

The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible

by

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"The Great Empires of Israelite Times"

The story of man's oft-repeated attempt to dominate his world by the use of totalitarian power is a fascinating account. It is the story of ambitious men who consolidate their power over a people, and turn the total resources of that people toward world conquest. Strangely enough, the conquest has not always been an unmixed evil. The organizing energy required often stirred creative powers to such an extent that great prosperity resulted and achievements in science and art were phenomenal.

Yet conquest was more often a dreadful thing, draining the resources of subject peoples and keeping them in a state of poverty, terror, and seething hatred. The mounds which dot the ancient Near East are filled with the evidence of this state of affairs. In Palestine and Syria especially the average city was frequently destroyed in war. Small wonder that Israel was so concerned with death and judgment and salvation! . . .

The period of the Old and New Testaments was the first great epoch of empire-building, and in its maelstrom of tragedy and triumph the Hebrew people were inevitably caught. The Egyptian Empire of the fifteenth century B.C. was the greatest which the world had seen. Yet it was dwarfed by the achievements which followed. During the eighth and seventh centuries the Assyrian Empire was formed, including in its scope the whole of Mesopotamia, Palestine-Syria, southern Asia Minor, and even for a time Egypt. By 600 B.C. Assyria had fallen and Babylonia had taken its place, ruling over substantially the same territory. Babylonia soon fell, however, to the Medes and the Persians, and by 500 B.C. the Persian Empire included in its scope the whole of Western Asia, Egypt, and Thrace in Europe; and its armies were threatening Greece. By 300 B.C. Alexander the Great had mastered Greece and the Persian Empire. After his death three great Hellenistic empires divided his domain. Then in the first century before Christ, the Romans, with a military power and organizing genius unparalleled in antiquity, conquered and unified the entire Mediterranean world.

Such was the procession of empires in which the small country of Palestine was caught. Geographical situation decreed that political independence could be achieved in that country only during the brief periods when a dominant empire weakened and could no longer control its dependencies.

THE EMPIRE OF ASSYRIA

The country of Assyria lay along the upper Tigris River, and in the early period of its history Assur (or Asshur) was its chief city. As early as 1900 B.C. the people of this small region were prosperous traders. One of their trading colonies was as far away as Kanish in Asia Minor, where an active interest in the silver mines of the area was one of the chief concerns.

In the thirteenth century Assyrian armies had crossed the Euphrates, and about 1100 B.C. an

Assyrian monarch led his troops to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. These conquests, however, were of a temporary nature. During the second half of the tenth century there began a series of rulers whose conquests during the subsequent century give evidence of a planned program of empire-building. This program was carried out with extraordinary vigor and determination. After securing the back door to Assyria in the highland regions to the north and east, and after subduing Babylon, the kings pushed westward.

The middle Euphrates region around Gozan and Haran and the area east of the watershed in Syria from Hamath to Damascus, were in the hands of Aramean invaders, who were destined to flood the whole area with traders and settlers, and after 500 B.C. to make their language its official tongue. Around the turn of the ninth century the Assyrian monarchs, Adad-nirari II and Tukulti-Ninurta II, conquered Aramaean territory within the great northern bend of the Euphrates with the result that virtually the whole of Mesopotamia was firmly organized under Assyrian control. The major political story from Western Asia during the ninth century, however, concerns the exploits of the two Assyrian emperors whose reigns occupy the greater part of that century. The first of these, Assurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.), is the first of the emperors about whom detailed information is available. It was found in the excavation of his capital, Calah, the modern *Nimrud*. In form of braggadocio which typifies the royal inscriptions for the next two and one half centuries Assurnasirpal describes his conquest of northern Syria, the types and amounts of the booty he received, and the sadistic brutality which he visited upon all who refused to submit to him without battle. From this time forth the Assyrian kings describe their exploits in similar vein. Their armies were so powerful that none could withstand them. Their rapacious cruelty was so terrible that the hatred of them spilled over into the literature of a people as far away as Judah (cf. Nahum, chs. 2 to 3 and Jonah).

Northern Syria at that time was controlled by a number of Hittite dynasties, with their city-states, which were survivals from the fourteenth century B.C. when the region was first conquered by the Hittites of Asia Minor. Indeed both the Assyrians and the Israelites speak of Syria as "Land of the Hittites" (e.g., Josh. 1:4; cf. 1 Kings 10:29; Gen. 10:15). While the Aramaeans had pushed into the area by this period, they had rapidly assimilated the Syro-Hittite culture. Illustration of the latter has been revealed by the excavations at Carchemish and Samal. After the Assyrian conquest, the culture of the area was rapidly brought under Assyrian influence. The Lebanon district along the coast of southern Syria was not conquered by Assurnasirpal, but all its cities fearfully purchased their freedom from him by the payment of tribute.

His successor was Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.), by whose time the conquering armies were ready to turn southward toward Hadadezer (or Ben-hadad) of Damascus, the king who was probably the strongest ruler of the Syro-Palestinian region. In 853 B.C. the battle of Qarqar took place between Shalmaneser and a coalition headed by Hadadezer (Ben--hadad). Qarqar was south of Hamath and probably on the Orontes River. We have no mention of this battle in the Old Testament, but Shalmaneser lists among his opponents the following: 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalry and 20,000 infantry of Hadadezer of Damascus; 700 chariots, an equal number of cavalry and 10,000 infantry of Irhuleni of Hamath; and "2,000 chariots, 10,000 infantry of Ahab, the Israelite." Other smaller contingents of troops were present from places as far away as Que (the area of Tarsus) and Ammon. In other words the strongest kings in Asia, between northern Syria and Egypt, were those of Damascus, Hamath, and Israel. The last-mentioned had not yet taken up the newly introduced cavalry as a weapon of war, but he was able to supply more chariots than the other two together. The Assyrian monarch claimed the victory, saying in contradictory fashion in different

inscriptions that he killed 14,000, 20,500, and 25,000 of his enemy. Nevertheless, he retired from the scene and we may assume that the battle was drawn.

As a result of the religious revolution in Israel, which under Elijah and Elisha not only swept the dynasty of Ahab from the throne but also deposed Ben-hadad of Damascus, the coalition was broken up (2 Kings 8:7-15; chs. 9, 10). Shalmaneser was quick to take advantage of this fact, and in 841 B.C. pictured the embassy of Jehu, the new king of Israel, bringing tribute to him. The tribute was probably received after Shalmaneser's fifth attack on Damascus, following which he had taken his army into Phoenicia. While there he says that he received the tribute of Tyre, Sidon, and of Jehu, and that he placed his portrait on the cliff of *Ba'lira'si*. This portrait, along with that of Rameses II of Egypt, may still be seen on the cliff at the mouth of the Dog River, north of Beirut. After 837 B.C. Damascus was not troubled again by Assyria until 805 B.C., when its kingdom was devastated and forced to pay heavy tribute by Shalmaneser's grandson, Adad-nirari II (810-783 B.C.). In the years before this, Hazael of Damascus had been able to bring Israel to her knees and even to extract tribute from Judah. The defeat of Damascus was a great boon to Israel and permitted her rapid recovery.

For the next sixty years (c. 805-745 B.C.) the west was given a breathing space because the rulers of Assyria were not strong men. The kingdom of Urartu (Biblical Ararat) to the north gathered its resources and pressed southward. Babylon, and most of Syria freed themselves, while Israel and Judah reached the climax of their powers under Jeroboam II and Uzziah. Then another series of vigorous Assyrians began anew the relentless push of conquest. Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.), after consolidating his borders to the east and north, led his armies westward. His policy was to divide the west into subject provinces, each with its own governor, though leaving the native kings on the thrones of certain outlying areas, provided they paid a regular tribute. He also instituted a policy of exchanging large sections of the populations of conquered territories, to break up nationalistic feeling and to make the population less united and more pliable.

After subduing Urartu, he struck at Syria, and within a comparatively short time he had conquered the whole of it as far south as Arvad and Hamath. Then internal political problems in Palestine gave him his opportunity there. In 738 B.C. he received tribute from Menahem of Israel, who thus purchased Assyrian support for his hold upon his throne (2 Kings 15:19). Tiglath-pileser confirms this Biblical statement by saying in his annals that Menahem "fled like a bird, alone" and bowed at his feet. He then returned Menahem to the throne and imposed a tribute upon him.

It was not until c. 734 B.C. that Damascus and Israel took the lead in attempting to form a coalition of all the southern powers against the Assyrians. Yet this time Ahaz of Judah refused to join, and his northern neighbors attacked him. He appealed for aid to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 16:7), who was evidently delighted to have such a fine chance to intervene. Between 734 and 732 he conquered Philistia; Galilee and Transjordan were taken from Israel; and Damascus, finally, was destroyed. The whole of this territory was then incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system, ruled by Assyrian officials. Galilee, for example, was ruled from Megiddo where a large fort was erected, probably as the administrative center. A fragment of the famous Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, recently found at Megiddo, may perhaps be evidence of the presence here of Mesopotamian officials, though it may date from an earlier period. The much-reduced Israel, as well as Judah, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, he left under their native rulers, whom he required to pay tribute (cf. 2 Kings 15:27 ff.; 16:5 ff.; Isa., ch. 7). Within a few years, however, Israel had revolted again and was this time utterly destroyed. The siege of Samaria, begun in 724 by

Shalmaneser V (727-722), was completed early in 721 by his successor, Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). The latter tells us that he carried away captive from Samaria 27,290 people. Some of them were exiled in "the (Valley of the) Habor, the river of Gozan" (2 Kings 17:6). In the years that followed, people deported from Babylonia, Elam, and Syria were forced to live in Samaria.

During the reign of Sargon, Hezekiah of Judah reasserted the Davidic claims to rule all of Palestine, and to that end instituted a religious reform in both south and north (2 Chron. 29-31). He probably attempted this, not as a rebellion against Assyria, but as a readjustment within the empire, whereby he claimed control over the provinces of Samaria and Megiddo (Galilee). Probably because he believed he could secure his end in this manner, he refused to aid the king of Ashdod, Assyrian sources inform us, when the latter was attacked by Sargon in 711 B.C. (cf. Isa., ch. 20) and had his territory reorganized into an Assyrian province. Yet subsequently he evidently concluded that the role of client-king was inadequate for his aims. After Sargon's death in 705 B.C., he allied himself with Babylon and Egypt and became the leader of all the smaller states of his area in a revolt against the new emperor, Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.). In 701 B.C. the latter retaliated (2 Kings 18:13 ff.). He claims to have reduced forty-six fortified Judean cities and to have shut up Hezekiah "like a caged bird in Jerusalem." He did not wish to ruin the country; he simply broke down city fortifications, besieged Jerusalem but did not destroy it when the latter surrendered and paid a high tribute. The chief Judean fortress-city was Lachish, and its capture was pictured on a relief in the royal palace at Nineveh. While our sources are obscure and difficult to harmonize in places, it is not improbable that still another rebellion took place a few years later. Whereas before the first revolt the prophecies of Isaiah appear to have envisaged the fall of Judah to Assyria and to have interpreted the event as the just judgment of God, another group of later prophecies, delivered during a second siege of Judah, predicted the defeat of Assyria and the salvation of Jerusalem. According to 2 Kings 19:35, 36, which is confirmed by the Greek historian Herodotus, Sennacherib actually did retire quickly from the west when a plague broke out among his troops.

The most notable event of the seventh century came in the seventies and sixties when the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.) and Assurbanipal (669-c.633 B.C.) conquered Egypt. The fall of Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt, in 663 B.C. was still remembered by the Judean prophet Nahum a half century later ("No" in Nahum 3:8). Between 652 and 648 B.C. a serious revolt against Assyria occurred which was again led by Babylon. This was the probable occasion when Manasseh of Judah also revolted (2 Chron. 33:10-13). Other than that the latter's reign was chiefly notable for the introduction of Canaanite and Assyrian religious cults into Judah and for the attempt to convert the Judean faith into polytheism with Yahweh at the head of a pantheon (2 Kings 21:2-9).

When the revolt of Babylon was suppressed, the Assyrian power began rapidly to wane. Egypt was soon free, and the Assyrians found their energies completely absorbed in defensive warfare in various directions. The golden age of the empire was drawing to a close.

The remarkably detailed knowledge which we have about the Assyrians comes largely from vast palaces and imposing temple-towers built by the kings along the Tigris, especially from *Dur Sharrukin* ("Sargonburg"), Nineveh, and Calah. The first was a magnificent royal residence erected by Sargon II on a grander scale than the ancient world had yet seen. It was abandoned, however, by his son Sennacherib, who made Nineveh his capital. This city then became renowned the world over as the symbol of Assyrian power and aggression. It extended some two and a half miles along the Tigris, and the circumference of the inner walls was about eight miles. The palace

was a tremendous structure. In one place the excavators cleared seventy-one halls, lined with stone reliefs, nearly two miles in total length, depicting various activities of the king and his armies.

Assurbanapal also made Nineveh his capital, and the reliefs in his palace represent the finest examples of Assyrian art. This king was much interested in intellectual matters, and took pride in his mastery of the art of writing. One of the greatest discoveries ever made by archaeologists occurred in the unearthing at Nineveh of his great library, composed of some 22,000 clay tablets. Here the king had systematically collected the religious, scientific, and literary works of the past. They represent our chief source of knowledge regarding life and thought in ancient Mesopotamia.

THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

On the death of Assurbanapal c. 633 B.C. the great empire of Assyria fell rapidly to pieces. For centuries the Chaldeans, Semitic nomads, had been slowly moving into Babylonia. They now gained control of that country, and the first king of these Neo-Babylonians, Nabopolassar, declared his independence of Assyria c. 625 B.C. Meanwhile the Medes in the area of northern Iran were becoming another threat to the security of Assyria. Under their king Cyaxares they captured Asshur in 614 B.C. The Babylonians then joined them, and together they attacked and conquered Nineveh in 612 B.C. As the Babylonian Chronicle put it, "the city they turned into mounds and heaps of ruins." This was a momentous date in ancient history. The greatest power that the world had yet known had fallen, and from the subject peoples there arose a chorus of gratitude, hatred, and new hope. To this sternly exultant mood the Hebrew prophet Nahum gave most vivid expression: "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, but the Lord will surely not acquit the guilty. . . . Woe to the bloody city, all of it filled with lies and robbery. . . . Everyone who hears the news of thee shall clap their hands over thee, for over whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually" (chs. 1:3; 3:1, 19).

The Assyrian army fell back on Haran, and in 609 B.C. the Babylonians attacked. Meanwhile Pharaoh Necho of Egypt marched north through Palestine to aid the Assyrians. King Josiah attempted to halt him at Megiddo, but was killed in the attempt (2 Kings 23:29 ff.). The Assyrians were defeated at Haran, and Necho took over their territory in Syria-Palestine. The new Egyptian empire in Asia was short-lived, however, for in 605 B.C. the vigorous Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Syria with a Babylonian army, administered a crushing defeat to the Egyptians at Carchemish, and took over the whole of the west to the border of Egypt. The new hopes which the fall of Assyria had raised among the subject peoples were dashed. Babylon was substituted for Nineveh.

We do not possess the same detailed information about the exploits of Nebuchadnezzar as we do about those of the Assyrian kings. Babylonian tradition permitted him to write about his religious and architectural activity but not about his military exploits. Apart from the Bible our main source of information has been the Babylonian Chronicle, an official document which simply recorded the chief events in the empire year by year. One portion, published by C. J. Gadd in 1923, described the fall of Nineveh and for the first time fixed its date in 612 B.C. In 1956 D. J. Wiseman published four more tablets of the Chronicle. These are especially important in that they give itemized information about the chief events from 626 to 594 B.C., with a break of only six years. For the first time we learn the details of Babylonia's struggle against Assyria, and after 609 B.C. her war with Egypt. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar completely annihilated the army of Pharaoh Necho,

but the death of his father caused him to hurry home to be crowned king so that he was unable to pursue his advantage. Hitherto unknown is the record of a major battle with the Egyptians in 601 B.C. in which Nebuchadnezzar was defeated. The new documents for the first time also describe and give the precise date of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem in his seventh year.

Apart from his wars, the chief work of Nebuchadnezzar was the enlargement and beautification of Babylon, which now surpassed Nineveh in architectural glory. He repaired the great Temple of Marduk, the Tower of Babel, and erected a vast imperial palace, on top of which, rising terrace upon terrace, was a garden. This place was called "The House at Which Men Marvel," and the "Hanging Gardens" were listed by the Greeks among the Seven Wonders of the World.

Nebuchadnezzar was the only great king of the newly erected Babylonian kingdom. If he had had strong successors, the extent of the empire would probably have equaled that of Assyria. His thirteen-year siege of Tyre did not result in the city's capture, though it did eventually acknowledge his sovereignty. In the latter part of his life he began the conquest of Egypt, but his death and weak successors prevented more than a purely temporary success (cf. Ezek. 29:17-20). Nabonidus (555-539 B.C.) was the last vigorous personality of the dynasty. Yet that vigor was not so observable in political and administrative matters as it was in those of religion and archaeology. He excavated and repaired ancient temples. He took a great interest in archaic religious matters. He apparently had definite opinions of his own about cultic practices and even dared interfere in priestly ceremonies and customs in Babylon. During the latter part of his life he retired to Tema in Arabia and stayed there year after year, probably insane. Administrative matters in Babylon were left to the crown prince Belshazzar, whom The Book of Daniel knows as "king" (Dan., ch. 5). Meanwhile the annual New Year's festival could not be celebrated in Babylon. In this festival the king acted the part of the god Marduk and ritually refought and rewon the battle that took place with chaos at the beginning of time. It was undoubtedly believed that when this ceremony was not repeated annually, world order was threatened. All in all Nabonidus succeeded in making himself so unpopular that the arrival of Cyrus, the Persian, at the gates of Babylon was welcomed, at least by the priests of Marduk, as heartily as it was by the Jewish exiles (cf. Isa. 45:1-8).

Commerce, literature, art, and science flourished during this age. The Chaldeans were the founders of astronomy as a science. Careful astronomical observations were continuously kept for over 360 years, and these calculations form the longest series ever made. One great Chaldean astronomer, living shortly after the completion of the period of observation, was able to calculate the length of the year as 365 days, 6 hrs., 15 mins., and 41 secs.--a measurement which the modern telescope has shown to be only 26 mins., 26 secs. too long! His calculations on the diameter of the face of the moon were far more accurate than those of Copernicus. Certain measurements of celestial motions by another Chaldean astronomer actually surpass in accuracy the figures long in practical use among modern astronomers.

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

During the days of Nebuchadnezzar two powerful empires, the Median and Lydian, existed to the east, north, and northwest of Babylon. By a treaty the boundary between them had been fixed at the Halys River in Asia Minor. The Medes, who had captured Asshur in 614 B.C. and assisted the Babylonians in destroying Nineveh in 612 B.C., had their capital at Achmetha (Ecbatana). By 549 B.C. a Persian named Cyrus had united the people of his land and defeated the Median king. The

attention of the west was now focused on the career of this extraordinary individual. A Judean prophet rightly interpreted the signs of the times, and saw in Cyrus one anointed of the Lord, who "giveth nations before him, and maketh him rule over kings" (Isa. 41:2; 44:28; 45:1). By 546 B.C. Sepharad or Sardis, the capital of Lydia, had fallen to Cyrus, and Croesus, its king, was a prisoner. Cyrus was then ready to strike at Babylonia; in 539 B.C. he easily defeated the Chaldean army (led by the crown prince Belshazzar? Cf. Dan., ch. 5) and entered Babylon without opposition.

Thus just seventy years after the final Assyrian defeat at Haran in 609 B.C., the days of the Semitic empires were past. The Persian, Greek, and Roman empires were ruled by Indo-Europeans or Aryans. In 525 B.C. Egypt was added to the Persian Empire by Cyrus' son. In the space of twenty-five years the whole civilized east as far as India was brought under the firm control of Persia. Repeated attempts were made to add Greece to this empire. One was led by Darius the Great, who was defeated by the Greeks at Marathon in 490 B.C.; another, ten years later, was led by Xerxes, who was defeated in a naval battle off Salamis. Unable to subdue Greece, the Persians nevertheless held a firm hold over Asia for almost two centuries.

The organization of the great empire was a colossal task, brought to completion by Darius the Great (522-486 B.C.). While ruling Egypt and Babylonia directly as actual king, he divided the rest of the empire into twenty "satrapies" or provinces, each under a governor or "satrap"--a development of the earlier Assyrian provincial system. Aramaic, the language of Aramean ("Syrian") traders, which by this time had become the commercial tongue of the Fertile Crescent, was made the official language of government. Stamped coinage, an idea borrowed from Greece, was introduced throughout the empire as a convenience for business and government alike. A fleet was organized, and to provide a sea route from Egypt to Persia, a canal was dug between the Nile and the Red Sea.

Babylon and Susa (Shushan) were used as royal residences. Cyrus had built a palace at Pasargadae, and there he was buried. Darius, however, erected a magnificent palace with attendant buildings at Persepolis, structures which surpassed in grandeur even the work of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It is most unfortunate that Alexander the Great saw fit in 330 B.C. to burn them, leaving only the ruins for the modern excavator to uncover.

The Assyrian and Babylonian policy of suppressing subject peoples by deportation and merciless taxation was reversed by the Persians, whose enlightened policies won a measure of gratitude from subject peoples. They were the only rulers of Palestine who did not incur the wrath of the Hebrew people. When Cyrus came to the throne of Babylon in 539 B.C., he evidently had himself proclaimed king and thus the legitimate successor to Nabonidus. In so doing he did not have to reconquer the Babylonian empire; instead, as he said in an inscription written for Babylonians, the god Marduk had searched through all countries and selected him as "righteous ruler" in place of the "weakling," Nabonidus, who babbled incorrect prayers and changed Marduk's worship into an abomination. Once within Babylon his troops were not permitted to loot the city; he returned exiles to their countries, rebuilt their sanctuaries, and restored the statues of their gods. In Ezra 1:2-4 and ch. 6:3-5 there are preserved two accounts of the decree by which Judeans were permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Recent study of these two documents in the light of our present knowledge of royal decrees suggests that they are actually two different statements of the one decree. The second is in Aramaic, the official language of the Persian administration. It was entitled a *dikrona*, a term for a memorandum that recorded the decision of a king or official and was not for publication but for filing in government archives. The document

in Ezra 1:2-4, on the other hand, is in Hebrew and probably preserves the essence of the royal proclamation made to Judeans throughout the empire. The words, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem," are precisely in keeping with the type of address Cyrus had previously used to the Babylonians; indeed the document was probably framed with the aid of a Judean adviser who knew what a contemporary Judean prophet was saying about Cyrus as the Lord's Anointed (Isa. 45:1). In any event, the exiles from Judah benefited from the new policies. During the years that followed, quite a number returned to the Jerusalem area, established a small province called *Yehud* (Judah), built a new Temple between 520 and 515 B.C. (Ezra, chs. 5; 6), and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem under the leadership of a Jewish governor, Nehemiah, after 445 B.C. (Neh., chs. 2 to 6).

The best of the Persian monarchs felt obligated to rule justly and righteously. Their acts and words set them apart from Assyrian kings in this regard, and the reason is probably to be sought in their religion. Darius and his immediate successors, at least, were followers of Zoroaster, a Median religious reformer who lived about 600 B.C. Zoroaster saw life as a ceaseless struggle between the forces of good and evil. The good, the light, he believed, was a supreme being, named Ahura Mazda. Opposed to him and helpers he created were the evil spirits; but the good Ahura Mazda would ultimately prevail over them. Zoroaster called men to take their stand on the side of the good, and worship "the righteous Master of Righteousness." The influence of this religion spread widely, and even Judaism by the second century B.C. had borrowed certain conceptions from it.

Evidence for Jews living in foreign countries during the fifth century B.C. has been found in both Mesopotamia and Egypt. Several hundred commercial tablets found at Nippur in Babylon are in the archives of the commercial firm of Murashu Sons. They reveal the great mixture of peoples who lived in the area; the large number of Hebrew names shows that one sizable element in the population was certainly Jewish. The Elephantine papyri from Upper Egypt indicate that on the island of Elephantine at the first cataract a group of Jews were living as mercenaries, guarding Egypt's southern frontier. They were scarcely orthodox Jews, for they had a temple of their own on the island. The Persian satrap of Egypt during the latter part of the fifth century was a man named Arsham. This we know from recently published correspondence from him and his officials. Putting all the evidence together, we infer that while Arsham was absent in Mesopotamia between 410 and 408 B.C. there were disturbances in Egypt which resulted in the razing of the Jewish temple at Elephantine. The Jews at the fortress wrote to the high priest in Jerusalem and to the sons of Sanballat, former governor of Samaria, for aid in getting the temple rebuilt. The former, as we should expect, did not reply. The latter and Bagoas, governor of Judah, advised that they petition Arsham. This they did, and a copy of the petition is preserved. The letter carefully states that no animal offering will be burnt in the temple if it is rebuilt. Some years earlier, in 419 B.C., Arsham through his commissioner for Jewish affairs had ordered the community at Elephantine to celebrate the Passover according to certain precise regulations, which, we note, accord with Pentateuchal law. These two bits of evidence suggest what we would infer from the Bible, namely, that the religious reforms in Jerusalem and the new priestly community there soon made their influence felt on Jewish affairs throughout the empire. The Elephantine temple was rebuilt, and from that fact we gather that the compromise regarding animal offerings was effective. The priesthood in Jerusalem, of course, felt that such offerings were reserved for the Jerusalem altar, for that, they believed, was the altar meant in Deut. 12:5-7. Reconciliation with the Samaritan sect at Mt. Gerizim, on the other hand, was impossible precisely because the latter believed that Shechem was the place which God had chosen for the central altar.

THE HELLENISTIC EMPIRES

In the fourth century B.C. the center of political power moved westward while Greek culture was making an energetic and partially effective attempt to penetrate the east. Culturally, Greece had long been important. Its brilliant cluster of city-states had generated a vitality and originality still unsurpassed. Particularly at Athens political vigor, expressed in civic interest, extensive sea power, and outreaching colonies, had joined with intellectual and artistic genius to create a permanently stimulating heritage.

An eastward movement of Greek influence may appear strange. Greek colonies and trade had previously been limited to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Two factors, however, directed attention eastward. The Greek cities in Asia Minor were inevitably bound up with trends farther east. Moreover, the competing city-states of Greece recognized that Persia, which at Marathon and Salamis had tried to conquer the Greeks, was still a threat.

These divided city-states found unity and protection, but only through unwilling subjection to Macedonia. Philip of Macedon (359-336 B.C.), whose capital was at Pella, extended his power southward until a decisive battle in 338 B.C. gave him control of all Greece except Sparta.

It fell to Philip's son, Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.), to carry out the war Philip had planned against Persia. This brilliant pupil of Aristotle, a provincial governor at sixteen, able general at eighteen, and king at twenty, swiftly won loyalty in Macedonia and Greece. In 334 B.C. he crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor to challenge Persia. A victory at the River Granicus opened Asia Minor to conquest. The next spring, he passed through the Cilician Gates and decisively defeated the Persian army of Darius at Issus. Turning south, he subdued Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. At the western mouth of the Nile he founded the famous city of Alexandria. Returning northward, he crossed the Euphrates at Thapsacus, moved east, and in 331 B.C., at Gaugamela, near Arbela, he crushed the remaining forces of Darius and was master of the Persian Empire.

Alexander continued eastward. His route took him through Babylon, Susa, Persepolis, Ecbatana, and Zadracarta. At Prophthasia, in Drangiana, when it had become apparent that he wanted to unite East and West in one great brotherhood, revolt was brewing among his followers, but he crushed it, and moved on into Bactria, Sogdiana, and India. There his troops mutinied and refused to go farther. He returned westward, moving his troops partly by sea and partly by a land route through Gedrosia and Carmania. At Babylon death ended his plan to create a world brotherhood with a culture prevailingly Greek (323 B.C.). He had proved a military genius; he had planted Greek cities and Greek influence in a wide area. But he made no deep and lasting imprint on the eastern regions he conquered. His work and the later Roman conquest did much, however, to determine the direction in which Judaism and Christianity were later to spread.

At his death there was no logical successor to hold the empire intact, and Alexander's generals fell to fighting among themselves. One of the many rivals, Ptolemy Lagi, emerged with secure possession of Egypt. Seleucus, another general, was able in 312 B.C. to establish the Seleucid dynasty in Syria and the east. The battle of Ipsus in 301 B.C. finally excluded from Asia the Antigonid dynasty, which henceforth contented itself with Macedonia. . . . Three great empires existed, and they continued in essentially the same form until the eastern expansion of Rome absorbed them one by one. In Macedonia, Antigonus Gonatas ruled (283-239 B.C.). He was not

able, however, to bring Greece under his control. In Egypt the Ptolemaic dynasty was firmly established, and Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) ruled also Cyrene, the southern part of the Aegean Sea, Lycia, Cyprus, and Palestine.

The dry climate of Egypt has permitted the survival of thousands of papyri, and from these records much of our knowledge of ancient life and history is derived. Tradition dates the translation of the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus. The number of Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt, especially in Alexandria, was increasing, and they needed a Greek translation of their Scriptures.

The greater part of Alexander's empire, however, was in the hand of the Seleucid Antiochus I (280-262 B.C.), whose capital was at Antioch in Syria. Northern Asia Minor, including Bithynia under Nicomedes, Pontus under Mithridates, and Galatia, where the invading Gauls had just settled, was outside his control. But his empire extended from Thrace in Europe to the borders of India, although the effectiveness of his control over the eastern provinces is open to doubt. These eastern areas were soon to be lost, and Parthia was soon to begin its rise to power.

At this time Palestine was fulfilling its usual role of border region. Ptolemy Lagi had obtained control of it when Alexander's empire began to break up, and Ptolemaic control, though challenged more than once by the Seleucids, continued until 198 B.C., when Antiochus III added Palestine to the Seleucid empire. From that time until the coming of the Romans in 63 B.C. the history of Palestine was closely linked with that of Syria.

"The Great Empires of Israelite Time" in George Ernest Wright and Floyd Vivian Filson, *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956).