The Return of the Jews and the End of the Old Testament

In 587-6 B.C., the Jews in Jerusalem fell prey to the expanding Babylonian empire. Jerusalem was destroyed and many Jews were taken captive to Babylon. However, by 539 B.C., the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians. Cyrus, king of Persia, reversed the Babylonian practice of repression of nationalism by allowing those nations who had been deported by the Babylonians to return back to their homelands and to worship their own gods. Cyrus allowed returning captives to take with them the religious objects which the Babylonians claimed as booty. He also provided them some funds to help rebuild local religious shrines. He hoped that this generosity would create local governments who were loyal to him.

The Jews taken captive by Babylon benefitted from Cyrus’ policy and were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Cyrus’ edict allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem is found in Ezra (1:2-4; 6:3-5). Over the next century and a half, numbers of Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem and her temple. The books of Nehemiah and Ezra tell the story.

The return to the homeland was not forced. Those who wished to stay in Babylon could. These Jews were the children and grandchildren of the Jews who had been exiled by Babylon. They had acquired property and sunk roots in Babylon. As a consequence the majority of the Jews remained in Babylon where many had established a strong Jewish community. In fact, during the succeeding centuries numbers of Jews began to migrate to many areas of the Near East, Europe, and Africa so that by the time of Christ Jews were found in most parts of that ancient world (for a listing of countries see Acts 2:9-11). The areas where Jews were living outside of Jerusalem and Judea became known as the diaspora.

The Return of the Jews to Jerusalem

Two important accomplishments were realized by the returning exiles. First the temple was rebuilt. Second, the law of Moses became the center of Jewish life. This happened in the following way.

Shortly after Cyrus’ edict, a group of Jews led by Sheshbazaar, of the Davidic line, returned to Jerusalem. However, the situation in Jerusalem was difficult and the group failed to make much progress in securing Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. In 520 B.C., a second group of exiles returned to Jerusalem led by two men named Zerubbabel, nephew to Sheshbazaar, and Joshua.

Under their leadership, and through the inspiration of the prophet’s Zachariah and Haggai, the temple was rebuilt although its structure cannot be compared to the grandeur of Solomon’s temple. The building of the temple began what is known as the second temple period. As we shall see, it was this temple that Herod the Great greatly enlarged and remodeled.

With the rebuilding of the temple came the reestablishment of the old hierarchical social structure which had come to dominate Jewish (and Israelite) society before the exile. It has already been shown that this kind of social structure is often oppressive, especially to the peasantry which makes up the majority of the population. The oppressive nature of this stratified social structure was felt in the days of Nehemiah (Neh. 5:1-5) who enacted various reforms in an attempt to reduce the burden of debt created by the structure. But these reforms were only temporary.

Sometime after the temple was rebuilt (the date is very much disputed), a second group of exiles returned to Jerusalem led by a priest named Ezra. Ezra was “a ready [skilled] scribe in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). Through the work of Ezra, idolatry was eradicated out of Jewish society. Further, the law of Moses became the preeminent law of the Jews, something that had rarely happened since Moses. Because of this, Ezra is sometimes referred to as the second Moses.

Ezra also established a new class of religious leaders who were studied in the law. Prior to this time the religious leaders of the Jews were priests and prophets. But at this time, there were no prophets any more and the priests concerned themselves solely with temple rituals. These new religious leaders, called scribes, replaced the priests as those who interpreted the law of Moses and taught the law to the Jews. Through their help, many in the Jewish community became dedicated to the study of the law.

During the Persian Period (c. 515-332 B.C.), the Jewish community was localized in a twenty-mile radius of Jerusalem. Essentially, Jerusalem was a small temple-state. Though the temple and priesthood were reestablished as it was in the days before the exile, the monarchy was not. The political and religious leader of the Jews was a high priest of Zadokite descent. (The Zadokites were descendants of Zadok, who was installed as high priest by King David. From that time forth, all high priests were to be descendants of Zadok.) They were subject to the Persian governor of the area but were not appointed by him.

Malachi and the End of the Old Testament

Either before or after Ezra came the ministry of the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi. He spoke out against the priesthood which had become lax and careless in their duties. Moreover, the same priesthood had “departed out of
the way” and caused “many to stumble at the law” having “corrupted the covenant” (Mal. 2:8). He prophesied that “the sons of Levi” would be purified as gold and silver “that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Mal. 3:3).

He ended his prophecy, and thus the Old Testament, with a most significant prophecy: the Lord would send Elijah “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:5-6).

This is where the Old Testament ends.

The Inter-Testamental Period

The Greek Period

In 334 B.C., the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, conquered the Persian empire including Judea, the name given to the province where Jerusalem was located. In 323 B.C., Alexander died and his empire, which extended from Greece to India, was divided among his four generals. Judea came under the control of Ptolemy, who ruled Egypt and Palestine, while Syria and Babylon was ruled by Seleucus. However, in 198 B.C., Antiochus III, a Seleucid king, conquered Palestine, including Judea. Judea remained under Seleucid control until the Jews gained independence as a result of the Maccabean revolt which began in 167 B.C. This will be discussed later.

Hellenism

Understanding the Greek, or Hellenistic, period is important in the study of the New Testament. Though the Romans ruled the world of the New Testament, it was the Greek culture that predominated. Of this period, Frederick Murphy has written: “Alexander believed in the superiority of Greek culture, but was at the same time somewhat open to other cultures. . . Alexander wanted to put into practice the idea that all the world was a single city and all people inhabitants of that city. Alexander was pursuing a cosmopolitan ideal (from the Greek kosmos meaning ‘world’ and polis meaning ‘city’), but it was an ideal based on the conviction of the superiority of Greek views of the world and Greek institutions.”1 Under Alexander and his successors, Hellenism (the Greek way of life) was aggressively promoted.

As can be seen from Murphy’s comment, the main institution of Greek culture was the Greek city. These cities were ruled by the citizens (citizens were usually the landowners). Common to all Greek cities was the agora, the marketplace. The agora was a large open square, often surrounded by porticoes (Greek: stoa), porches with open sides and a roof held up by rows of columns. The agora also served as a marketplace for ideas where philosophers could get a hearing. Religious missionaries could do likewise.”2

You could also find theaters and gymnasia in a Greek city. “In the theater, plays immortalized Greek mythology and society was both praised and satirized. The gymnasion was much more than a place for sports, although sports were an important medium of social interaction and helped to substantiate the Greek idea of a sound mind in a strong body. Gymnasia also served varied social functions, from meeting places for political clubs, to a kind of high school for Greek boys. The high school taught the classics and trained the boys militarily. The gymnasion was a key vehicle for preserving, spreading, and transmitting Greek culture.”3 Temples were also a major part of the Greek city. “Worship of the city’s deities was a civic duty. Since there was no division between civic and religious life, shrines were found in gymnasia, theaters, and elsewhere.”4

The Greek city was the main instrument for the spread of Hellenism by Alexander and his successors. “They did so by building new cities, restructuring and chartering old cities of the Greek model, and organizing clusters of towns as a city.”5

The Hellenization of Jerusalem

Jerusalem experienced some Hellenization after the Greek period began. However, when Jerusalem fell under the control of the Seleucids during the reign of the Selucid king Antiochus III, the Hellenization of Jerusalem was greatly accelerated. During this time, the position of the high priest became appointed by the Selucid king. This began when Jason, of the Oniad family and a descendent of Zadok, took the office of the high priest from his brother, Onias III, by bribing Antiochus III. Jason changed Jerusalem from a temple-state to a Greek city-state with a governing council called the Sanhedrin. Further, a gymnasion was also established in Jerusalem. He also renamed the city to Antioch.

Jason lost his position to Menelaus who offered a higher bribe to Antiochus III. Menelaus was not a descendent of Zadok. The Jews who were steeped in the law of Moses found all of this unacceptable. There appeared at this time a clear division between the Jews. The rich aristocracy, of whom the high priests always belonged whether they were descended from Zadok or not, favored Hellenism while those who clung the law of Moses opposed it.

The Maccabean Revolt

In 175 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes became king of the Seleucid kingdom. He made even greater efforts to Hellenize Jerusalem. However in 168-167 B.C., resistance to these measures came to a head when Antiochus Epiphanes forbade Jewish rituals in the temple in Jerusalem and had an altar to Zeus placed atop of the altar of sacrifice. The resistance came from the family of Hasmon and a group called the hasidim—a religious party within Judaism devoted wholly to the law of Moses. The revolution has become known as the Maccabean revolt, named for Judas Maccabaeus, the leader of the rebels. Though the war went on for several years, by 165 B.C., Jerusalem had been freed of Selucid control and the temple was rededicated. Every year since then, Jews celebrate the rededication of the temple (known as the Feast of Dedication in the New Testament). This celebration is known as Hanukkah.
The Hasmonean Dynasty

In 128 B.C., the Jews finally won their independence and Judea became an independent state. Judea was ruled by the Hasmonean family, the leader of which became the high priest. However, the various successors to the position of the high priest became more and more Hellenistic themselves. During the rule of John Hyrcanus (128-104 B.C.), the spiritual descendants of the Hasidim, known as the Pharisees, began to openly oppose the Hasmonean high priesthood. John Hyrcanus switched his loyalty to the aristocratic Zadokites who had become known as the Sadducees. The Sadducees, who were opposed to the Pharisees, were mainly the wealthy priests and Jewish aristocracy. The Sadducees had control of the temple and from this time until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., the High Priest was a Sadducee.

John Hyrcanus’ son, Aristobulus I, (104-103 B.C.), became the high priest and took upon himself the title of king, like other Hellenistic kings. During his days, he conquered “the Galilee of the Gentiles” and began to establish Jewish colonies in that region.

The Roman Rule

The Hasmonean rule continued until Judea was conquered by the Romans in 63 B.C. The Romans, however, made Hyrcanus II, who had been King of Judea, both the High Priest and the ethnarch, or “ruler of the people,” but withheld from him the title of king. Hyrcanus II was personally responsible to the Roman governor, to whom the Jews had to pay an annual tribute or tax.

During the next several years, the Jews were unhappy about the government and especially Hyrcanus II as High Priest. Though there was much contention in Judea from both inside and outside sources, Hyrcanus retained his position. However, in 48 B.C., Rome placed Hyrcanus and Judea under the procuratorship of the governor of Idumaea, Antipater. Idumaea was the area of land stretching from the southern hills of Judea to the northern part of the Negev. It had been annexed by the Hasmoneans in about 120 B.C. At that time, many of its inhabitants voluntarily converted to Judaism, including the father of Antipater, also named Antipater.

Herod the Great

In 39 B.C., the Roman Senate approved Antipater’s son, Herod, as King of Judea. However, Herod had to take possession of his new kingdom by force. In 37 B.C., Herod conquered Judea and Jerusalem.

In order to create a stable kingdom, Herod “chose dependency on Rome as the best strategy for assuring the welfare of the nation and of Judaism in general. This may have been his most important and successful decision. As future events seem to prove, Herod’s prudence in accepting the political realities of Rome’s dominance in the first century was a better alternative to the irresponsibility and impulsiveness of the political and religious zealots that brought Judea in direct and open conflict with Rome in A.D. 66. His commitment to Rome and to Judaism penetrated his policies in various degrees.”

He accomplished this stability through several means. First, Herod quickly moved to eliminate any opposition to his rule from within his kingdom. This was a policy which continued throughout his life and one for which he has become most noted. He was not above killing anyone, his wife and children included, who posed a threat, real or supposed, to his kingdom. In this way, he established law and order in the kingdom.

Second, he reduced the power of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, by making them like the privy councils of other Hellenistic kings. They were made up of friends, family, and others who were allied in their thinking with Herod.

Third, Herod made several attempts to be fair and partial to non-Jewish subjects in his kingdom. Fourth, Herod’s fiscal policies and building projects brought economic prosperity and security to Judea.

It should be noted that Herod’s building projects are some of the grandest in ancient Palestine. He had several projects throughout Judea and in other areas including Antioch, Beirut, Damascus, and Rhodes. Though a complete listing is beyond the scope of this work, a few will be mentioned. He built several fortresses including the impressive Herodium (a virtual man made mountain where Herod eventually died), Machareus (where John the Baptist was imprisoned and killed), the Antonia Fortress (on the northwest corner of the temple), and Masada. He also built an impressive city with an artificial harbor that he named Caesarea (often called Caesarea Maritima to distinguish it from Caesarea Philippi built by Herod’s son, Philip). This became the city where the Roman governors were headquartered. But his most impressive building was the temple complex built to replace the edifice constructed by the returning Jews from Babylon. The temple complex was the largest structure of its kind in the Roman world.

Herod the Great is often portrayed as a cruel, paranoid, vindictive tyrant. Yet it is hard to assess his inner motives. Much of our information regarding Herod comes from Josephus, a Jewish historian living several decades after Herod’s death. But it is apparent that Josephus had a strong bias against Herod that seems to have tainted his writings.

However one assesses Herod’s life, it must be noted that he brought respect and security to the Jewish people during his reign, both in Judea and throughout the Roman empire. As already mentioned, this was brought about, in part, by eliminating those whose acts he considered subversive. It was in this context that Christ was born (see Matthew 2). Upon hearing the tale of the birth of “King of the Jews,” it appears that Herod moved quickly to eliminate another potential threat to the stability he worked so hard to achieve.

Succession to Herod’s Rule

It was several years after Christ was saved by divine intervention from the sword of Herod’s soldiers before He began his ministry. There had been many changes in the political structure of Judea and regions round about. A brief
review of these changes is necessary to help complete an understanding of the New Testament.

After Herod’s death in A.D. 4, the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus divided Herod’s kingdom among three of Herod’s sons. The southern districts of Judea, Idumaea, and Samaria were given to Archelaus; the northeastern districts of Paneas (modern Banias), Batanea, and Gaulanitis were given to Philip; and the northwestern district of Galilee and the southeastern district of Perea were given to Antipas. None of these men were given the title of king: Archelaus was granted the title of ethnarch while the other two brothers were given the lower titles of tetrarchs.

It was clear that if the teenaged Archelaus proved himself an able ruler, he would later be made a full king. He was not. After nine years, Augustus banished him to Vienna where he died in A.D. 14. His region was made a Roman province governed by a Procurator, the most famous of which was Pontius Pilate before whom Christ was tried.

Philip’s region contained a few Jewish subjects but was mostly gentile. He built his capital at Paneas, one of the sources of the Jordan river and a place where the Greek god, Pan, was worshiped. He called it Caesarea Philippi. There he built a temple to the god Pan. He died in A.D. 34 after thirty-eight years of quiet reign.

Antipas, whose reign resembled his father’s, was the ablest of Herod’s sons. Initially he reigned from Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee about four miles northwest of Nazareth. But tiring of the winters, he built a new capital on the southwestern shores of the sea of Galilee, naming it for the new emperor of Rome, Tiberius. He fell in love with the wife of his half-brother (named Philip, but not the tetrarch) and married her, an obviously illegal action. This action was denounced by John the Baptist. In response, Antipas imprisoned John in Marchaeus and eventually had him killed. Eventually, Antipas was banished by the Emperor Caligula. He died in Gaul in A.D. 39.

Caligula gave Herod’s grandson, Agrippa, the region ruled by Philip. He was also given the title of king. He was also given Antipas’ region when he was deposed. Eventually, Caligula gave Judea, Idumaea, and Samaria to Agrippa. Therefore, Agrippa became ruler over all the kingdom his grandfather had governed. Upon the acquisition of Judea, Agrippa moved to Jerusalem where he attempted to prove his orthodoxy as a Jew. Called Herod the King in Acts 12, Agrippa began a persecution of the early Christians in which James of Peter, James and John was killed.

Acts 12 describes the gruesome death of Agrippa in A.D. 44. Because Agrippa’s son, Agrippa II, was only seventeen at the time of his death, Judea-Samaria was placed under the rule of a series of Roman governors. As in the former days of Roman governorship, these governors ruled from Caesarea Maritima. It was in the days of one of these governors, Felix, that Paul was arrested by Roman military and taken to Caesarea Maritima (Acts 23:24). Felix heard Paul’s case (Acts 24). Festus replaced Felix as governor and desired that Paul be tried by the Jews. But Paul, being a Roman, claimed his right to be tried by Caesar (Acts 25). At that time, Agrippa II, who had been given a small portion of his father’s kingdom to rule, came to Caesarea Maritima and desired to hear Paul (Acts 26). Paul’s impassioned defense of Christianity was so powerful, Agrippa II exclaimed, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Paul replied, “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am” (Acts 26:29).

As already seen, it is in this political setting of Herod’s successors that the New Testament takes place.

The New Testament

The New Testament recounts the ministry and atonement of Jesus Christ. It also relates various acts of the apostles including some of their teachings. The stories recorded in this sacred record occurred in the first century A.D.

The Ministry of Christ

The dates for Jesus’ birth, ministry, and death are subject to debate. However, two years before the death of Herod the Great, Jesus Christ, the redeemer of the world, was born in Bethlehem, five miles south of Jerusalem. He was raised in Nazareth, a small village in Galilee.

When the Savior was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), John the Baptist began his ministry as the forerunner of Messiah (see Matt. 3, Mark 1; Luke 3, and John 1). His mission was to prepare a people for the Messiah. To him, Christ came to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:13-17). After He was baptized, the Savior was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be with God” (JST 4:1) where He fasted for forty days and nights.

After his wilderness experience, the Savior began his ministry teaching that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). The ministry lasted about three years. The early part of his ministry centered on the region known as Galilee. The, the Savior also taught in other areas such as Perea, on the eastern side of the Jordan River. He ended his ministry in Jerusalem.

The Atonement of Christ

While Jerusalem, the Savior came into open contact with the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem and spoke against their wickedness (see Matt. 21-23). In the Book of Mormon, Jacob taught, “But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified” (2 Ne. 10:5). True to this prophecy, “Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtily, and kill him” (Matt. 26:2-3).

While the leaders of the Jews planned the demise of the son of God, the Savior fulfilled the reason He came to earth: the atonement! Before performing the atoning sacrifice, the Savior met with the twelve in an upper room to have a passover
mankind from spiritual bondage. During this experience, He instituted the sacrament as a token for His disciples to remember what He was about to do (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20). Then the Savior taught the apostles important doctrines (John 14-16). At this time, He promised them that after His death and resurrection, the apostles would be blessed with the Gift of the Holy Ghost which would aid them in doing His work (see John 14:16; 26; 16:7-14).

After offering prayer (John 17), the Savior with His apostles went to the Mt of Olives (Luke 22:39) where there was a garden (John 18:1)—or cultivated area as the Greek word means—in which there was a gethsemane or olive press. The garden was an olive orchard and the press (which was generally located in a building or cave) was the ideal symbolic place to enact the first part of the atonement. Elder Russell M. Nelson explains: “The word Gethsemane comes from two Hebrew roots: gath, meaning “press,” and shemen, meaning “oil,” especially that of the olive. There olives had been pressed under the weight of great stone wheels to squeeze precious oil from the olives. So the Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was literally pressed under the weight of the sins of the world. He sweated great drops of blood—His life’s “oil”—which issued from every pore. (See Luke 22:44; D&C 19:18).”

After the suffering in Gethsemane was concluded, the Savior was betrayed by Judas, one of His apostles, to the temple guard who had been sent by the Jewish leaders to capture their antagonist. After trials before the Jewish leaders and before the Roman Governor, Pilate, the Savior was taken by the Roman soldiers to Golgotha where He was crucified.

Elder Nelson observed, “The second phase of His atonement was effected on the cross. Hours before that was accomplished, Barabbas was released and, in His stead, Jesus the Christ was consigned to the cross. Iconic it is that Barabbas in local language literally means “son of the father.” While He was released, the true Son of the Eternal Father was condemned to death. (See Matt. 27:17–26.) Pilate delivered the Lamb of God to be crucified at the same time Paschal lambs nearby were being prepared for sacrifice. (See John 19:13–14.) The Crucifixion took place at a hill called Golgotha (Greek) or Calvary (Latin) meaning “the skull.” The skull symbolized death. At a place such as this, the atoning sacrifice was completed. On the cross, the Savior of the world was lifted up over death in the greatest of all possible significance—the realization and reality of the Lord’s power over death. God the Father offered His Son Jesus at Golgotha (or Calvary), a northern outcropping of Mount Moriah, where Abraham had nearly sacrificed Isaac some two thousand years previously. Foreseen long before, there the Savior’s atoning sacrifice was completed.”

From the cross, the Savior’s slain body was taken and buried in a sepulcher a garden near Golgotha (John 19:41). Here, His body lay for three days waiting the impending resurrection. During this time, the Savior visited the Spirit World where He organized missionary work for the spirits in prison (D&C 138). Then, early in the morning of the third day, the marvelous resurrection of the Savior took place. The resurrection was the crowning sign of the truthfulness of the Savior’s work.

**The Forty-day Ministry**

After His resurrection, the Savior made several appearances to His faithful disciples including the Apostles who were in the Jerusalem area. During this time the Savior ministered to the faithful saints. Matthew records, “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them” (Matt. 28:16). What took place in during this appointed meeting is not said. But Luke informs us that the Savior “shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). It was perhaps at this time that at this time the Savior “was seen of above five hundred brethren at once” as recorded by Paul (1 Cor. 15:6).

**The Ascension of Christ**

The forty-day ministry concluded in Jerusalem. While there, the Savior with the eleven Apostles went to the Mt of Olives where He ascended to heaven. While the apostles were gazing upon this remarkable scene, “two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1"10-11). This was a prophecy of the Savior’s return at his second coming. Indeed, as part of that return, the Savior will return upon that very same Mt of Olives (see D&C 4548-53; 133:20).

**The Acts of the Apostles**

What we know of the history of the first century Christian church after the ascension of Christ is recorded by Luke in *Acts of the Apostles* and from the various epistles written by Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude. The history gleaned from these documents is at best fragmentary.

After the ascension of Christ, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem and waited for the promised coming of the gift of the Holy Ghost which came on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1-2). As a result, the apostles experienced spiritual gifts including the gift of tongues and the ability to teach. On that day, they taught and baptized over three thousand Jews who were attending the feast from all over the diaspora. As these Jews returned to their homelands, they began to spread the gospel throughout the world. The apostles continued to teach and baptize in Jerusalem (Acts 3-5). Eventually, the Jewish leaders tried to stop the spread of Christianity. One of the Christian converts, Stephen, was brought before the ruling council and convicted of blaspheme. Under the direction of a zealous Pharisee named Saul or Paul, Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7). Paul continued to persecute the Christians. As he did so, Christians began fleeing Jerusalem. But everywhere they fled they taught people the gospel (Acts 8).

Frustrated, Paul received permission to destroy Christians...
in Damascus. As he was coming into Damascus, he saw of
vision of Christ. Paul was converted. He was shown that he
would become the instrument in taking the gospel to the
gentiles (Acts 9). Before that would happen, he had several
years of preparation. During this time, Peter received a vision
that the gospel should now go to the gentiles and not just to the
house of Israel (Acts 10). The first gentile convert was
Cornelius.

Eventually, Paul was called to begin missionary work
among the gentiles in Asia and Europe. With various
companions, Paul served three missions (Acts 13-20) taking the
gospel to Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. The
work among the gentiles created a controversy with the Jewish
Christians who felt the gentiles should be required to live
certain aspects of the law of Moses. A council was held in
Jerusalem under the direction of the apostles to discuss the
matter (Acts 15). It was concluded that the gentiles were not
required to live any aspect of the law of Moses. This frustrated
some Jewish Christians who continued to teach that the law of
Moses must be lived by gentiles.

Because of his work among the gentiles, many Jews hated
Paul. They desired to have him killed. While in Jerusalem,
Paul went to the temple where an uprising took place on
account of him (Acts 21). He was taken by the Romans into
prison in Caesarea, the sea coast capital of Judea. For two
years Paul was held captive, defending himself before the
Roman governors, Felix and Festus, and the Jewish king Herod
Agrippa (Acts 23-26). Paul was eventually taken to Rome
where he was to be tried before the Roman emperor (Acts 27-

The rest of early Christian history in the first century is
unclear. We glean from the letters of Paul that he was freed
from his first Roman captivity upon which he revisited several
congregations of Christians. There is also reason to believe
that he made a fourth missionary journey to Spain.10 According
to various traditions, Paul was eventually imprisoned in Rome
a second time during the time of Nero. These traditions also
claim that Peter had come to Rome during this time as well.
Eventually, when Nero accused the Christians of setting fire to
a section of Rome, many Christians were put to death.
Tradition states that both Peter and Paul were martyred during
these persecutions (c. 66-67 A.D.).

Notes


9. For discussion on the forty-day ministry of Christ, see S. Kent Brown and C. Wilfred Griggs, “The 40-Day
33-54.

10. Evidence for the mission to Spain is found both in the New Testament and from early Christian writings. It is
clear from Romans 15:24, 28 that Paul intended to go to Spain after his intended visit to Rome. Eusebius, who wrote
the first Christian history early in the fourth century, implies that Paul went to Spain after his first Roman
imprisonment (*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.22.2-3). Further, Christian writings in the second century also attest to his
going to Spain (Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, ch. 5; *Actus Petri Vercellenses*, chs. 1-3; *Muratorian
Canon, lines 34-39).