

LESSON FOUR

THE TIMES OF JESUS

A. **HEROD THE GREAT:**

Herod became king of the Jews in the year 37 BC. Herod is styled the Great. He was able, he was cruel, and he was unscrupulous. He was a shrewd warrior. He always sided with the ruling faction at Rome. He was made king over almost all of Palestine.

Herod was heartless towards those who opposed him. He loved and married Mariamne, a princess of the Hasmonean house, but because he believed that she was plotting against him, he had her murdered at Samaria in 29 BC. All rivals were ruthlessly swept aside. Fearing his own sons, born of Mariamne, he had them murdered. He died a maniac after years of horrible suspicions and remorse. Herod was a great builder and administrator. He was an admirer of Greek culture. He built an amphitheater in Jerusalem and various large public structures through the East. He built the cities of Sebaste and Caesarea. Though he hated the Jews, he paid respect to their religion and built the Temple, the greatest they ever possessed.

The new temple was Herod's crowning work. Repeated sieges had left the sacred place almost in ruins. He felt that it was his duty to rebuild the sanctuary. He enlarged the narrow summit of Mount Moriah by building a huge stone platform around it, supporting the structure on piers and arches. This platform was about a thousand feet square and covered the site not only of the old Temple but also of the ancient palace of Solomon. Around the edge of this platform Herod erected beautiful cloisters of marble, roofing them in with cedar from Lebanon. On a higher level stood the Temple proper, a beautiful structure of which the Jews were very proud. The Temple had foundation blocks 70 feet long, which was covered on their outer faces with pure gold.

In the year 4 BC Herod died leaving an order that all the leading Jews be butchered so that the people might mourn at his funeral. However, no attention was paid to the command, and Herod was buried amid the rejoicing of the populace.

B. **THE SUCCESSORS OF HEROD:**

Herod left his kingdom to his three sons: 1) Archelaus got Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea; 2) Herod Antipas got Galilee and Peraea; and 3) Philip got the northeast territory. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, confirmed this arrangement, but Archelaus proved to be so bad that in 6 AD he was banished to Gaul and his territory was put under a procurator who was subject to the legate of Syria. The procurators lived at Caesarea, though on festival occasions they came to Jerusalem and lived in Herod's palace, which came to be called the Praetorium. The most famous of these procurators was Pontius Pilate (26 AD - 36 AD).

C. **RELIGIOUS PARTIES:**

1. **SADDUCEES:**

The Sadducees were members of the ancient aristocracy. They were primarily political and were interested in maintaining the prosperity of the State as secular, with religion but

secondary. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body and future rewards and punishments, and maintained that the soul perishes with the body. They denied the existence of angels and spirits. They felt no need of a Divine providence, but relied on their own resources. Their opposition to Jesus was based mainly upon political grounds.

2. PHARISEES:

The Pharisees resisted foreign influence and were zealous for their traditions. They were a religious party, whose fundamental principle was complete separation from everything non-Jewish.

The characteristics of the Pharisees may be stated thus:

- a. Their scrupulous observance of the Law;
- b. Belief in the immortality of the soul, in the resurrection of the body, and future rewards and punishments;
- c. Messianic expectations, which included the literal reign of God upon earth;
- d. Belief in angels and spirits;
- e. Belief in Divine Providence but along with this the freedom of man's will;
- f. Separation of themselves from the mass of the people;
- g. Patriotism of a religious nature, their ideal being the Kingdom of David.

The Pharisees opposed Jesus on religious grounds.

3. HERODIANS:

The Herodians were supporters of the government of the Herods, holding that a foreign governor was a better guarantee for protection of life and property. They were like the Pharisees in belief.

4. ZEALOTS:

The Zealots were also like the Pharisees in belief but insisted on war against Rome. Various revolts promoted by them were unsuccessful and they were severely punished. The spirit nurtured by this party broke out in the war against the Romans which terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

D. THE MESSIANIC HOPE:

The Jews were a people intensely national in spirit. They were accustomed to looking back upon their history with its evidences of divine intervention and guidance. For centuries they had been buffeted and oppressed. The Exile had left its permanent impress. The years after the return had led to alternate hope and despair. The Messianic Hope mainly expressed their hope for the future. There were two main elements in this Hope which were 1) The Kingdom of God, and 2) The Messiah.

Israel's prophets had foretold from the beginning the coming of a Messiah who would bring in a new day. The Kingdom of God meant for them the Kingship of God. His reign rather than His realm, an era when God would re-establish the Jewish kingdom and destroy their foreign conquerors. With this hope co-existed the view that this kingdom would be established in most concrete form upon earth with a king who was to be a descendant of the Davidic line.

E. THE SYNAGOGUE:

The word "synagogue" meant in the original "assembly" or "congregation." The synagogue originated during the exile in Babylon, when the Jews would congregate on the banks of streams to read the law and pray. They prayed facing Jerusalem with arms outstretched. The synagogue had no particular size or structure except it was longer than its width. It was built beside a running stream or on the highest hill in or near the town. The end, which contained the law, always faced Jerusalem. The entrance was always in the end farthest from Jerusalem, so as they entered they faced Jerusalem.

The officers of the synagogue were:

1. Elders of the Congregation;
2. Ruler of the synagogue - the presiding rabbi;
3. Reader - no set person;
4. Receivers and Distributors of Alms;
5. Minister - the one who looked after the law and furniture;
6. Men of Leisure - consisted of ten men who did not work but were appointed in order that the meeting could go on.

The order of the service was generally:

1. Began when ten were present;
2. Recitation of the "shema" (Deuteronomy 6:3-9 & 11:13-21, Numbers 15:37);
3. Pray responsively, standing facing Jerusalem;
4. Reading of Scriptures: a) Law read every three years; b) Prescribed portion every Sabbath; c) Other portions of Scripture could be read;
5. Sermon by a member of congregation, seated;
6. Blessing pronounced by the rabbi, the congregation responds.

The hours of prayer were the third, sixth and ninth hours. There were synagogues scattered all through Palestine at the time of Jesus.

LESSON FOUR

SELF HELP TEST

Fill in the blanks with the correct word:

1. The _____ were supporters of the government of the Herods.
2. The synagogue originated during the exile in _____.
3. The _____ believed in the resurrection of the body.
4. _____ was the son of Herod the Great.
5. The Roman procurators lived at _____.
6. The _____ expressed the hope of the Jews.
7. _____ was the wife of Herod the Great.
8. _____ built a new temple for the Jews.
9. The _____ were mainly interested in politics.
10. The Pharisees opposed Jesus on _____ grounds.

Use the following words to fill in the above blanks:

Caesarea
Antipas
Babylon
Mariamne

Herod
Sadducees
Herodians

Messianic Hope
Pharisees
religious