



### Aim of lesson

To help young people to get a simple but clear picture of what happened in between the Old and New Testaments and to show that although, as far as we are aware, no prophets were speaking for God. he was still at work amongst his people.

### Bible background

Daniel 11

### Preparation required

There is quite a lot of information in this lesson so if you can, get the class to do some research beforehand - see the note at the end of the previous lesson. There are pictures in the students' books but you might like to find others to enliven the lesson. If you are not particularly familiar with the history of this period, you may need to do some homework yourself. If you have access to an NIV Study Bible there is a detailed explanation of Daniel 11.

### Outline of lesson

As you go through the history get the students to mark the important events and highlight periods on the timeline in their books. The students may have little knowledge of material in this lesson, so you will have to avoid overloading them with detail.

### The Persian empire

Ask the class about the state of the Jews at around 430 BC (when Malachi stopped prophesying). In lessons 20 we learned that although many like Esther had remained in exile, a remnant had returned to the land, had built a temple that had made old men weep, and had struggled to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Malachi had admonished them about the insincerity of their worship. God's Land was now a minor province of the Persian Empire.

Get the students to use a highlighting pen to identify the Persian Empire on Nebuchadnezzar's image, the period on the dates grid, the picture of Cyrus and the map of the Persia Empire.

### Alexander the Great and the Greeks

The interpreting of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the visions of chapters 7-8, had told Daniel that after the Persian Empire would come the Greeks; the vision of the goat and the ram in chapter 8 is particularly detailed. Tell the students, or ask them if you have been able to get them to do research beforehand, about the rapid rise of Alexander the Great and his astonishing marches (332-323 BC). Once again the students could highlight the bronze belly and thighs and the Greek elements in their books.

At Alexander's early death his empire was divided into four (see Daniel 8:5-8, 21-22). One of these parts was the land of Egypt, which was under the rule of the Ptolemies, and Syria which was under the rule of the Seleucids. The land of Israel was reduced to being the front line of a struggle between them to gain power. First they were ruled over by one side, then the other.

During this time, Greek culture spread throughout the Greek Empire and paved the way for the translation of the Old Testament into Greek<sup>1</sup> (Septuagint version), probably in the third century BC.

### Antiochus Epiphanes<sup>2</sup>

Greek ideas began to spread, challenging the Jewish faith, and Antiochus Epiphanes, a Seleucid ruler, tried to crush the Jewish faith in one God and this led to the rebellion of the Jewish Maccabees.

Daniel was told about all this by God and it is recorded in Daniel 11. It doesn't matter too much if the students don't remember any names of this period but it is astonishing how accurate the prophecy is. Verse 2 refers to Xerxes (of Persia), v3 to Alexander, 5-19 the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Verse 21 refers to Antiochus Epiphanes and v31 to when he set up a statue of Jupiter (aka Zeus) in the Most Holy place of the temple. Verse 32 refers to the revolt by the Maccabees.

<sup>1</sup> The students may have learned in lesson 20 that Aramaic became the common tongue of the Jews in Israel, and it seems from the way the New Testament writers quoted from the Old Testament that by the first century the Greek Bible was in common use.

<sup>2</sup> The name 'Epiphanes' has to do with the manifestation of a God (hence the English word 'Epiphany'. Antiochus was clearly not an overly modest man.

## **Triumph and disaster – from the Maccabees to the Romans**

A brief period of Jewish independence broke down through in-fighting. You could talk about (or ask them if they have done preparation) about Cleopatra - a later Ptolemy (therefore a Greek not an Egyptian as is often thought).

By 275 BC, the Romans in Italy were beginning to conquer other parts of the Mediterranean. The Greeks decided to help the Carthaginians against the Romans, and the conflict grew into a war between Greece and Rome. By 146 BC the Romans destroyed Corinth and made Greece into a province of the Roman Empire.

In Palestine the Romans were invited in by one Jewish faction to help them against the others, and by the time of Jesus, the Romans were fully in control. The students could highlight the legs of iron and the Roman elements in their books.

Herod the Great was not Jewish, but he had been compelled to be circumcised and adopt Judaism, was put in charge of Judaea by Caesar (40 BC), and (probably in 36 BC) he captured Jerusalem with Roman help.

## **Waiting for Jesus**

It may seem as though all this history is unimportant and it is true that the students don't need to know all the details, but it ideally sets the scene for the coming of Jesus and the spread of the gospel. The Romans had created a world in which travel by sea and land was relatively safe and easy, and their empire was relatively peaceful - the 'Pax Romana'.

Ask the class about the Jewish situation around the time of Jesus first coming. The spiritual leaders had become rigid and remote, they had no king of their own nationality and the grip of the Romans was becoming stronger.

Talk about the faithful believers in God waiting for the prophecies of the Old Testament to be fulfilled and knowing the Messiah should soon be born and the dramatic ending of the silence in the angel's appearance to Zechariah, the father of John Baptist and of Gabriel (the same angel as in Daniel) to Mary. They had the prophecies, there were signs of the times and when Jesus was born some were ready.

## **Relevance to our lives**

The lesson is obvious. There were faithful men and women expecting the birth of Jesus because they could see God working his purpose out over the silent centuries. It is how we should be today - a people who know their Bibles, see prophecies coming to pass and trust God to fulfil the rest of his word.

## **Extension Activities**

Talk about the development of some important groups and organisations.

- The synagogue ('gathering'). First established in Babylon when the Jewish exiles could no longer worship at the temple in Jerusalem; became the centre of their worship in each town. Once again there was emphasis on reading of the Law, Psalms and prophets and separateness as a nation.
- The Sanhedrin ('council chamber') Set up about 250 BC as a council to rule on religious and civil questions; had 70 members.
- The Pharisees ('separated ones'). Set up about 168 BC to resist Greek ideas and to maintain the keeping of the Law of Moses and faith in the God of Israel; added many traditions to the teaching of the Old Testament.
- The Sadducees ('followers of Zadok'): the aristocratic, worldly minded and generally rich part of the Sanhedrin. Tended to accept Greek ideas, collaborate with the Romans and to be very keen on maintaining their position. They did not believe in the coming of the Messiah.
- The Apocrypha (means 'hidden' but has come to mean 'false'). A set of books which are not generally considered to be inspired by God. The Roman Catholic church includes a selection of such books between the Old and New Testaments. If you can get hold of one, the class can see that some of the writings are rather strange, but there are books of the Maccabees which tell of the time we have been talking about.