A Moore.

the angel whisked him and the food away to Babylon and the lion's pit. Habakkuk gave the food to a grateful Daniel, who enjoyed the meal whilst the lions fasted and the angel took Habakkuk back home.

After seven days, the king came to the pit to lament over Daniel, but finding him alive exclaimed "You are great, Lord God of Daniel; there is no god but you!" Releasing Daniel, he threw those who had plotted Daniel's ruin into the pit, where they were instantly devoured by the famished lions.

The Wisdom of Ben Sira, Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (ca 180)

Whilst the dating of Bel and the Snake is problematic, we can be reasonably confident in dating Sirach to the early second century BCE. This book is known as Sirach from the Greek manuscript, as Ecclesiasticus from the Latin Vulgate or as the Wisdom of Ben Sira from the Hebrew. In Protestant bibles it is part of the Apocrypha; Roman Catholics hold it to be Deuterocanonical and together with the Wisdom of Solomon it is incorporated in their bibles after the Song of Songs. For a long time, it was only known from the Greek translation provided by the author's grandson, but Hebrew manuscripts were discovered around 1900 CE in Geniza and these and subsequent discoveries elsewhere inform modern translations. It was written after the death of the high priest Simon (199 BCE) since it contains an epitaph to him.¹³¹ The absence of any reference to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV in 167 BCE leads most commentators to conclude that it was written before that event. The author's grandson prepared his translation in 132 BCE or thereabouts so, if 25 years are reckoned to be a generation, then the original would have been written about 50 years earlier. This evidence points to a date within a decade or so of 180 BCE for the Hebrew text.

The book is an interpretation of selected Hebrew writings by the learned Alexandrian scribe, Jesus ben Sira, who linked wisdom closely with Torah, the law, for he wrote this reflection on the theme of Proverbs: -

*The whole of wisdom is to be in awe of the Lord.
All of wisdom is the fulfilment of the law.
The knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom.
Nor is there ever prudence in the counsel of sinners.
There is a cleverness that is detestable,
but a simpleton merely lacks wisdom.
Better are those that have a small understanding but are in awe of God
than those with great intelligence who transgress the law¹³².*

He quoted heavily from scripture but often gave the old text a new twist. In Deuteronomy, for example, it was written "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might", but ben Sira says:

*Fear the Lord with all your soul,
Revere his priests.
Love your maker with all your might,
Do not neglect his ministers.¹³³*

Where he made use of Proverbs he often expanded the original, making it the inspiration for a short address. His expansion of "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land" runs to 16 verses: -

*Listen, children, to me your father.
Do as I tell you, and so be safe.
For the Lord honours a father above his children,
and upholds a mother's rights over her children.
My child, help your father in his old age.
Never grieve him as long as his lives.
Even if his mind fails, be patient with him.
In all your strength, do not despise him*

¹³¹ Sirach 50:1-21

¹³² Sirach 19: 20-24

¹³³ Sirach 7:29-30

*For kindness to a father will not be forgotten.
It will be credited to you against your sins.
In the day of your distress it will be remembered in your favour.
Like frost in fair weather, your sins will melt away.
Whoever abandons his father is like a blasphemer,
Whoever angers a mother is cursed by the Lord.¹³⁴*

He deals with a wide range of issues – the treatment of the poor, proper modesty, dependency on God rather than one's own strengths, the avoidance of anger, proper ambition, the value of friendship, relationships with women, how to bring up a son, how to manage a daughter, how to deal with slaves, time management, table manners and many other matters such as this piece of general advice about how to behave in meetings: -

*Do not find fault before you investigate; examine first, then criticise.¹³⁵
Do not answer before you listen,
Do not interrupt when another is speaking.
Do not argue about a matter that does not concern you,
Do not sit with sinners when they judge a case.¹³⁶*

Some of his writing is in 22-line poems, the number of letters in the Greek alphabet. The main body of the work was opened and closed with such acrostic poems. The final poem spelled out the letters of the Hebrew word meaning 'learn' in the initial letters of the first three lines.

He took a stern view on the upbringing of children and the management of slaves: -

*He who loves his son will often cause him to feel the rod,
that he may have joy of him in the end.¹³⁷*

*Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,
lest she may make you a laughingstock amongst your enemies,
a byword in the city and amongst the people
and shame you in public gatherings.¹³⁸*

*Set your slave to work, and you will find rest;
leave his hands idle, and he will seek liberty.*

...

*Set him to work that is fit for him,
If he does not obey, make his fetters heavy.
but do not be overbearing toward anyone,
and do nothing unjust.¹³⁹*

The author was clearly wealthy; moreover, he believed that only the leisured can be wise – 'The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; only the one who has little business can become wise.'¹⁴⁰ He described the work of various artisans, who do not have leisure and then, perhaps thinking of himself, continued: -

*How different the one who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High!
He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients,
and studies prophecies.*

¹³⁴ Sirach 3:1-2 & 12-16.

¹³⁵ Proverbs 18:13 'If one gives answer before hearing, it is folly and shame' seems to say much the same.

¹³⁶ Sirach 11: 7-9

¹³⁷ Sirach 30:1

¹³⁸ Sirach 42:11

¹³⁹ Sirach 33:26-30

¹⁴⁰ Sirach 38:24

*He preserves the sayings of the famous men
and penetrates the subtleties of metaphors;
He seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs
and is at home with the obscurities of parables.
He serves among the great
and appears before princes.
He travels foreign lands
and has tested the good and bad among men.¹⁴¹*

His view of the good things in life may reflect the society of the educated Alexandrian: -

*To work, and have enough to be content, makes life sweet,
but better still is finding treasure.
Children and the building of a city establish a man's name,
but better still is finding wisdom.
Cattle and orchards make a man prosperous;
but a blameless wife is better than both.
Wine and music gladden the heart,
but the love of friends is better than both.¹⁴²*

He had a clear view about free will; whereas other biblical passages may indicate that Yahweh managed the actions of men in order to achieve his purpose, Ben Sira is clear that all men are free to choose:

*It was he who from the first, when he created humankind,
made them subject to their own free choice
...
Before each person are life and death;
whatever he chooses shall be given him¹⁴³.*

In this he reflects Zoroastrian belief. But unlike them he holds that retribution for a wrong choice will occur in this life and not in the afterlife. Ben Sira travelled widely and is held by many to have incorporated Greek and Egyptian philosophy into his work. Some even find evidences of traces of the Homer's Iliad.¹⁴⁴

The famous passage at the start of chapter 44, 'Now let us now praise famous men', introduced 16 chapters in which the history of Israel was reviewed through the deeds of her patriarchs, kings and prophets – from Enoch who was the father of Methuselah and walked with God, to Simon who was the high priest who died in Jesus ben Sira's youth. The reviews of their lives were combinations of their achievements and poetic comment; he wrote of Josiah: -

*The memory of Josiah is like an incense
blended by the perfumer's art -
like honey it is sweet in every mouth -
like music at a banquet with wine.
He did well in turning around the people.
He took away the abominations of lawlessness.
He set his heart upon the Lord.
He strengthened godliness in the days of lawless men*

Periodically he introduced a general comment, as here: -

*Except for David, Hezekiah and Josiah they all piled wrong on wrong,
for they forsook the law of the Most High.*

¹⁴¹ Sirach 39:1-4

¹⁴² Sirach 40:18-20

¹⁴³ Sirach 15:14-17

¹⁴⁴ See A.A Di Lella' article on the Wisdom of Ben Sira in ABD.

*The kings of Judah failed; for they gave their power to others,
and their honour to a foreign nation.¹⁴⁵*

Before coming to Simon, his last famous man, Ben Sira included a short retrospective;

*No one has been created on earth like Enoch,
for he was taken up from the earth.
And no man has been born like Joseph,
whose bones are cared for.
Shem and Seth were honoured among human beings,
and above every living being in creation was Adam.*

Simon, son of Onias, the great High Priest of his day, was honoured for his building and restoration work, of both temple and city, and for his leadership of the people. But above all he was admired for manner in which he led worship. He was “*like the morning star among the clouds, like the full moon of a feast-day, like the sun shining upon the temple, like the rainbow gleaming in glorious clouds...*” and so on for seven more comparisons. Ben Sira concluded this section with a short prayer:

*And now bless the God of all things
who does great things in every way;
who exalts our days from the womb,
and deals with us according to his mercy.
May he give us gladness of heart,
and grant peace in Israel in our days, as in the days of old.
May we be entrusted to his mercy.
May he redeem us in our days.*

The Epilogue disclosed the dislike that some Judeans had of Samaritans – even in far-away Alexandria.

*Two nations my soul detests,
and the third is not even a state:
Those who live in Seir, and the Philistines,
and the foolish people that live in Shechem¹⁴⁶*

Translated by his grandson into Greek, this book became part of the Greek Orthodox Bible. Near the end of the 1st century CE the Pharisaic rabbis officially excluded the Wisdom of Ben Sira from the Jewish canon. The probable reason was that the Pharisees disliked some of Ben Sira’s teaching, particularly his denial of retribution in the hereafter, which resembled the theology of their adversaries, the Sadducees. His grandson, however, added some allusions to retribution after death in the Greek translation he made some years later.

Esther: the Greek addition

The original version of Esther seems to have been almost a secular novella; it made no mention of God, prayer, or religious laws. The Greek edition rectified that. In the Greek, God became an integral part of the text and additional material was added to provide a more religious context for the events. It is ironic that the Greek additions were removed from the canon to the apocrypha at the time of the reformation on the theological ground that they were not in the Holy Language of Hebrew. The translation and the additions probably date from the early part of the second century BCE, for the flowing style of the romantic Greek and the gentle treatment of the foreign ruler suggest a period before the events that were to convulse the nation after 167.

One of the major changes in this edition was a more extended section concerning Esther’s approach to Xerxes. In fear for her life she prepared to see the king in order to intercede with him on behalf of the Judeans and ultimately to expose the wicked Haman. As part of her preparation she prayed to her god.

¹⁴⁵ Sirach 49:1-3 & 4-5

¹⁴⁶ Sirach 50:25-26

“You have knowledge of all things, and you know that I hate the splendour of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any foreigner. You know my necessity - that I abhor the sign of my proud position, which is upon my head on days when I appear in public. I abhor it like a filthy rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure. And your servant has not eaten at Haman’s table, and I have not honoured the king’s feast or drunk the wine of libations. Your servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here, except in you, O Lord God of Abraham. O God, whose power is over all, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!”¹⁴⁷

Then, majestically adorned, she took two maids with her leaning gently for support on one whilst the other followed, carrying her train. She was radiant with perfect beauty as if beloved, but her heart was frozen with fear. When she had gone through all the doors, she stood before the king. He was seated on his royal throne, clothed in the full array of his majesty. He was terrifying.

Lifting his face, flushed with splendour, he looked at her in fierce anger. The queen faltered and turning pale and faint, collapsed on the head of the maid who went in front of her. Then God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness; and in alarm he sprang from his throne and took her in his arms until she came to herself. He comforted her with soothing words, and said to her, “What is it, Esther? I am your husband. Take courage; you shall not die, for our law applies only to our subjects. Come near.”¹⁴⁸

Not only does the Greek edition offer a more religious approach, but the writing style betrays the realistic and emotive prose that characterised the Greek culture of the second century BCE.

Daniel; The story of Susanna

The story of Susanna can be found both in the Septuagint and in the Theodotian Greek translation of the presumed original Aramaic or Hebrew. Whilst the translation could be as late as the first century CE, the existence of a Septuagint text suggests the 2nd century BCE for the underlying Semitic original. Whilst no such original has yet been found, the Greek texts contain sufficient structures and phrases characteristic of Aramaic and Hebrew to persuade scholars that such a text did once exist. The Theodotion version is nearly twice as long as the Septuagint translation, puts more emphasis on Daniel and may include some original Greek material. It was placed as an introduction to Daniel in the Theodotion translation and as a kind of add-on (thus creating chapter 13) in the Vulgate. It does not fit well in either place, largely because the main character is not Daniel and neither the setting nor the form bears any relation to the rest of the book. It is possible that the Daniel mentioned in the later verses of Susanna is an independent fictional character unrelated to the Daniel of the other stories and the visions. Despite this it is included in the Bible as part of the Book of Daniel by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches whilst being retained in the Apocrypha by the Protestant Churches.¹⁴⁹ It was never part of the Hebrew Canon.

The story of Susanna differs from the stories in the Daniel collection proper in that this Daniel only enters the story towards the end, and even there is referred to simply as ‘a young boy’ who was roused to action by God in response to a prayer from Susanna. There was no foreign ruler involved and no court scene; indeed, the setting is simply the home of a rich family man of the Judean community in Babylon – but it could be a Judean community anywhere. The subject matter is the vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society.

The eponymous heroine of the story was a beautiful and virtuous woman. She, her husband, parents and children were part of the Judean society. Her beauty had attracted the attention of two elderly men whom the community had unwisely appointed as judges. They had access to her house and took every opportunity to enjoy watching her, but without admitting their lust. One day, after a community meeting, the two of them went their separate ways, but each back-tracked hoping to catch sight of Susanna walking in her garden. Coming face to face with each other whilst stalking the object of their desires they were embarrassed into explaining their actions, and agreed to jointly seek out an opportunity to catch her on her own and have their way with her.

One hot day, they hid themselves in the garden. Susanna emerged as usual and, deciding to

¹⁴⁷ Esther 14:15

¹⁴⁸ Esther 15:2-10

¹⁴⁹ M D Mendels, *The Book of Susanna*, ABD (1992,1997)

bathe, sent her maids away to fetch oils and balsam. Seizing the moment, the men sprang out and grabbed her saying

“Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We want to have sex with you. Give in. Lie with us. If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.”

Susanna groaned and thought, “I am trapped. If I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape their hands.”

She chose to resist saying, *“It is better to be at your mercy than to sin in the eyes of the Lord”*. The elders carried out their plan, brought Susanna to trial and secured her conviction for adultery. As she was being led off to execution, she shouted: -

“Eternal God, you know all secrets and all things before they happen; you know they have given false witness against me. And now I must die – innocent as I am of everything their malice has invented against me”

God heard her cry and ‘roused the spirit’ in a young boy called Daniel who cried out: -

“I am innocent of this woman’s death.”

He demanded and secured a retrial. Then he asked each of her accusers separately what type of tree this woman lay under when allegedly coupling with the young man. Their inconsistent answers, puns on the Greek word for ‘divided’, showed their accusations to be fabrications and, as the law of Moses proscribed, they were given the same punishment as would have befallen the victim of their false witness. They were executed and Susanna was restored to her family and husband.

And from that day forward, Daniel was a great man among his people¹⁵⁰.

A time of peace?

During the early years of the second century BCE, Judea was wealthy and at peace; Jews in the diaspora had adapted to life in their adopted lands. The second Punic war between Carthage and Rome was over. The possibility of a golden age could have been perceived by some. But it was not to last. Beneath the surface there were cracks, whose exploitation by unstable leaders would cause many to believe that the end of the world was at hand.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel 13:1-64 in Catholic Bibles.