

A Brief History of Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities in the world and it was already extremely old when Jesus and the Apostles walked its streets. Some historians believe the location has been inhabited since 3,500 B.C.

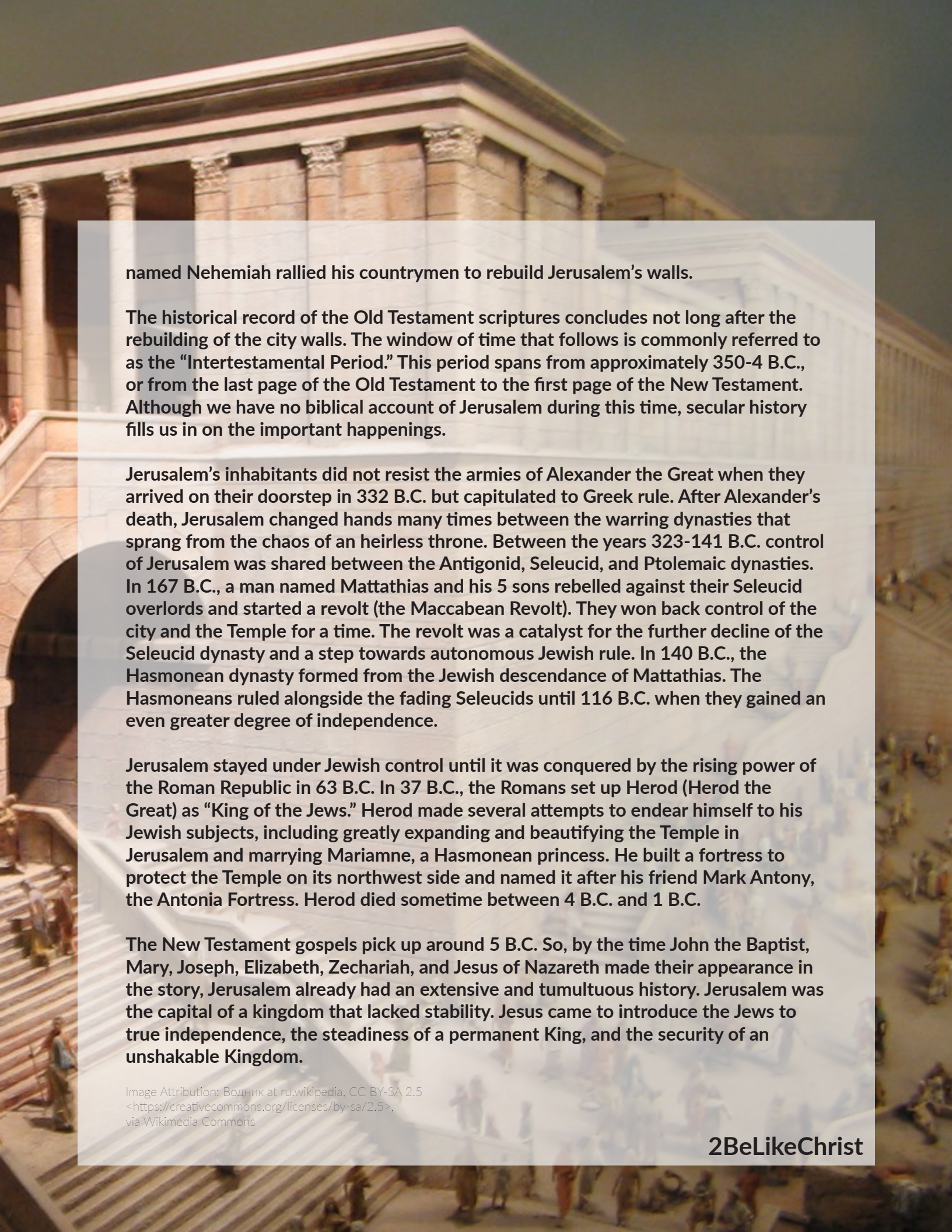
The first clear reference to Jerusalem in the Bible is found in Joshua 10:1. Joshua and the Israelites had just begun their conquest of Canaan when Jerusalem's king, Adoni-zedek, gathered 5 kingdoms to oppose their advance. The Lord gave the Israelites victory over Adoni-zedek and the city was given to the tribe of Benjamin as part of their inheritance. Jerusalem was also known by the name Jebus, because it was the home of the Jebusites. The Israelites were told by God to drive out all the inhabitants of Jebus, but the men of Judah and Benjamin failed, choosing instead to live in Jerusalem alongside those they were supposed to oppose (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21).

Jerusalem wouldn't be completely conquered until almost 500 years later, when King David fought against it in approximately 1,000 B.C. His army took possession of the stronghold of Zion (Zion was the southernmost hill on which Jerusalem was built) and he made his home in the city. For this reason, Jerusalem is often called the City of David.

David's son Solomon built a temple in Jerusalem to replace the tent (tabernacle) that housed the holy items of Israel, including the Ark of the Covenant. This made Jerusalem both a political and religious centerpiece for the people of Israel. Unfortunately, the kingdom divided when Solomon's son took the throne and Jerusalem's status as the capital was only honored by those living in the southern half of the nation.

About 200 years later, the Assyrian Empire conquered the northern half of the nation and attempted to besiege Jerusalem (701 B.C.), but their army was turned back by an angel of the Lord (1 Kings 19:35). Jerusalem remained secure through the following century until the Babylonians destroyed the city and the Temple in 587-586 B.C. The people of Judah (the southern half of the kingdom) were taken captive and sent to Babylon, where they would remain confined for several decades.

Between 539-538 B.C. the Persians defeated the Babylonians and replaced them as world leaders. Cyrus, king of the Persians, released the people of Judah to return to their homeland and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Houses were built and the construction of a new Temple was completed around 516 B.C. The city continued in a state of renovation for many decades, and it wasn't until 445 B.C. that a man



named Nehemiah rallied his countrymen to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

The historical record of the Old Testament scriptures concludes not long after the rebuilding of the city walls. The window of time that follows is commonly referred to as the "Intertestamental Period." This period spans from approximately 350-4 B.C., or from the last page of the Old Testament to the first page of the New Testament. Although we have no biblical account of Jerusalem during this time, secular history fills us in on the important happenings.

Jerusalem's inhabitants did not resist the armies of Alexander the Great when they arrived on their doorstep in 332 B.C. but capitulated to Greek rule. After Alexander's death, Jerusalem changed hands many times between the warring dynasties that sprang from the chaos of an heirless throne. Between the years 323-141 B.C. control of Jerusalem was shared between the Antigonid, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic dynasties. In 167 B.C., a man named Mattathias and his 5 sons rebelled against their Seleucid overlords and started a revolt (the Maccabean Revolt). They won back control of the city and the Temple for a time. The revolt was a catalyst for the further decline of the Seleucid dynasty and a step towards autonomous Jewish rule. In 140 B.C., the Hasmonean dynasty formed from the Jewish descendance of Mattathias. The Hasmoneans ruled alongside the fading Seleucids until 116 B.C. when they gained an even greater degree of independence.

Jerusalem stayed under Jewish control until it was conquered by the rising power of the Roman Republic in 63 B.C. In 37 B.C., the Romans set up Herod (Herod the Great) as "King of the Jews." Herod made several attempts to endear himself to his Jewish subjects, including greatly expanding and beautifying the Temple in Jerusalem and marrying Mariamne, a Hasmonean princess. He built a fortress to protect the Temple on its northwest side and named it after his friend Mark Antony, the Antonia Fortress. Herod died sometime between 4 B.C. and 1 B.C.

The New Testament gospels pick up around 5 B.C. So, by the time John the Baptist, Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Jesus of Nazareth made their appearance in the story, Jerusalem already had an extensive and tumultuous history. Jerusalem was the capital of a kingdom that lacked stability. Jesus came to introduce the Jews to true independence, the steadiness of a permanent King, and the security of an unshakable Kingdom.

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