

single city had it's own king! Some grouped together and formed alliances. At times a particular nation grew in power, which meant it took over surrounding nations. Some had better success than others. When they took over, some were nicer than others. At all times larger powers sought to make treaties with smaller powers. Another name for treaty was covenant. In those days the covenant made between a larger power such as Egypt and a smaller power meant that the smaller power had to pay the large power money, produce etc.. If they did not pay up, the larger power came along with it's army and destroyed the smaller power. If they did pay up, then if someone attacked them, the larger power would send it's army to defend them. There was give and take, but overall there was take.

This was always risky since if you gave your allegiance to the wrong power, than the dominant power would destroy you. This indeed happened to Israel in 587 when a set of bad political mistakes led to Israel being crushed and Jerusalem and it's temple being destroyed and it's people being exiled to Babylon by the Babylonians.

If you ever play a game like civilisation or risk, you will get a good idea about how different nations have their hay-day.

Usually Egypt was the great power in the south, and there was a great power in the north. Israel was stuck in between. When these great powers fought each other, it was often on Israelite soil and particularly in the valley of Megiddo. Today nations 'fight' it out in soccer. Back then, there was only the battle field. It was normal for armies to go out to war every year during the 'battle' season. Since Israel was in between, it had to be very careful who it made treaties with. Generally the battles were over border regions. But there were times when particular powers were strong enough to dominate most of the Ancient Near East.

Israel's history is shaped by these powers.

HISTORY OF ISRAEL

The first point to make is that the history up to David as a line of kings is considered reliable. After that the history as archeologically confirmed is scant and conjecture. This does not mean the events didn't happen.

What is important to realise is that the Bible as we have it, is guided by God as true author to teach us about Him, his plan and his love for us.



Here is an overview of the history of Israel and who was in control at the time.

Date (BC)	Events	Dominant Power over Israel
1850	Abraham	self rule
1250	Moses and Exodus	Egyptians leading to self rule
1210-1000	Period of the Judges	self rule
1000	David and the United Kingdom	self rule
950	Solomon. 1st Temple Built	self rule
920	Northern and Southern Kingdom splits	self rule 2 kingdoms
721	Northern Kingdom falls to the Assyrians. Intermarriage leads to the Samaritans.	Assyrians rule the North.
587	Babylonians exile the Israelites. 1st Temple destroyed.	Babylonians
537	Persians free Israelites. Most return and build 2nd Temple	Persians
333	Greeks control Israel	Greeks
167	Maccabees rule Israel	self rule
64	Romans control Israel	Romans



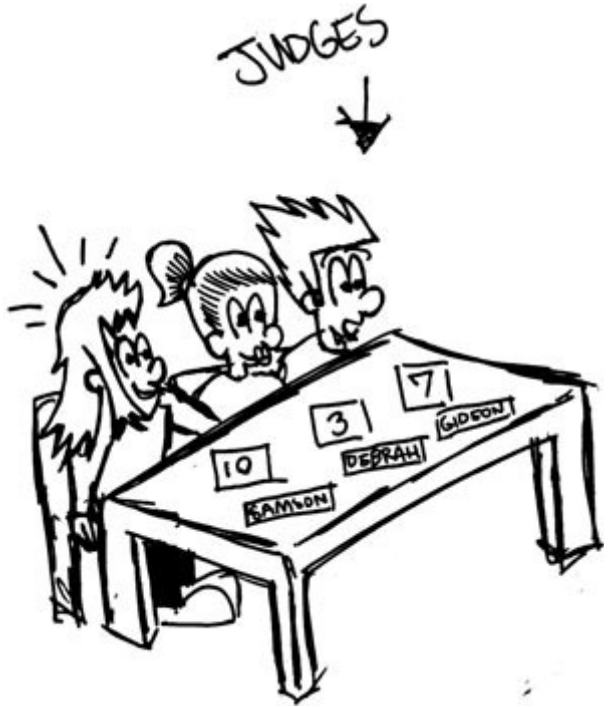
The fundamental beginning of Israel is God's call to Abraham around 1850BC. Abraham moved from his country to eventually settle in what we know today as Israel. He was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob who had 12 sons. These sons bear the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. One of them is Joseph (of Technicolor dream coat renown). Joseph settled with his brothers in Egypt. Eventually the Egyptians turned them into slaves.

Abraham is the actual father of the Jewish people.

When Israel was freed from Egypt, and was in the desert, God made a covenant with Israel in much the same way as a world power made a covenant with a lesser power. God would protect Israel and care for it, provided Israel lived as God wanted them to, ie according to the 10 commandments. Israel agreed. This was during the exodus in 1250BC. The Israelites entered the promised land and gradually took over it. Israel was led by a number of 'judges'. Eventually King David took control and united the nation and captured Jerusalem and made it Israel's capital in 1000BC.

The Exodus is the most important event in Israel's history. It is when God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the promised land in Israel

Israel did live up to the covenant for sometime. Israel became a great nation under king



THIS ONE IS FOR YOU, SAMSON!



David and king Solomon. But after Solomon, the

nation was split into two, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. But over time Israel did not live up to the covenant with God. Eventually the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 721. This was a great blow to the people. The people of the North began to marry Assyrians and their children were of mixed blood. These were

eventually known as the Samaritans and were looked down upon by the people of the south who considered themselves pure blooded Israelites, and thus better.

Eventually the southern kingdom fell to the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 587 and exiled the Israelites to Babylonia.

Fifty years later the Persians came to power and defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Isrealites to return to Israel in 537. They returned and built the second temple - this is the temple that Jesus knew. It was also at this time that most of the Old Testament took it's final shape. From this experience of exile the Israelites realised what really caused the exile was their lack of faithfulness to God.

In 333 Alexander the great leader of the Greeks took over most of the Ancient Near East and brought Greek culture with him. This had a lasting effect with Greek being the major common language from then on.

There was a lull in the strength of the major powers which allowed the Israelites to have autonomy under the Maccabees in 167BC.

In 64BC the Romans came to dominate and took over Israel. They occupied Israel, but allowed the Israelites to have their own religion, provided it did not interfere with Roman control. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor while Jesus was active in ministry. The Jewish king was king Herod who was interested in power and not religious practice.

As we explore Mark's gospel, it is important to be aware of Israel's history.

What is this 'Good News'?

The good news that Jesus is the saviour, the one to set us free, to give us victory over sin and live in the full plan of God which is for us to be totally happy, totally fulfilled and living a life of love from conception to death and beyond - for ever!

God prepared the Jews for Jesus by promising a saviour. The saviour would be a king like David. The saviour would be a prophet like Moses. There are many other prophecies about the saviour. Each of the gospels in their own way confirm Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament messianic expectations. By the time of Jesus there were particular groups with particular expectations. We will now explore each group and their expectations. It is these expectations that shape so much of the gospel and even lead to Jesus' death.

THE PHARISEE



The Pharisees: The Pharisees were a group of devout Jews who lived out the Jewish Law to the letter. The Jewish Law is contained in the first five books of the Bible and is called the Torah (Jewish for 'law') We call the first five books the 'Pentateuch' - it's just the name for the first five books. The Pharisees wanted everyone to live the law. They looked down on those who did not live up to it's expectations. The Pharisees were expecting a Messiah who would follow the law exactly. We will learn more about the law next week.

The Scribes and the Pharisees follow the Law. The Law is contained in the first 5 books of the Bible. They believe Moses gave them the law in about 1200BC and they MUST follow it.

THE SCRIBE



The Scribes: The scribes were the educated group, who could read, write and interpret the law and other ancient writings. Like the Pharisees they wanted people to follow the law. The scribes were expecting a very intelligent messiah who would fulfil the law and teach based on the law they knew.

The Romans: The Romans were in control of Israel. By maintaining control they were able to tax the people, but in return they kept law and order and build good roads and would protect Israel if it was attacked. Romans had many gods and caesar their leader was also considered a god. Generally they had a strong ethical code and believed in a universal justice. The Romans already worshiped their

The Romans conquered Israel in 64BC. They were in control of Israel when Jesus was around.

leader, Caesar as a god. They had many other gods as well. Because of this, they thought Christians were atheists, since they did not believe in their gods. They thought is some way that Caesar was their 'saviour'.





The Sadducees: The Sadducees were a rich group of people who enjoyed the pleasures of life at the time. They were not so concerned about the law and rejected some of the beliefs of the Pharisees. There were interested in enjoying the here and now. They expected a messiah who would make everything easy for everyone - a good political leader.

The Sadducees generally cooperated with the Romans. But the Zealots hated them and wanted to get rid of them at all costs.

The Zealots: The zealots were a resistance group to the Romans and sought to overthrow Roman rule in Palestine. They wanted to have a good Jewish king to rule over Israel again so Israel can again achieve it's former glory. The zealots were expecting a Messiah who would be a great military leader and free Israel from the Romans.



The Samaritans: In 721BC when the Assyrians captured the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they started to marry the Israelites and their children are known as the Samaritans. The Israelites looked down on them. Jesus loved them and cared for them. He taught us the parable, 'The Good Samaritan'. There are still Samaritans around today, but only about a 1000 of them. They still worship God as they use to.

The whole gospel deals with this question: Who is Jesus? What kind of Messiah is Jesus?

There are prophecies and expectations from the Old Testament of who/what the messiah would be like.

A descendant of Eve would "crush the head of the serpent" (Gen 3:15)

Through Abraham, "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 17:5)

God promised a prophet like Moses. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren - him you shall heed." [Moses is speaking] (Deut 18:15)

God promised a king like David would rule forever. 1 Chr. 17:10-14. This king would also be Son of God, 2 Sam. 7:14. "I will be his father, and he will be my son" [God speaking]. He was also termed "Christ," i.e. the "Messiah" or "Anointed One" 2 Sam. 19:21. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him."

Many prophets talked about the Messiah. Isaiah (9:5, 6) speaks of a son who will be given us and denotes his attributes. The prophet Micah (4:14-5:1-5) predicted that this ruler would be born in Bethlehem. The prophet Ezekiel likewise looks forward to a future ideal king (Ez 17:22-24). David royal messianism is found in Amos (9:11-12), Haggai (2:21-23), and Zechariah (4:7-10; 9:9-10; 13:1).

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE JESUS YOUR LORD AND SAVIOUR?

As Catholics we are invited to be disciples of Jesus. One way we can say yes to Jesus is to consecrate ourselves to His Sacred Heart. This means we desire to give our whole self to

Jesus and receive the fire of his divine Heart within us. It also means we ask that his will be done in all that we do. There are several beautiful prayers that can be said. I use a simple one. "*I consecrate myself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*". That's it. I also suggest that any important situation, eg a test, that you also consecrate it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I recommend any important step taken for Jesus be consecrated to the Sacred Heart. I find it a way of handing it over to God, so it is more His work rather than mine. That way I can leave it in His hands because I have given it to Him. For example, "Dear Lord, I consecrate our new group and all that we do for you, to your Sacred Heart, in Jesus name, Amen" Then everyone can say "Amen" to your prayer which means they agree. Amen?

Day One The Sick of the Palsy Mk:2:1-12

How easy is it for Jesus to forgive sin?

It is also that easy for Jesus to forgive our sin. If only we ask for it in confession. He will free us of our sins. When the priest says, "I absolve you of your sins". Our sins are forgiven and we are free.

If Jesus can just forgive sin, this breaks down the whole simplified system. There is no need for ritual cleansing or sacrifices. Jesus just forgives sin.

Day 2 The Call and Feast of Levi Mk:2:13-17

Which group does Jesus identify himself with, the righteous or sinners?

Jesus goes out of his way to be with the 'unclean'. These people are the ones Jesus seeks to be with the most.

Day 3 The Controversy concerning Fasting Mk:2:18-22

Jesus clearly identifies himself as the bridegroom. Who is the bride?

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We have in this passage a bit about unshrunk cloth and wine skins. What do you think they mean? What is the old wine skin and the new wine? (Hint: Have a look at Mark 3:13-19)

Day 4 The Sabbath Mk:2:23-28

How does Jesus counter the Pharisee's concern about what is lawful on the Sabbath?

Learning the scriptures helps us deal with the questions we might face. Sometimes we might be at a loss to understand scripture, but we should persevere and read the Bible everyday. There will be a time when a particular scripture will help us in our life.

Day 5 The Withered Hand Mk 3:1-4

Why do you think they were silent?

How did Jesus feel? Why did he feel this way?

Here we have the crux of the controversy. Jesus wants to do good. The law is ultimately about doing good and helping others.

Day 6 Pharisees and Herodians seek to destroy Jesus Mk 3:5-6

Why did they want to destroy Jesus?

Take a moment and reflect on your own life. Have you ever wanted to have revenge on someone? Have you been able to overcome it? How?

What do you think Jesus must have felt knowing they wanted to kill him?

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Day 7 The Beatitudes Matthew 5:3-12

The Beatitudes are a kind of new Law which gets to heart. They are about the way of the heart. Which one do you like the most?

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