

Our Contributors.

For Dominion Presbyterian.

The Maccabean Period of Jewish History.

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The life of humanity is one. All periods of history and all phases of human life are important, in varying degree, to those who seek to grasp the spirit that runs through the whole. One period may seem to be heroic and poetic, another prosaic and commonplace, but human experience is similar in all of them, and it is instructive to study the same life in its ever-varying forms. It is difficult to deal with an important period of a nation's life in one short lecture. We are in danger of either of two extremes; we may lose ourselves in a confusing mass of details, or we may content ourselves with vague generalities. Neither of these results would be satisfactory, and we shall be thankful if we can avoid them and achieve even a small measure of success in the attempt to seize the salient points, to fix upon the leading facts and exhibit the dominant formative principles.

The importance of our period has recently been emphasized from two different directions. On the one hand, the historian of the times of our Lord finds that the Christian religion "is joined by innumerable threads with the previous thousand years of Israel's history" and goes back to the Maccabean age to discover the beginnings of the Pharasaic tendency. On the other hand, the student of "Old Testament Theology" realizes that he cannot stop until he has traced the transition of the Hebrew religion into Judaism and the development of Judaism into its final form, the form from which there came two things so diverse as living Christianity and dead Rabbinism. Hence, whether we regard it as a link with the past or a preparation for the future, it is a period of great significance.

One of the deepest divisions in the life of the Jewish people is that between pre-exilic and post-exilic times. Though the continuity of the national life was not actually broken by the tragic national experience called "the Babylonian Exile," there was a tremendous wrench with manifold effects and far-reaching influences. There is all the difference between a mediæval and modern period. The world of a Jew becomes new in its intellectual interests and religious activities. We cannot now attempt to follow the Jew as he enters upon the larger arena of commercial enterprise, literary effort, and missionary activity in Babylonia, Palestine and Egypt. The centre and scene of our subject is Palestine and particularly Jerusalem, though we must now and then cast a hasty glance outside the circle, but that also to gain needful light upon the events which take place there.

After the exile we have to do with a community in and around Jerusalem whose main characteristic is not so much its political life as its religious aims and ecclesiastical forms. It is neither charitable nor correct to speak contemptuously of this community as a *sect*. The church that has handed down to us the wonderful and varied literature contained in the Old Testament canon has in it universal elements and much real catholicity of feeling. We cannot stay now to discuss how far the intolerance, which was a necessary limitation of the time, was in spite of its noble aims tinged with selfish narrowness. We note in passing the predominance of what we may call church-

interests in the life of the community; the different tone of prophecy preparatory to its final disappearance; the beginnings of scholastic Judaism; and finally a point of special importance in view of the period we have to study, the prominence and importance of the High Priest's office.

We cannot consider in detail the work of Jewish leaders and reformers in the Persian period; we must steadfastly resist the attractions of Nehemiah, the patriot-statesman, and Ezra, the great scribe. They did important work in strengthening the Jewish and consolidating the peculiar institutions of Judaism. Neither can we discuss the kind or degree of Persian influence on later Jewish theology. Only one point must be emphasized, namely, that the political circumstances favoured the peculiar religious development. The temporary destruction of Egyptian independence gave comparative peace, and within the large frame-work of the Persian empire this strange community, in spite of or by means of internal difficulties, could grow according to its own genius.

"It is one of the great ironies of fate known to universal history, or to speak more correctly, it is one of the most striking evidences of the wonderful way which Providence takes for the attainment of its most important and most significant ends, that the final completion and permanent consolidation of the exclusive Judaism which sealed itself hermetically against non-Jewish and rejected sternly everything heathen, was made possible only under the protection and by the aid of a heathen government; that the reformation of Ezra and Nehemiah, to use a modern phrase, hung from the sword belt of the Persian gens d'armes."

The time of peace came to an end with the conquests of Alexander the Great, and Judea suffered severely in the confusion that followed his death. The old disputes in which Palestine had been so often involved and entangled began again between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucidae of Syria.

As we now view it, the conquest of the East by Alexander the Great is seen to be one of the most fruitful movements in the history of the civilized world. We are in fact just beginning to realize all it meant in the life of humanity and in the preparation for the Christian religion. When two forces so highly developed and so distinct in character and aim as Hellenism and Judaism met, there was bound to be the severe conflict which is essential to the highest progress. The Hebrew religion which had always possessed a wonderful strength and simplicity had now reached greater complexity and become more sharply defined. Greek culture which had attained its own rich maturity was subtle in its nature and atmospheric in its influence.

After the battle of Ipsus, 301, Palestine was surrendered to Ptolemy Lagus; hence Judea belonged to the new Egyptian kingdom for about a century. The Jews had a grudge against the founder of this dynasty, who took Jerusalem by deceit on the Sabbath day, and in course of time other cause of complaint arose; but this century was a time of peace, to this extent, that there was no external interference in the affairs of Judaism. The Ptolemies showed a wise policy as to religious views and feelings of their subjects, and were not unfavorable to the Jews whom they regarded as a useful medium between the native Egyptian and the ruling Greeks. The Jews shared, for example, with the Egyptians the custom of circumcision, the distinction between clean and unclean animals; and with enlightened Greeks in the

unity and spiritual nature of God. With respect to dexterity in trade, in distinction from the Egyptians, they were rivals of the gifted Greek.

To this period belongs the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible; and much literary activity among the Alexandrian Jews who wished to honour Judaism in the presence of the Greeks. All this must necessarily react upon the life of the Palestinian Jew. Jerusalem, however, still remained the religious centre, and while as a people they were becoming more cosmopolitan and adapting themselves to a new and larger world, they were closely bound together by the feeling that the Law was Israel's peculiar pride and that it demanded the loyal and strict observance of every real Jew. The importance of this century of comparatively peaceful intercourse between Hellenism and Judaism can scarcely be over-estimated. In order to gain the clue to the Maccabean period and to understand the later Jewish literature we must continually bear in mind this century during which Greek influence had legitimate, free and healthy play in and around Palestine. The characteristic feature of the Maccabean period is the heroic struggle of godly patriotic men to prevent the destruction of their religion by a hostile force from outside, but that which made such an attempt possible was the division within the nation itself. During the previous century Greek influence had worked its way very near to the heart of the nation, and is responsible for something of the best and much of the worst in the life of this period.

In the struggle between the Egyptian and Syrian powers a decisive battle was fought at Paneas, 199 B. C. Jerusalem opened its gates to Antiochus the Great, and he granted them certain privileges as a reward. The influences of Rome was at this time beginning to make itself felt, and he was compelled to conclude a hasty peace with Egypt. Both the ruling families now sought the favour of the Jews and the political history of this period is the complicated story of the relation of the Jews to the bewildering maze of Syrian and Egyptian politics. Jewish life reproduced something of the same restless struggle of selfish factions, and from this heroic period we may select some of the vilest specimens of their race.

The Ptolemies had allowed the High Priest to send the tribute. This was a concession to the religious feeling of the nation and increased the influence of the chief ecclesiastical official. In the reign of Ptolemy Energetes (247-222) a change took place; the High Priest Onias foolishly withheld the tribute and brought upon him the King's displeasure. A nephew of Onias, the son of Tobias, managed to get himself sent on a mission to the Egyptian court for the purpose of settling the matter. By his cleverness and courtesy, aided by the rich gifts that he brought, he secured the favour of the King and Queen and was himself appointed farmer-general of taxes for the whole of Palestine and Coele-Syria. He kept this position for twenty-two years and supported by Egyptian troops was enabled to raise the revenue for his master and much gain for himself. This is the first big specimen of this type of publican and sinner. The powerful, unruly faction of which he was the head could set at defiance the regular authority of the High Priest. This Joseph, the son of Tobias, introduced much trouble and confusion into the life of the Jewish people. His youngest son Hyrcanus is said to have excelled his father in the arts of dissimulation and flattery. After the father's death he was engaged in a deadly