***Life in Israel at the time of Christ***

*Peter Reid*

***The Inter-testamental Period***

***The Remnant***

***Between Malachi and Matthew 6 different foreign powers had governed in Israel.*** *But more than that, they had left their mark and Judaism had come into being. There was never an “ism” attached to God’s chosen people; Jews were now associated with Judaism. In the mean time, the following parties had come into being: Sadducees, Pharisees and Herodians.* ***The following institutions had come into being: the Sanhedrin, Synagogue, and the Mishna (traditions of the elders).*** *It was a time which included great political, financial and cultural turmoil. We would say today that there was oppression, terrorism and a secularization of society in general.*

***It is very interesting that Jesus said very little about the current issues of the day.* “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (Jn. 18:36) *He said that His kingdom was like seed (Mat. 13:31-33) and leaven (Lk. 17:20-21)***

*The world now was ruled by Rome and not Babylon. The rulers in Jerusalem was the corrupt Asmonean family with Herod the Great at the head and not Ezra or Nehemiah. The Greek language had replaced Hebrew and by the time Jesus arrives the OT had been gathered and translated by Jews (beginning with the Pentateuch in 285 BC and the rest in stages following) in Alexandria into Greek. (The Septuagint) Hence the scriptures were more widely circulated among Jews and Gentiles alike.*

*The one thing that becomes apparent in Israel after they returned to the land after being exiled in Babylon by the Persian ruler, Cyrus, (there were only about 60,000 in total that returned under Ezra and Nehemiah; the most prosperous millions remaining in the then Persian Empire and elsewhere in the Jewish dispersion, many in north Africa and Egpyt is that they had been cured of idolatry.*

*The vast majority of Jews never returned back to the Holy Land from exile. Why should they? Many who did return were very old.* ***(Ezra 3:12)*** *It had been 70 years and the majority who were invited to go had never been there! Furthermore, their lives were quite comfortable where they were. For those who did go back, they found no king, no temple, no wealth, no independence, no support.*

***So what did they have? The prophesies concerning a Messiah! It was the hope of a Messiah based on their sacred scriptures that was their anchor.*** *There was a zeal for the scriptures that they had formerly neglected and their witness of a coming Messiah that permeated their thinking. God had proven Himself in His word and they took it very seriously.* ***(Jn. 5:39)***

*When Ezra returned some 80 years after the first 50,000 arrived under Zerubbabel and Joshua with another 2,000, there was a certain amount of apathy among the people of God because the older ones who would have provided the motivation to return in the first group had now died off. Ezra led a series of reforms that went deep into the lives of the Jews. Marriages to Gentiles were desolved.* ***(Ezra 9-10)*** *The law was recovered and adopted as the State constitution and was considered authoritative for daily life.* ***(Neh. 8-10)*** *There were 3 prophets that preached to the Jews of the post-exile period: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.*

***Spiritual background of Israel***

*During the whole history of the nation, theirs had been one long and devastating relationship with idols. Think of the following examples:*

* *Aaron made the calf at Sinai*
* *In Canaan they quickly went after the Ashtaroth of the Phoenicians*
* *Solomon led the nation into the brutal worship of Milcom, Chemosh and Molech*
* *Jerboam sets up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel (the house of God)!*
* *Ahab marries Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, the center of Baal worship*
* *During the reigns of Manasseh, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah Jeremiah laments, “According to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah”*
* *After the re-settlement of Samaria, the half-Jews revise the OT and replace the word “Moriah” with Gerazhim and make Shechem the center or worship with its own priesthood.*

*Babylon was an idolatrous environment itself, so what brought about the deep change in Israel’s turn from idolatry during this period of Exile? Because when they return to Israel, they were purified of this sin. There is no mention of the sin among the Jews in the gospel accounts. There were several factors that God used to bring them back to Himself:*

* *The OT prophesies concerning their captivity and the miraculous release through Cyrus. The prophesies were so exact, coming over 200 years before their fulfillment that this provided a powerful witness to the trustworthiness of God.*
* *The exaltation of Daniel in the Babylonia Empire itself. He was second only to the king. There would have been many Jews who knew of the plight of Daniel as he exhibited supernatural wisdom and was also rescued from the lions by the Living God.*
* *The memory of the kind dealings of God in the past and the pain of missing Him.* ***See Ps. 137*** *There was a godly sorrow worked into them that brought about repentance.* ***(2Cor. 7:8-10)***

***Judaism by the time of Jesus*** *(Explore the Book, pgs. 78-85)*

***The Traditions of the Elders (The Talmud)***

***In order to protect the scriptures that Ezra so clearly brought back to national and personal use, the leading Jews thought it best to create a “fence” around the Jewish scriptures to make sure that it was obeyed and revered on all points. To trespass the fence was to transgress the word.*** *It was like saying that someone has broken into Bodenseehof when they break through the hedge around our property.*

***This fence was made up of oral traditions which became known as the Mishna and was very much in place by the time of Christ. This commentary on the OT scriptures that provided supplemental comments and interpretations was known as the Midrashim.*** *It was made up of the Halachoth (dealing with civil, legal issues arising out of the Pentateuch.) and the Haggadoth (dealing with moral, daily issues arising from the OT as a whole)* ***In about 90 AD the Gemara, a commentary on the Mishna, was added to these traditions (done from about 200-500 AD) of the elders and when both were combined and written at the end of the 5th century AD, together they became known as the Talmud.*** *(There was actually two Talmuds, one in originating in Jerusalem and one in Babylon; for after 70 AD there were more non-Hellenised Jews in the area of Babylonia than elsewhere. Hence it was fitting that they studied the Mishna and made their comments on it.*

***The center of rabbinical schooling shifted from Jerusalem to Babylonia after 70 AD) The Talmud remains today the authoritative encyclopedia of Judaism.*** *Orthodox Jewish scribes in the day of Christ believed that in addition to the Law of Moses given on Sinai, God had passed on proper interpretations of those laws by word of mouth (Ex. 33:11) and that this oral tradition had been successfully transmitted through the centuries up to the time of Christ. To write the oral traditions down was considered a moral offense; hence it was not done until after the country was dispersed in 70 AD.*

***The Mishna itself reads this way regarding the origin of the oral traditions, “Moses received the oral law from Sinai, and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue.”*** *The Great Synagogue mentioned here is a group of 120 men who formed the leading Rabbinical school among the Jews. These were to have been the last to have received the oral traditions and were responsible for dispensing them in their judgements, to the people. Edersheim says that this college may have come into being when Nehemiah returned the second time to Jerusalem and faced the utter chaos left in his absence. We have no way of knowing if this is true, or if the Great Synagogue ever really existed.*

*To quote Edersheim on the weight of the Talmud on the Jewish culture he says, “The miraculous merges into the ridiculous and even the revolting. Miraculous cures, miraculous supplies, miraculous help, all for the glory of great Rabbis, who by a look or a word can kill or restore life. At their bidding the eyes of a rival fall out, and are again inserted. Nay, such was the veneration due to rabbis, that R. Joshua used to kiss the stone on which R. Elieser sat and lectured, saying, ‘This stone is like Mount Sinai, and he who sat on it is like the Ark.’”*

***It is important to note that in the day of Christ, the Mishna was still an oral tradition and was gradually beginning to be committed to writing. It’s not always easy to distinguish Christ’s reference to it, but there are some helps. In the sermon on the mount Jesus says, “You have heard it said…” 6 times in Matt. 5 and referred to the Mishna when He did. Also see Matt. 15:1-9; 23:16-18,23. Whenever you see Jesus saying, “You have heard it said…your traditions…your law” He is referring to the Mishna, these oral traditions of the Jews which made up the fence around Moses. When He refers to Moses and the scriptures, He most often says, “It is written…”***

*The fault to which the Jews elevated tradition over revelation and the word of God over the God of the word is addressed in* ***Jn. 5:39-40; Lk. 24:25-27; 24:44-45.*** *It is one thing to know a book, but quite another to know the author who wrote it. We need to go to the bible to meet a Person and not just to gain information. The goal of the written word is to have an encounter with the Living Word. We don’t go to get a fat head, but rather to get a full heart. If you address it with the right heart, trusting in the author to teach you, you will meet Jesus.*

***The good thing about the Jews treatment of the word of God was that they brought a very healthy reverence back to God’s revelation in this world. They put the church to shame on this point. At the altar in a Jewish synagogue you will see a very ornate cabinet in which is located a scroll of the Torah. By the time a Jewish boy is 12 years old, he had memorized the Pentateuch. For at age 13, at his Barmitzva, he would be questioned on it’s content, like an exam. The word Barmitzva means, “Son of the commandment or covenant”***

***The Synagogue***

*You never see a synagogue mentioned in the OT. They were not in existence at that time. When you read the gospels, they’re everywhere. Even in the book of Acts we find them scattered throughout the Roman world. It was in the synagogues that Jesus often preached, as He had spent the first 3 decades of His life attending the one in Nazareth. When the authors of the NT epistles gave revelation on church offices, the terms used, “Elders”, “Bishops”, “Deacons” are used and were adopted from the offices of the Synagogue. The word “Priest” is not used as an office in the church, for that one is used of Christ and exceptionally used of believers as a whole.*

***The synagogue originated during the period of exile in Babylon.*** *They had no temple, so the synagogue was built as a place of learning and worship away from home.* ***The language spoke in Babylon was Aramaic and the Jews did not want to lose their grasp of Hebrew, the language of the OT.******(See Neh. 8:8)*** *It was revered as the place where the Jews clung to the scriptures that were revealed to them and was the birth place of Judaism that returned to Israel when the remnant returned to the land. It had been in place for about 500 years before Christ and had spread throughout the Roman Empire.*

***It was in the synagogue that Jesus and His disciples preached from the same scriptures that the Jews of their day so revered.*** *But the message was completely different!* ***(Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Lk. 4:15, 44; Acts 8:5,15; 14:1; 17:10; 18:19)*** *It was common practice to invite guests to read from the scriptures and expound them, much the way the Brethren churches would today. There were rulers in the local synagogues* ***(Mk. 5:22; Acts 8:15)*** *as well as “chazzan” who acted as attendants at the services which took place there.* ***(Lk. 4:20)*** *There needed to be 10 men in a community in order to establish and build a synagogue.* ***The best place to work a resurrection is in a grave. A dead institution is a great place for a revival. It was in this setting that Jesus often taught and healed.***

***Working from the lunar calendar, the Jews divided up the year into 50 weeks. They divided up the scriptures into 50 parts to match those weeks and they were read in a specific order. This way, they read through the bible in a year.***

***The Scribes***

***These were professional experts in the interpretation and application of the OT scriptures.*** *Their name in Hebrew was, “Sopherim” (plural) coming from the word, “Saphar” which means, “to write, set in order or account”.* ***They are known as “scribes” or “lawyers” or “rulers” in the NT. (Lk. 7:30)*** *Back in 2Chron. 17:7-9 king Jehoshaphat sent priests and Levites into the countryside to teach the people the law of God.* ***The scribes were a group that established themselves in exile when the synagogues came into being. They were not just scribes, but the scribes who administered the scriptures to the nation. What they believed the people were to believe. (Jn. 7:48-49)*** *Jesus’ authenticity rebuked and exposed them (Matt. 7:9; Mk. 1:22) and He severely chastised them in Matt. 23.*

***Because of the silence of God between Malachi and John the Baptist, the scribes arose in this void to study and apply the scriptures in this dark period. When the prophetic voice of God ceased, the written word of God took on new value. The scribes would have traced their authority to Ezra who was also called a scribe. (Ezra 7:6,11,21; Neh. 8:1-8) But they went astray in this office:***

***“Step by step the scribes were led to conclusions at which… the earlier representatives of the order would have started back in horror. Decisions on fresh questions were accumulated into a complex system of (false philosophy). The new precepts, still transmitted orally, more precisely fitting into circumstances of men’s lives than the old, came practically to take their place. The right relation between moral and ceremonial law was not only forgotten but absolutely inverted” Dr. William Milligan***

*It would be incorrect to say that the scriptures had become an idol, it was their interpretations and the resulting traditions that became the idol.* ***(See Matt. 7:28-29; Mk. 7:7-8)*** *Although the scribes are often mentioned in connection with the Pharisees, not all scribes were Pharisees. But most Pharisees were scribes. The title of the scribe refers to scholastic pursuit while the title Pharisee refers to religious convictions based upon those pursuits.* ***(1Cor. 3:1-6; 4:19-20)***

***The Pharisees (Conservative, Legalists)***

***The sect of the Pharisees has its roots back in the time of Ezra when a national reform was commenced some 80 years after the return of the first 50,000 Jews from Babylon. Ezra called for a national repentance which included the dissolving of all mixed marriages and a signed covenant acknowledging the scriptures as authoritative in civil and private matters. It was a call to separate themselves from the ungodly influences that had become mixed into Judaism. The name Pharisee means, “Separatist”.***

***The High Priest gained much power at this time as well because there was no king in Israel. The office of the High Priest was an inherited right to represent the nation before God. The Persian government left the High Priest responsible for civil affairs, including levying a tribute to Persia from the Jewish remnant who owed their return to Cyrus. Hence the office became coveted and its operation filled with greed and intrigue. The office became filled with compromise financially, politically and of course spiritually.***

***It was in this environment that scribes rose up in rebuke of the secularization of the office of the High Priest and made repeated calls to become separate from the worldly influences that were imbedded in this office. There around out of this tension the parties of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.***

*It was during the revolts of the Maccabees that the famous High Priest, John Hyrcanus arose to such power that he was able to recover much of the original territory allotted by God to the nation of Israel. No king held so much territorial power in Israel since Solomon ruled over the united kingdom. This family held power from 165-135 BC and their influence extended all the way to 63 BC when Israel was conquered by Rome. This family dynasty became known as the Asmonean Dynasty. It was during this period that the Pharisees are first mentioned as an influence in national Judaism.*

*The Pharisees are the spiritual successors of the Chasidim, or “Pious Ones”, who had banded together 30 to 40 years previously into a secret league in order to preserve the Jewish faith during a time of increasing compromise. The Pharisees were most likely named so by their enemies who had a more pragmatic view of Judaism in light of the political turmoil of this time. They held to an extreme adherence to the law and were seen as proud and impractical.*

***The Pharisees despised the laity among the population and considered them godless. They were notoriously greedy and were in the minority in the Sanhedrin.*** *They kept alive the Messianic hope and believed in the future resurrection. It was these beliefs that fanned their inner hope for they were such a small group. Josephus says that there were about 6,000 in the day of Christ; a small minority with a large influence.*

***The two greatest scribes among the Pharisees, Hillel and Shammai, were at their peak of influence when Christ was born. It was because of this influence that the Pharisees enjoyed such respect in the day of Christ, even though the Sadducees were in the majority in the ruling body of the Sanhedrin.***

***By the time John wrote his gospel, the Pharisees claimed the control of the spiritual life of the nation. Jesus meets this head on in chs. 7-10 and ends with one of the greatest promises in the gospel in 10:27-30. The crowning sign sealed the outcome of the conflict. (11:47-53)***

***The Sadducees (Secular, Liberal)***

***The Sadducees arose at the same time and under the same conditions as the Pharisees. When the Asmonean Dynasty took control of the High Priests office, the rest of the priestly line sought to preserve their privileged place in Judaism by forming the party of the Sadducees. Their name comes from “Zodak”, the priestly line who held the office during the reign of David, hence their claim to greatness. (See 2Sam. 8:17ff) Ezekiel names the sons of Zodak as representatives of the whole priestly line. (Ezek. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11) Herod the Great greatly weakened the influence of the Sadducees’ in his day by murdering 45 of their number and revoking their right of inheritance of the office of the High Priest.***

***It was the idea that the priesthood represented both political and spiritual responsibilities during this time that motivated the formation of this party. They were not just priests, but assumed the role of king as well, during the oppression of the Jews by foreign powers. Mainly through the influence of Alexander the Great and his favor of the Jews, the Sadducees came under the influence of Greek culture. This was seen as worldly influence by the Pharisees and they would have accused the Sadducees of coming under ungodly influences. They were more of a social clique in their day. They were much smaller in number than the Pharisees, although had greater representation in the Sanhedrin. They were the aristocracy of the Jews. They were considered liberal by the Pharisees as they were heavily involved in the cultural, financial and political forces of the day in order to lead the Jewish nation. They were as jealous of Judaism as the Pharisees, but would achieve their ends through the means of the day.***

***Theirs was a religion of pragmatism, holding to that which helped maintain their political aims. They rejected the oral laws of the scribes and Pharisees and appealed only to the written law of Moses. They did not adhere to the supernatural intervention of the Living God, rejecting the resurrection, angels or demons. They were rationalists. (See Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8) The fanaticism of the Pharisees provoked the anger of the Sadducees and the skepticism of the Sadducees provoked the anger of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were other-worldly in their Messianic views and the Sadducees were worldly-minded in theirs. Both Anna and Caiaphas were Sadducees, as the office of the High Priest was controlled by their party. (Acts 5:17)***

***It was His claims to being the Messiah that incited the wrath of the Sadducees against Jesus (See Lk. 3:2; Jn. 9:49; 18:13,14,24; 19:15; Mk. 15:11) , as it was His disregard of their oral traditions that incited the wrath of the Pharisees. (Mat. 9:14-17; 12:1-8) Not all priests were Sadducees, for the parents of John the Baptist were of the priestly line and John himself was of this line. God took John out of this environment and prepared him in the desert Himself. (Lk. 1:5-6,80) One could say that John was closest in life-style to the spiritual and mystic Essenes, who lived a ascetic life in the deserts of Judea toward the Dead Sea. (They were escapists if anything) And a number of the priests did come to faith in Christ. (Acts 6:7)***

***The Herodians (Political Pragmatists)***

***We find the Herodians mentioned in the gospel accounts in Matt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6; 12:13. This was not a religious party like the Pharisees, but a purely political movement of individuals who sought the welfare and aims of the family of Herod, from whom they derive their name.***

***Herod the Great, who died in 4 BC, had given the rule of Palestine’s 5 districts to his 3 sons: To his eldest son, Archelaus (Mat. 2:22) he gave the districts of Judea and Samaria. (10 years after receiving this rule, Archelaus was deposed from this position because of misuse and Rome appointed a series of Procurators, or Governors, to this region. The 5th of these was Pontius Pilate, who was rule of Judea at the time of Christ.) To another son, Herod Antipas (Lk. 23:6-12), he gave the district of Galilee and Perea. (This man’s mother was Samarian and he was not of Jewish origin, so it is fitting that he ruled in Galilee of the Gentiles.) To a third son, Philip (Lk. 3:19-20), he gave the districts of Trachonitis. All 5 districts of Palestine belonged to the Roman province of Syria and the rulers were responsible to the Roman Emperor’s representative there. (Lk. 2:1-2)***

*Given the turmoil of the Jewish revolts under the Asmonaen Dynasity and the violence it brought to the country, many considered it best to back the family of Herod who enjoyed the favor of Rome and had brought visible prosperity to the country. After all, it was Herod the Great who re-built the Temple which was destroyed by Pompey.*

***Others detested this group, in particular the Pharisees. For the family of Herod was not purely Jewish; the grandmother of Herod the Great was from the area of Idumea and Arabian descent. Herod the Great was a brutal despot. He murdered 3 of his sons and the one wife he loved the most in acts of suspicious revenge. He had murdered all but two of the Sanhedrin in order to protect his power. He had built temples in honor of Caesar Augustus all over the territory he ruled. He even built a Roman theatre in Jerusalem, including the shows of the Gladiators, to the despair of God-fearing Jews. The hate of the Pharisees for this group must have been surpassed only by their hatred of Jesus, for the two groups conspired together to have Him crucified.***

*The Herodians were suspicious by nature and were always watching out for their own interests.* ***(Lk. 20:22; Matt. 22:16)***

***The Zealots (Terrorists)***

*Simon the Zealot was included in the list of the disciples in* ***Lk. 6:15.*** *This was a nationalist movement who believed in the use of military force to free the country from Gentile rule. They exercised gorilla warfare and took pride in death as it was given in their cause. It was this group that incited the wrath of Rome with led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD under the general Titus.*

*They, too, looked to the miraculous intervention of God on behalf of His people and this would come through the means of war by their hands. They would have been supporters of the revolts under the Maccabees. They embodied the fanaticism of the Pharisees, but with a nationalistic, military aim to carry out their convictions. The Pharisees would be counted as pious pacifists, while the Zealots were just the opposite. They are mentioned in* ***Acts 5:37*** *in connection with a revolt lead by Judas, one of their number. Their movement became increasingly characterized by disorganized terrorism. Barabbas was most likely a Zealot.* ***(Mk. 15:7)*** *This makes the call for his release at the trial of Jesus even more spectacular.*

***The party sent to John was intended to observe the intent of his ministry and gut it to an end if he had politically dangerous leanings. (1:19-28) But he merely quotes their own scriptures out of Isaiah. He goes on to say that he is merely a friend of the groom. (3:22-36, vs. 31-36 are most likely John the Apostles comments)***

***In summary: the Pharisees are the ritualists (always adding to); the Sadducees are the rationalists (always taking from); the Herodians are the secularists (always passing by); the Zealots are the terrorists (always striking out). Christ warns us of the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Herodians. (Matt. 16:6,11; Mk. 8:15; Lk. 12:1)***

***The Sanhedrin***

***The Sanhedrin is referred to as the “council” and it’s members the “rulers” in the gospel accounts. (Matt. 26:59; Mk. 14:55; 15:1; Lk. 22:66; Jn. 11:47; Acts 4:15; 5:21,27,34,41; 6:12,15; 22:30; 23:1,6,15,20,28; 24:20) There was the local Sanhedrin (Mat. 5:22) and the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Lk. 22:66)***

***The origin goes back to Moses when he appointed 70 elders to bear the burden of ruling the new nation of Israel. (Numb. 11) Jewish historians say that Saul preserved it with Jonathan his son being the vice-president and that Ezra re-instituted it upon return to Israel after captivity.*** *But there is no reference to it in the history of the OT, nor in the inter-testimental literature. It appears to have come into being in the 3rd century before Christ and was certainly functional in the 2nd century before Christ. The members were known as “senators”. It was powerful enough to indict Herod the Great of wrong doing early into it’s reign, but seemed to have lost some power by the time Christ began His public ministry. It had most likely been operating for 300 years by then.*

*The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 members:* ***24 chief priests*** *who represented the 24 orders of the Levitical priesthood (1Chron. 24:1-6);* ***24 elders*** *who represented the laity in Israel (Matt. 21:23; 26:3; Acts 4:8; Rev. 4:4);* ***22 scribes*** *among whom were the Pharisees and Sadducees;* ***1 High Priest.*** *(See Mk. 14:55; Matt. 16:21; Lk. 23:13; Acts 3:17) There was a president, vice-president and “chakam”, or referee/clerk who laid all matters before the other rulers/senators.* ***It is interesting that Jesus chose 12 disciples who were named apostles (Lk. 6:13), but He also sent 70 out endowed with supernatural power ahead of Him in Lk. 10:1-24. He was most certainly appointing His own Sanhedrin with Himself as President.***

***Regarding membership in the Sanhedrin, these are the criteria:***

*“The applicant had to be morally and physically blameless. He had to be middle-aged, tall, good-looking, wealthy, learned both in the Divine Law and diverse branches of profane science such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy, magic, idolatry, etc., in order that he might be able to judge in these matters. He was required to know several languages, so that the Sanhedrin might not be dependent on an interpreter in case any foreigner or foreign question came before them. Very old persons, proselytes, eunuchs and Nethinim were ineligible because of their idiosyncrasies, nor could such candidates be elected as had no children, because they could not sympathize with domestic affairs, nor those who could not prove that they were legitimate offspring of a priest, Levite, or Israelite, who played dice, lent money on usury, flew pigeons to entice others, or dealt in produce of the Sabbatical year. In addition to all these qualifications, a candidate for the Great Sanhedrin was required, first of all, to have been a judge in his native town, to have been transferred from there to the small Sanhedrin which sat at the entrance of the temple hall before he could be received as a member of the 71.”* ***Dr. C.D. Ginsburg***

*The Great Sanhedrin was located in Jerusalem up to 70 AD and after the destruction of the city by the Roman general Titus, it was removed to the city of Tiberias, where it’s influence eventually died out about 425 AD.*

***The Common Man***

***Having said so much about the religious and political landscape of Israel a the time of Christ, we must remember that they represent a small, albeit powerful, minority. There were thousands of thousands of common people among whom God did His greatest works.*** *Among all the apostacy, violence and worldliness of the day, there were God-fearing Jews whose hearts were right toward Jehovah:*

*The parents of John the Baptist, Zacharias and Elizabeth*

*The parents of Jesus Christ, Joseph and Mary*

*Anna the widow*

*Simeon the aged*

*Nathanael the good hearted*

*Nicodemus the hungry hearted*

*Andrew and Peter, James and John, all disciples of John the Baptist*

*Lois and Eunice, Timothy’s grandmother and mother*

***It was people like you and I who are far detached from, and yet heavily influenced by, the power of the world that be among whom Jesus longs to do His work today.*** *We who are left behind want to benefit as much as possible from what God chose to do through this man’s life.* ***(Heb. 13:7-8)***

**Eusebius of Caesarea**: Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine (ca. 275 to 339AD). The father of church history.

***The record of Eusebius on the deaths of the first disciples of Jesus:***

***Matthew:*** *He died in Ethiopia, being put to death with the sword.*

***Mark:*** *He died in Alexandria, Egypt after being dragged through the streets by horses until he died.*

***Luke:*** *He was hanged in Greece because of the powerful effect his preaching was having on the lost.*

***John:*** *He is said to have been placed in a basin of boiling oil in Rome during a time of intense persecution, but miraculously lived through it. He was later sent into exile in prison on the island of Patmos where he worked in the mines. It was here that he received the visions upon which the book of Revelation is based. He was later released and became Bishop of Edessa (the church in Ephesus) where he lived a long life and died a natural death. At the end of his life that he wrote his gospel at the request of the church, being the last living apostle.*

***James (Brother of John):*** *He was a strong leader in the church in Jerusalem and was beheaded there. It is said that the Roman officer who guarded James watch amazed as James defended in his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, the Roman guard declared his new faith in Christ to the judge in charge of the execution and knelt beside James and accepted the same death.*

***James the Just:*** *He was also a strong leader in the church at Jerusalem. He was thrown over 100 feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the temple (the same place where Jesus was tempted by Satan) when he refused to deny Christ. When they discovered that he survived his fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club.*

***Bartholomew (Nathanael):*** *He was a missionary to Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. He was killed because of his preaching in the area of Armenia where he was flayed to death with a whip.*

***Andrew:*** *He was crucified in Patras, Greece. After being severely whipped by seven soldiers, he was tied to a cross with cords in order to prolong his agony till death.*

***Thomas:*** *He went as a missionary to India and was stabbed to death with a spear during one of his ministry trips.*

***Jude (Brother of Jesus):*** *He was killed with arrows when he refused to deny Christ.*

***Matthias:*** *This is the disciple chosen in Acts 1 to replace Judas. He was stoned and then beheaded.*

***Barnabas:*** *This was the first, and at that time only, disciple to extend kindness to Paul after Paul’s conversion. It is said that he was one of the 70 disciples that Christ sent out to preach in Lk. 10. He preached throughout Italy and Cyprus, being stoned to death in Saloncia.*

***Paul:*** *Paul was repeatedly tortured for his faith as he recounts in 2Cor. 11. He carried scars on his body for the rest of his life. (Gal. 6:17) He endured one imprisonment in Rome and then was released (Phil. 1:19-20; 2Tim. 4:16). He was later recaptured, tortured and beheaded under Nero (the Roman emperor who used Christians as torches to light up his garden when he entertained guests) in 67 AD. Nero himself died in the spring of 68 AD.*

***Peter:*** *Peter was crucified in Rome in ca. 58 AD. It was said that he requested that he be crucified upside down. This is what he wished in John 13. The record of these deaths are one of the greatest proofs of the power and truth of the risen Christ. Men don’t die for a lie!*