

The Grecian Empire

333 to 146 BC

In 333 BC, three years after being appointed Supreme Commander of the Hellenic Alliance of Greek city-states, Alexander II of Macedon defeated Persian King Darius III at the Battle of Arbela. Alexander the Great first defeated the once powerful Persian army on the plains of Lydia (modern Turkey). The world's sovereignty transferred from Asia to Europe. Greece moved east like Persia moved west 150 years earlier.

A new and important chapter in the history of the world now opened. Alexander would ten years later (323 BC), shortly after his world conquests were completed but before they could be organized and assimilated as Greek kingdoms. The four kingdoms into which his empire divided after his death were all under Greek generals/kings, and they were all Greek in language and civilization. To understand the "*Time Between the Testaments*," it is crucial to know this time period when the Greeks ruled the world. It seems God providentially prepared the nations for the coming of the Messiah. Through Alexander's conquest and the commonality of Greek language, customs, and trade, the Good News of Jesus spread quickly.

I. The Reign of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC).

The Grecian Empire doesn't begin until the Persian Empire is defeated by the Greeks in 333 BC. Alexander is born in July 356 and becomes Supreme Commander of the Hellenic Alliance of Greek states in 336 BC at the age of 20 (see **Appendix 5** for an examination of Alexander's life).

The Assyrian Empire is the world's first empire (911 BC to 609 BC)

The Babylonian Empire defeated the Assyrians (609 BC to 539 BC)

The Persian Empire defeated the Babylonians (539 BC to 333 BC)

The Roman Republic defeated the Grecian Empire (146 BC to AD 476).

II. The Four-part Division of Alexander's Empire (323-311 BC).

Soon after Alexander the Great died, his generals rushed to claim his vast empire. The land was claimed by four generals and separated into four different regions:

- 1). The Antigonid Empire ruled by Antigonus took over Greece and Macedon, where they ruled strongly until the Romans invaded
- 2). **The Seleucid Empire** (*northern kingdom*) was the largest of the four divisions in terms of covering most of the old Persian Empire and now ruled by General Seleucia.
- 3). **The Ptolemaic Dynasty** (*southern kingdom*) located on the coast of Africa (Egypt).
- 4). The Lysichamus Empire which consisted mostly of modern day Turkey.

The Antigonid and Lysichamus Empires didn't last long. Through later wars, they were absorbed into the two most powerful divisions of the Greek Empire (Seleucids/Ptolemies).

You'll never understand Daniel 11 until you know the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom in that chapter refers to the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. In addition, the books of I and II Maccabees, part of the intertestamental Jewish books called The Apocrypha, recount the Jews and their subservience to, alliance with, or revolts from the Seleucids and Ptolemies.

III. The Egyptian Ptolemaic Supremacy Over Judea (311-198 BC).

In the division of Alexander's conquests Judea was annexed to Syria but it soon fell into the hands of Egypt and was governed by the Ptolemies, Greek kings of Egypt until BC 198. The only important events of this period were the rule of Simon the Just, an exceptionally able high priest about BC 300 and the translation of the Old Testament into the Greek language for the use of the Jews of Alexandria who had lost the use of Hebrew or Chaldee. This translation was made about BC 286 according to Jewish tradition and is known as the Septuagint version.

IV. The Syrian Seleucid Supremacy Over Judea (198-167 BC).

About the year BC 198 Judea fell into the hands of the Syrian kingdom also ruled by a Greek dynasty the Seleucids or descendants of Seleucus. This change of rulers brought to the Jews a change of treatment. Hitherto they had been permitted to live undisturbed upon their mountains and to enjoy a measure of liberty both in civil and ecclesiastical matters. But now the Syrian Seleucid kings not only robbed them of their freedom but also undertook to compel them to renounce their religion by one of the most cruel persecutions in all history. The temple was desecrated and left to ruin and the worshipers of Jehovah were tortured and slain in the vain endeavor to introduce the Greek and Syrian forms of idolatry among the Jews (Heb 11:33-40). When Antiochus the Syrian king found that the Jews could not be driven from their faith he deliberately determined to exterminate the whole nation. Uncounted thousands of Jews were slaughtered other thousands were sold as slaves. Jerusalem was almost destroyed, and the Temple was dedicated to Jupiter Olympus and the orgies of the Bacchanalia were substituted for the Feast of Tabernacles. The religion of Jehovah and the race of the Jews seemed on the verge of utter annihilation in their own land.

V. The Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BC).

In preparation for next week's lesson, I would encourage you to read I and II Maccabees. Our entire lesson next week (Lesson 6) will cover this revolt of the Jews against the wicked rule of Antiochus Epiphanes over the Jews, and what they did to throw off the Seleucid yoke of oppression. Since they were unable to celebrate the holiday of Sukkot at its proper time in early autumn, the victorious Maccabees decided that Sukkot should be celebrated once they rededicated the Temple, which they did on the 25th of the month of Kislev in the year 164 B.C.E. Since Sukkot lasts seven days, this became the timeframe adopted for Hanukkah.

VI. Continued Wars Between the Rome and Greece (160-146 BC)

The Macedonian Wars (214–148 BC) were a series of conflicts fought by the Roman Republic and its Greek allies in the eastern Mediterranean against several different major Greek kingdoms. They resulted in Roman control or influence over the eastern Mediterranean basin, in addition to their hegemony in the western Mediterranean after the Punic Wars with Carthage. The Roman Republic considered Greece and Carthage enemies, and the wars fought eventually led to the Romans obliterating the city of Carthage (146 BC) and the city of Corinth (146 BC). One hundred years later, Julius Caesar would be assassinated (March 15, 44 BC) and the Republic of Rome would come to an end. The first person to take the title "Emperor of Rome" (Augustus) would be Octavius, nephew of Caesar, who took the name "Augustus Caesar" in 27 BC and ruled the Empire when Jesus was born.

VII. The Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt Became a Roman Province (146 – 30 BC).

Greeks were crushed by the Romans at Corinth, but the beautiful, suave, and intelligent nobles of Egypt continued as a Roman province. The last Greek ruling Egypt was Cleopatra (Lesson 10).