

## Ancient Israelite Timeline

It is difficult for an island nation to appreciate the fear of a small nation caught in the crossfire of competing groups. The Bible's most frequent divine message is 'Do not be afraid' because existential threats have often appeared in Israel's history.

*Pre-3397* The Flood. The sense of a global civilisation having been lost is also conveyed by the expulsion from Eden ('delight') and by the destruction of the 'Tower of Babel', a ziggurat or stepped pyramid of the kind found in Mexico, Alaska (under permafrost) and Crimea.

*1628* Thera (a Greek volcanic island) explodes sucking Red Sea dry before sending a tsunami and darkening the sky with iron oxides which turn rivers red, confuse wildlife, and affect crops with mould which kills the firstborn child who was given a double portion of cereal. These natural events were inexplicable but remembered and incorporated in the retelling of the exodus. *1*

*260* Latest possible date of exodus if '40 years in the wilderness' is literal.

*1240* Latest possible date of exodus if '40 years in the wilderness' symbolises one generation.

*1220* Israelites in Canaan (evidence in Egyptian inscription on the Merneptah stele).

*1020-1000* Saul reigns. *1000-960* David reigns and defeats Philistines ('Philistine' = 'Palestine', partly explaining Israeli attitudes towards Palestinians: EXISTENTIAL THREAT).

*960-931* Solomon reigns and builds the Temple. *931* Northern anger at Rehoboam's tax policy enables Jeroboam to be northern king. *722* Assyria destroys northern kingdom.

*701* Assyria raids Judah but spares Jerusalem to defend Assyria from other raiders, giving Hezekiah time to ban Assyrian idols and close even orthodox shrines so the Temple is the only place to worship Yahweh legally. Hezekiah welcomes defeated northerners, even naming his son after a northern tribe: Manasseh. Manasseh then allows Hezekiah's reforms to slide by seeking alliances with Assyria politically and religiously. So does Manasseh's son Amon. Things change with Amon's son Josiah, the boy king. (The English Edward VI, 1547-1553, will be presented as another boy king reformer.)

*622* Josiah begins major reform when part of Deuteronomy is found in the Temple.

*597* First deportation to Babylon (EXISTENTIAL THREAT).

*586* Second deportation and destruction of the Temple.

*582* Third deportation. By this time Jeremiah has been taken by his friends against his will to Egypt where it is safer and where he dies naturally.

*539* Cyrus the Persian is welcomed into Babylon, frees the Jews (in exchange for tax), and so is the closest thing to a messiah in the history of Judaism. On the other hand, the anti-semitic plot by later Persians in the book of Esther is partly why Israel remains wary of Iran (EXISTENTIAL THREAT). (Esther is the only Hebrew book excluded from the Dead Sea Scrolls because its vision of Jews succeeding through gentile governments is at odds with the vision of Jewish

ethnic purity held by 'monastic' Jews. The purity model of Judaism ironically depends on the patronage of other Jews engaging with gentiles. Without this, the isolated community that compiled the Dead Sea Scrolls died out. The engagement model appealed to the medieval East European kingdom of Khazaria which partly converted to Judaism when forced by Christian Russia and other neighbouring kingdoms to convert to Judaism, Christianity or Islam in the hope of ending some Khazarians' murderous behaviour. The killing of over 100 million in the Russian revolution, the Russian civil war and the Soviet purges has been seen as revenge orchestrated by some Khazarian descendants in Washington and Wall Street for this forced conversion. The engagement model can attract support from many co-religionists after millions of them have been killed by a common enemy, such as Hitler. The survival that is sought through the engagement model, beginning with Joseph at the court of Pharaoh, can be selective. A model that depends on manipulation is easily manipulated by those who feel entitled to sacrifice anyone.)

515 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple completed by Zerubbabel (governor of Judah and great grandson of Josiah).

445 Nehemiah becomes governor of Judah and quickly rebuilds Jerusalem's wall. Around this time, Ezra (priest and scribe) promotes biblical teaching in Jerusalem and prohibits Jews marrying non-Jews (gentiles) in the hope that ethnic purity will help prevent another catastrophe like the Babylonian exile. Ezra's version of Judaism remains a reference point for all Jews, so gentiles=EXISTENTIAL THREAT. 332 Alexander the Great brings Greek rule and culture to the Middle East. His successors based in Egypt (Ptolomies) bring some Jews to develop Alexandria and to create the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

223 Greeks based in Syria (Seleucids) take over Judah from the Ptolomies.

167 Antiochus IV 'Epiphanes' desecrates the Temple by introducing pigs to be slaughtered in front of his statue of Zeus ('the Awful Horror' - Daniel 11:31 ).

164 Three years to the day, the Temple is rededicated (still celebrated as Hanukkah in mid-December) after Antiochus dies suddenly from an illness while failing to contain the Maccabean revolutionaries. Before this resolution, the book of Daniel is completed by ultra-orthodox Hassidim (devotees) but written in code (apocalyptic) to avoid persecution since it parodies Greek rule, just as Revelation will parody Roman rule.

63 A Roman general, Pompey, conquers Jerusalem.

37 Before naming himself Augustus, Caesar installs the Herodian royal family and demotes Judah (previously recognised by the Roman Senate as a nation) to be part of a larger Roman province (Judea).

#### The Jewish Factions at the Time of Jesus' Birth (6-4 BCE Before Common Era)

Some Hassidim become conservative teachers (Pharisees). Other Hassidim (Essenes) despair of Greek influence on Jerusalem and live in insular communities around Judah. (The community at Qumran wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls.) Aristocrats who tolerate Greek ideas become Sadducees (named after Zadok, David's chief priest, and Zadok, a later chief priest during the relatively gentle Ptolomaic era when Greek culture was first introduced to Jerusalem.) Some aristocrats who resent foreigners in Jerusalem eventually become Zealots, fanatics en-

gaging in terrorism. Aristocrats operate at the royal court of the Hasmonean family, descended from the Maccabees ('the hammers'), and then of the Herodian family installed by Caesar beginning with Herod the Great, so called because he greatly improves Zerubbabel's rudimentary Temple. A painful illness then induces his murderous paranoia before his death in 4 BCE.

### Recommended reading

Required reading for the Old Testament module is Christine Hayes' *Introduction to the Bible* from Yale University Press, 2012. Michael Satlow's *How the Bible Became Holy* is fast-paced and essential reading for anyone who wants to understand what the Bible is. A unique achievement. Barry Beitzel's *Biblica: The Bible Atlas* is the best Bible reference book. Some distributors include an unnecessary CD-ROM which increases the already hefty price of this beautiful book. Cheaper and shorter than this is John Drane's *Introducing the Old Testament*. To understand the Old Testament story, start here. (His *Introducing the New Testament* is disappointing by comparison.) John J. Collins has written a more detailed textbook: *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. As detail is its strength, the abridged version (*A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*) lacks this advantage. The best book dedicated to studying the New Testament is *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings* by Warren Carter and Amy-Jill Levine. This is required reading for the New Testament module. Almost as impressive is the best British book on New Testament study: *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* edited by Paula Gooder. This covers more methods with worked examples using New Testament passages but the methods are identical to those used in Old Testament study, making this worth obtaining early. The best single-volume commentary on the Bible is *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* edited by Dunn and Rogerson.

Timothy Pownall-Jones  
Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham  
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