

# TEMPORAL DIVISIONS OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

In reading archaeological studies, one will encounter references to various periods in the history of mankind. Such references are necessary in presenting as precise a chronology as possible with regard to Old Testament study. Naturally, it is helpful to have an understanding of these periods of time.

## THE STONE AGE

William Foxwell Albright applied the term “prehistory” to the Stone Age, since the development of writing marked the watershed between the prehistoric and historic eras of man.<sup>1</sup> There is very little we can know for certain about this time in history. The time span is divided into four periods:

Paleolithic period (generally dated prior to 10,000 B.C.)

Mesolithic period (c. 10,000–8000 B.C.)

Neolithic period (c. 8000–4000 B.C.)

Chalcolithic period (c. 4000–3100 B.C.)

## THE BRONZE AGE

### Early Bronze Age (c. 3100–2000 B.C.)

This is also called the “Canaanite” age. These Canaanites were the “Amurru,” or the “Amorites” of the Bible. Civilization shifted during this period from unwalled villages to fortified towns. Two great areas of growth during this era are seen in Egypt to the southwest and in Mesopotamia to the northeast.

### Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 B.C.)

The patriarchal history begins in the Middle Bronze Age (MB) period. This period has been illumined by the archaeologist’s spade. The extent of commercial activities between major centers increased dramatically during this time. There is evidence of the Hyksos in Palestine at Hazor. In Anatolia (the western region of Asia), the Hittites were establishing themselves as a major power.

### Late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 B.C.)

The Hyksos were expelled from Egypt, and the Egyptian domination of Palestine continued throughout this period. This is when the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt occurred. The Stele of Pharaoh Merneptah mentions “Israel” for the first time in a non-biblical source about 1220 B.C.

## THE IRON AGE

### Iron Age I (c. 1200–900 B.C.)

The “Sea Peoples” invaded Palestine. The “Philistines” are from this people.<sup>2</sup> They brought with

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<sup>1</sup>William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2d ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1957), 8.

<sup>2</sup>The Philistines are said to have originated from Caphtor in Jeremiah 47:4 and Amos 9:7. How can this association be explained? One possibility is that the Philistines and the Casluhim shared a close link during an earlier time period. Hundreds of years later, many of the Casluhim (not yet called “Philistines”) who originated in Egypt could have migrated to the island of Crete and lived there so long that it became their home. Then, when the prophets spoke of Caphtor (Crete) as the home of the Philistines who came to invade Canaan, they could have been referring to a secondary settlement rather than the Philistines’ actual point of origin (Egypt). Another idea is that the Philistines of the Book of Genesis could have been a different ethnic group than the Philistines who invaded Palestine in the latter half of the thirteenth century B.C. and troubled the Israelites until David subjugated them (2 Sam. 8:11, 12). (William W. Grasham, *Genesis 1–22*, Truth for Today Commentary [Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 2014], 320–21.)

them the technological advance of iron metallurgy. Hewn stone cisterns and the beginnings of the Israelite monarchy date to this period. Jerusalem became the capital of Israel during the reign of David. Solomon made Israel a world power of the day.

### **Iron Age II (c. 900–600 B.C.)**

This period spans the time from Solomon to the destruction of Israel and Judah.

### **Iron Age III (c. 600–332 B.C.)**

This is the age of the Babylonian and Persian Empires. From a biblical perspective, it was the time of the Babylonian captivity and of the subsequent return to Jerusalem and Judea. During this period Babylon fell, and Persia came to power and in turn fell.

## **THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD (c. 332–63 B.C.)**

This corresponds to the “Intertestamental Period,” which covers the time between the writing of the last book of the Old Testament and the events in the first book of the New Testament. Its beginning is marked by the rise of Alexander the Great of Macedonia and his conquest of Persia. His death in 323 B.C. resulted in a period of conflict between his generals. The Ptolemies of Egypt, then the Seleucids of Syria, ruled over the Jews in Palestine.

The oppressive policies of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid king (175–163 B.C.), led to the Maccabean revolt. The Hasmonean Dynasty<sup>3</sup> came to rule in Palestine for more than a century.

## **THE ROMAN PERIOD (c. 63 B.C.–A.D. 324)**

Internal strife led to the recognition of Herod the Great as king of Judea in 37 B.C.

After the death of Herod, Judea became a Roman Province governed at first by a series of prefects and after A.D. 44 by a series of procurators. The Jews revolted against Rome, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Jewish historian Josephus, as an eyewitness, gave details of this revolt. The rebellion was crushed by the Roman generals Vespasian and Titus. In A.D. 73 Masada, the last stronghold, fell.

A second Jewish revolt in the next century was named for its leader, Bar Kochba. In A.D. 132 the Romans smashed any hopes the Jews had of returning to power.

## **SUBSEQUENT PERIODS (A.D. 324–1918)**

Other periods of history, moving toward modern times, have impacted the history of the church and the progress of archaeological excavation. Briefly, these include the times of the Byzantines (324–640), the Early Arabs (640–1099), the Crusaders (1095–1291), the Mamelukes (an Egyptian dynasty, 1291–1516), and the Turks (1516–1918).

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<sup>3</sup>The Hasmoneans were of the “House of Hasmon.” They are also called the “Maccabees” because one of their leaders, Judas the son Mattathias, was nicknamed “Maccabee,” meaning “Hammer.” That nickname came to be applied to the family, to the revolt, and to this period of history. (Coy Roper, *The Minor Prophets, 3: Zechariah and Malachi; The Intertestamental Period*, Truth for Today Commentary [Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 2013], 433.)