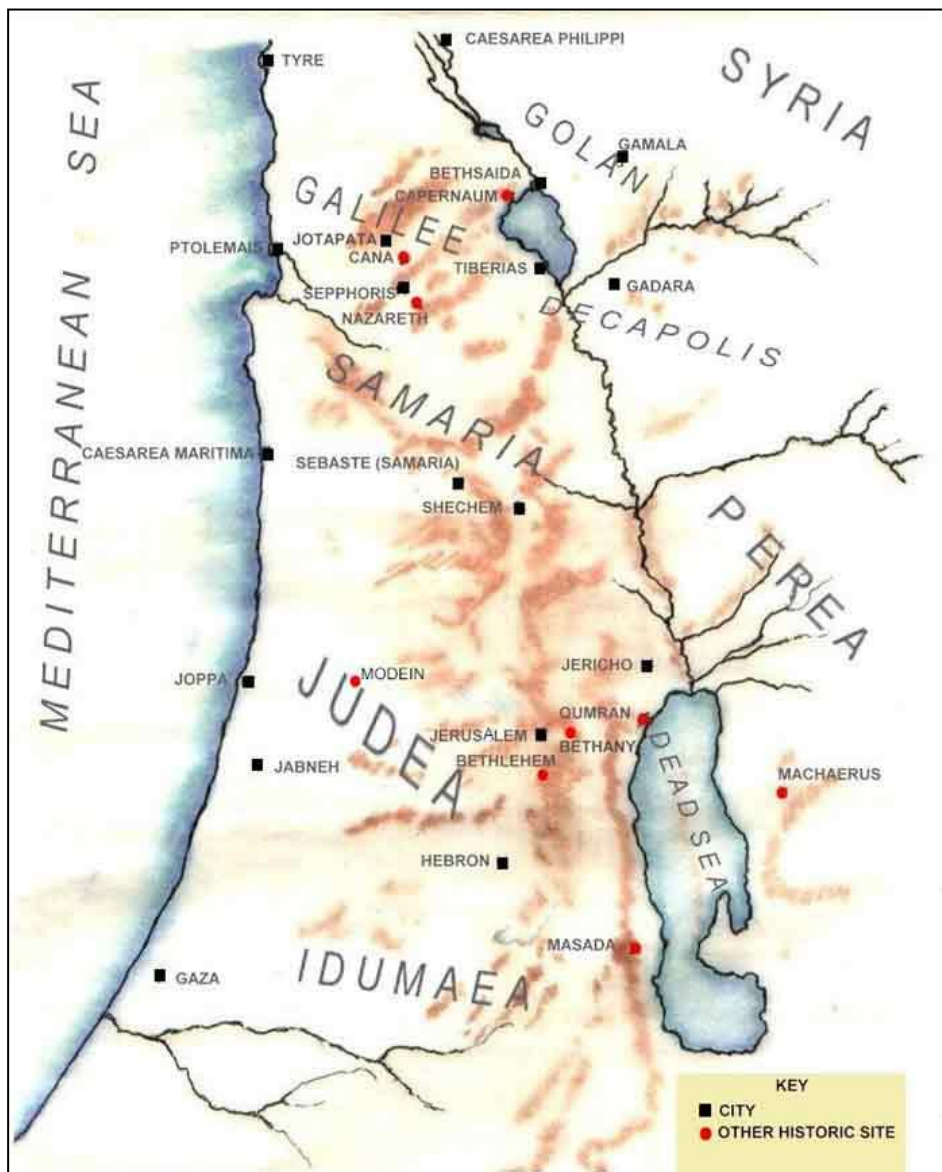


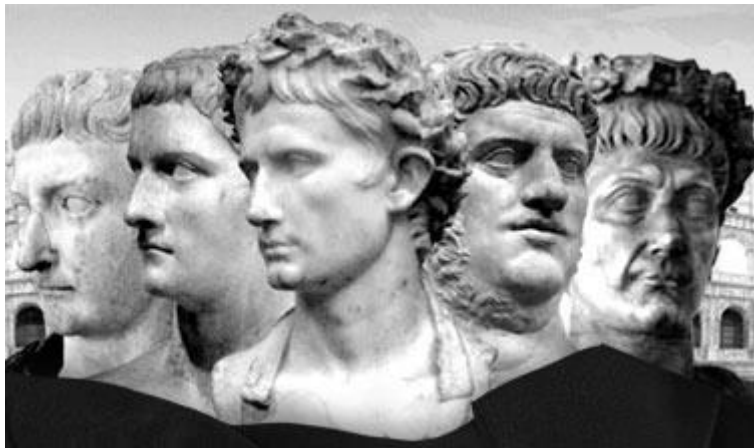
Palestine at the Time of Jesus

Religion and Romans



The Roman Empire

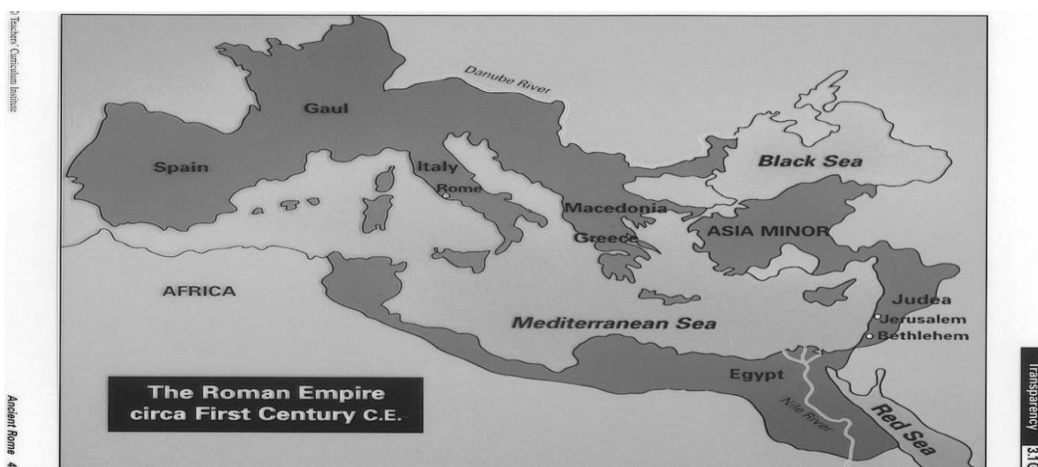
The Romans came from Rome in Italy. The Emperor was the head of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire lasted more than 500 years. It was powerful for a long time because Roman soldiers had better fighting tactics than anyone else. Roman armies won a lot of battles. They took control of all the land around the Mediterranean Sea. Gradually the Roman Empire spread throughout Europe and North Africa. When Jesus was born, Palestine was ruled by the Romans.



Palestine was only a small country, yet it was situated in a strategic position. It was on the edge of the Roman Empire at the cross-roads of three continents:

- Europe to the North
- Africa to the South
- Asia to the East

The Romans knew that whoever controlled Palestine had control of all the roads in and out of those areas.



The Roman Empire



The Romans invaded the land of Palestine in 63BC. The Roman army marched into Jerusalem and took over the city. Very soon they took control of the entire country. Then the Romans put their own governors in charge to rule the people. Each governor had to make sure that the Jewish people of Palestine obeyed Roman laws and paid Roman taxes. In return the Jews were allowed to follow their own customs, and practice their own religion.

However the Jews did not accept the Romans, They believed Palestine was their land, given to them by God.

Tax Collectors

In Jesus' time ordinary people in Palestine lived very simple lives. They earned just enough money for food, clothes and a small house for their families. Now they had to pay heavy taxes as well. These new taxes paid for the upkeep of the Roman army based in Palestine.

The money was collected by a few Jewish people called tax collectors. Most Jews hated the tax collectors because they worked for the Romans. Some tax collectors were cheats; they kept part of the money for themselves. As a result many of them became very wealthy.



Task 1:

Copy and complete the following passage into your jotter.

1. The Romans took control of P_____ because it was at the crossroads of three continents: E_____, A_____ and A_____.
2. The R_____ invaded Palestine in the year _____.
3. The Jews did not want the Romans in their country. They believed Palestine belonged to the Jewish people because G_____ had given it to them.
4. But the Jews were forced to obey Roman l_____ and pay Roman t_____.
5. People called T_____ C_____ collected money for the upkeep of the Roman army.
6. Most Jewish people h_____ the tax collectors because they worked for the Romans.

Task 2: Bible Search

Jesus lived in Palestine at a time when it was occupied by a foreign power. The Romans, Roman governors, Roman soldiers and tax collectors, are mentioned several times in the New Testament. Jesus surprised many Jews by the way he treated all these people.

Collect a **Bible Search Worksheet** from your Teacher.

Task 3: Questions

1. Why was control of Palestine important for Romans?
2. How did the lives of ordinary people change after the Roman invasion of Palestine?
3. Why did the Jews resent the Roman presence in Palestine?
4. Why do you think the Jews looked down on tax collectors?

Task 4: Creative Writing

Imagine you are a child in Palestine in Jesus' time. Your country has been invaded. Who is in control now?... Every day you see the soldiers. Where are they?... What are they doing?... Local people dislike what has happened; there is graffiti on the walls. What does it say?... At home your parents are finding it hard to make ends meet. Why is this?... How do you feel about this?...

Using the outline above write a short story of what it is like to be a young person in Palestine at the time of Jesus growing up in an occupied country.

Extension Work: Research

The Roman Empire was an occupying power yet it brought many benefits to the countries it occupied. It had a building programme for towns and cities. Public buildings were erected; water systems were installed, and roads laid down.

Find out about one aspect of Roman architecture or engineering that has survived to the present day in Palestine, or elsewhere in the Roman Empire.

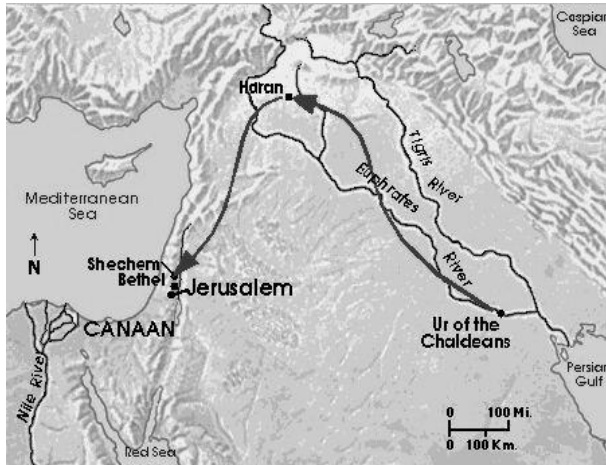
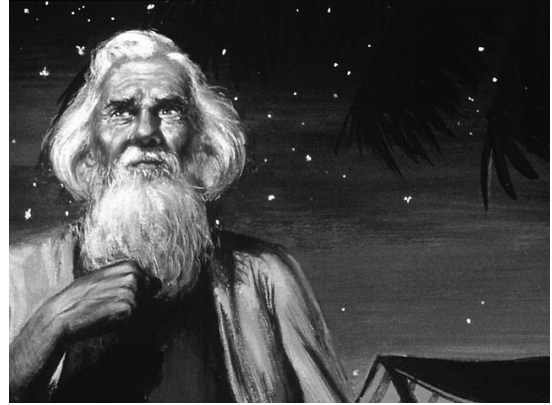
Write a short report, include drawings, diagrams or pictures, and present it to the class.



Political and Religious Structures in the Time of Jesus

Jesus was born into the Jewish faith. The Jewish faith has its origins in God's special relationship with Abraham and later with Moses.

God called Abraham to lead the people from the city of Ur in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) to the land of Canaan.



God made a covenant with Abraham whereby Abraham and his followers would be God's chosen people. In return for this, the people would be asked to obey God's laws.

Abraham's descendants settled in Canaan, but eventually they moved down to Egypt, where, as time went by, they were persecuted and treated as slaves. Hundreds of years later, God sent them a leader, Moses, to free them from slavery. In the book of Exodus, we read of how Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and on towards the Promised Land (modern-day Israel).

The story of ancient Judaism, of Abraham and Moses, would have been very familiar to Jesus.



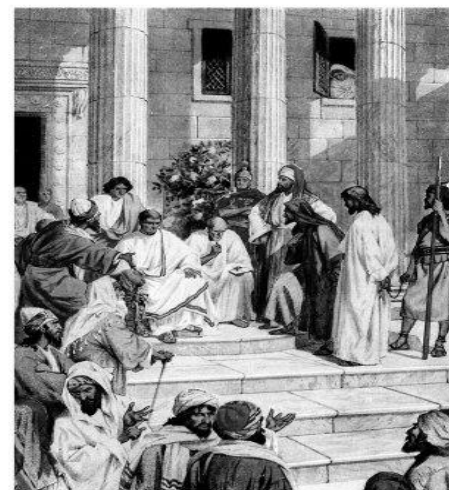
Political Structures in the Time of Jesus



Over the centuries, the Israelites had many rulers: first they were ruled by prophets called Judges, then by Kings, beginning with Saul, then David, then David's son Solomon. After Solomon's death, the land was divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judaea. In 63BC, the Romans conquered the land and called it Palestine. In 40 BC, they appointed Herod as king. Because Herod was not a Jew, the Jewish people never accepted him.

At the time of Jesus, Palestine (the Holy Land) was still part of the Roman Empire, and Roman law and customs were being imposed on the Jewish people. The Jews didn't like the Romans and there was always a great deal of tension between them.

The Roman Emperor was called Caesar. He allowed Herod to continue as a token leader (i.e. without any real power), but he sent governors to Palestine to take care of his interests and, therefore, the real power was firmly held by Rome. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor (procurator) from AD 26 to 36. His job was to keep law and order in Palestine and make sure the Jewish people paid their taxes.



The Romans found the Jewish faith baffling. They were polytheist (i.e. they believed in many different gods) and the Jews were monotheists (i.e. they believed in one God). The Jews called their God 'Yahweh'. (The name 'Yahweh' is so sacred that it is never said out loud.) The Romans allowed the Jewish people to continue to practice their religion. They saw this as a way of keeping the people happy and so making it easier for them to govern Palestine.

The Sanhedrin was the religious governing body located in Jerusalem. It also served as the highest court of Jewish law in Palestine. The High Priest was president of the Sanhedrin and its members were made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, two religious groups who disagreed on many issues. (You will learn more about these groups in another lesson.)

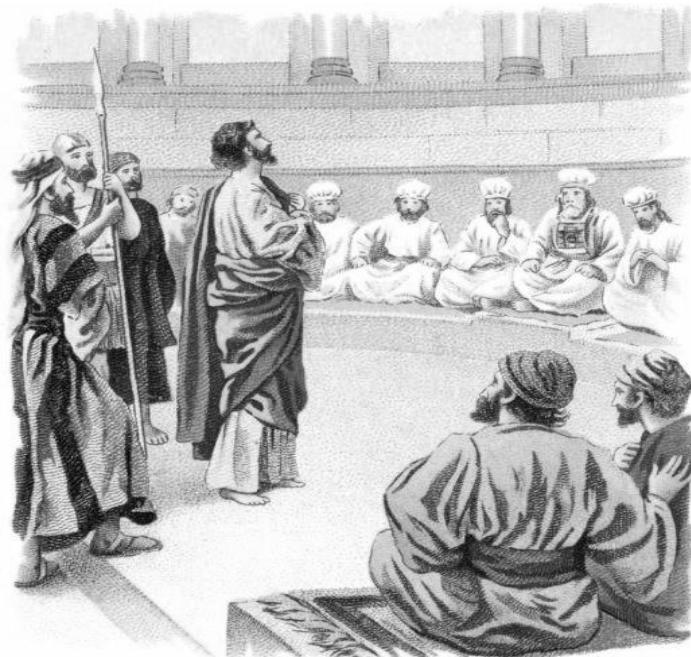


The Chief Priests take counsel together by James Tissot

The Romans allowed the Sanhedrin to:

- act as a law court
- punish Jewish people who broke the Jewish law
- keep its own guards, who maintained order.

This was quite a cunning plan on behalf of the Romans because they now had a situation where the two main Jewish groups were fighting and disagreeing amongst each other and inflicting punishment on their own people for not upholding the strict Jewish laws.

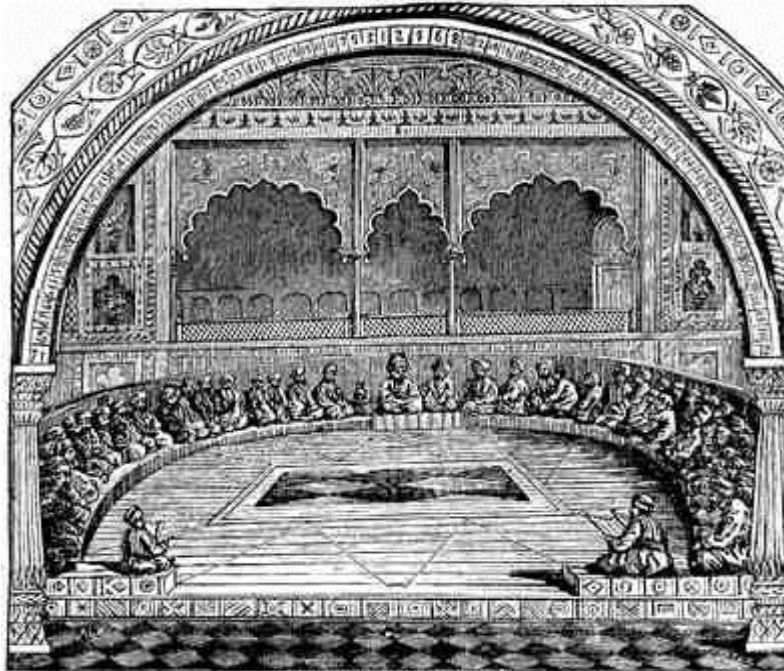


Questions:

1. What religion was Jesus born into?
2. What happened in 63BC?
3. Who was appointed king in 40 BC?
4. Who was made governor in AD 26?
5. What was the role of the Roman governor?
6. What was the Sanhedrin?
7. Who was the president of the Sanhedrin?
8. Who were the two main Jewish groups that were involved in the Sanhedrin?
9. What powers did the Sanhedrin have?
10. Why were the Romans happy to have a court like the Sanhedrin?

Question:

How do you think the political and religious structures might have impacted upon (affected) Jesus as he was growing up?



The Sanhedrin in Council.

Temple and Synagogue

In Jesus' time the Jews had two kinds of religious buildings or places of worship: the Temple in the city of Jerusalem and the synagogues in every town and village.

The Temple

The most sacred building for Jewish people was the Temple in the city of Jerusalem. The Temple in Jesus' time was a beautiful building. It was built of cream coloured stone and covered in gold. It was so big it could hold thousands of people at one time.

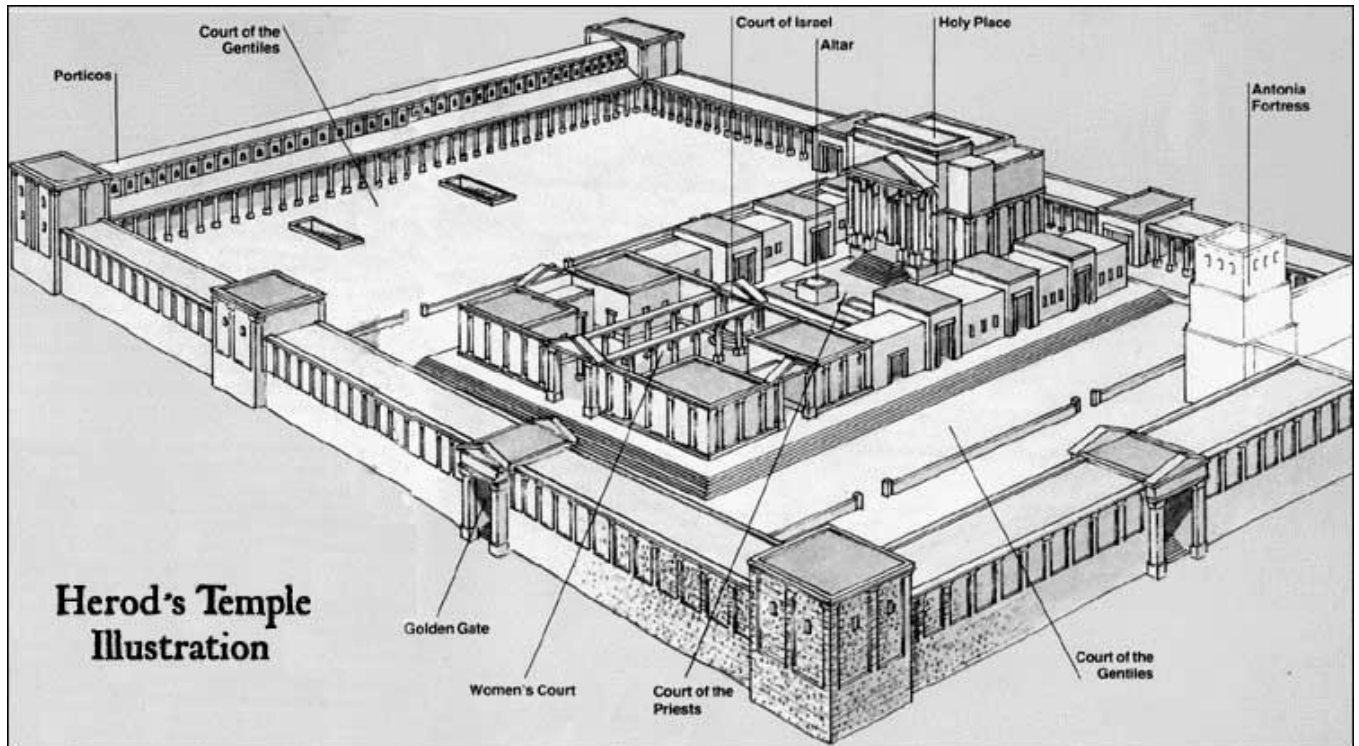


The Temple was at the heart of Jewish life. The Jews believed it was the dwelling place of God. They tried to visit the Temple at least once a year, during a Jewish festival. They came with their families to pray and to offer sacrifice to God.

In the Temple there was an outer courtyard called the Court of Gentiles. It was here that the Jews changed their Roman money into temple money. They bought birds and animals to be used for sacrifices.

The Temple priests took these offerings and sacrificed them on the altar in the Court of Priests. Only the priests were allowed into this area.

The most sacred part of the Temple was the Holy of Holies. A large curtain covered its entrance. No one except the High Priest, was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. He went inside once a year to offer sacrifice and pray for God's forgiveness for his people.



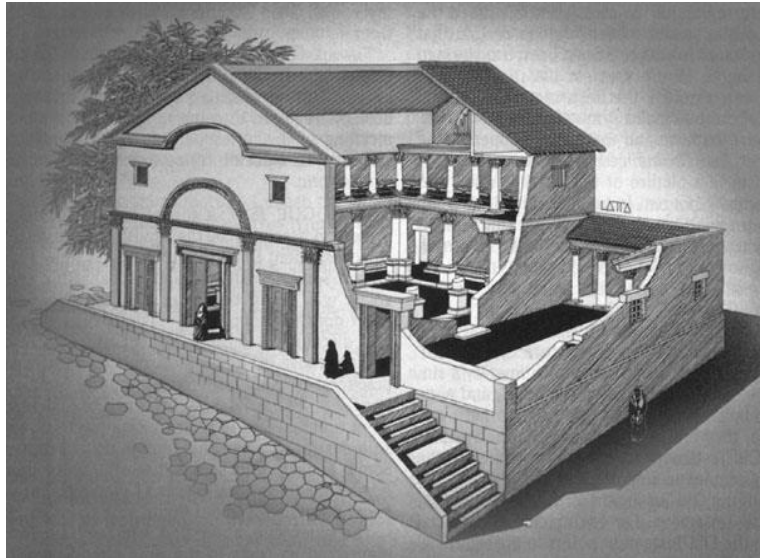
The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Part of one wall is all that remains today.



The Synagogue

In Jesus' time there was a synagogue in every town and village in Palestine. The synagogue was a meeting place for the Jewish community. Every week the Jews attended a service in the synagogue on Sabbath. They went to pray and listen to the scriptures.

The synagogue was a plain two-story building. It was small, holding between fifty and one hundred people at a time. It had a porch in front. Inside there were two doors. Women entered through one door and went upstairs to a gallery. Men and older boys went in another door and remained downstairs in the main part of the building.



During the Sabbath Service there were prayers and hymns. A rabbi, a teacher, read from a scroll of Jewish scripture. Then he gave a talk about the readings. The scrolls were treated with great respect because this was the Word of God for the Jewish people.

The scrolls were kept in a special part of the synagogue called the Ark. A curtain was drawn in front of the Ark, and a light burned near the Ark. The light was never allowed to burn out. It reminded the Jewish people that God was always with them. In front of the Ark a special candle holder held seven candles. It was called a menorah. The Sabbath service usually lasted an hour. There was a blessing at the end.

The Temple

Questions:

1. How often did Jewish people visit the Temple?
2. Where was the Temple?
3. What did the Temple look like?
4. What took place in the Court of the Gentiles?
5. Who was allowed to enter the most sacred part of the Temple?
6. Why was the Temple so important in Jewish life?
7. The Temple was finally destroyed in the year AD 70. What effect do you think the destruction of the Temple had on the Jewish people?

Activity – The Temple

Watch the DVD clip on the 'The Temple' . Your teacher will give you a worksheet to complete as you watch the DVD.

The Synagogue

Questions:

1. How often did Jewish people attend a synagogue service?
2. What did the front of a synagogue look like in Jesus' time?
3. Where did people sit in the synagogue?
4. What was kept inside the Ark?
5. What is a Menorah?
6. Describe what took place during a synagogue service in Jesus' time?

Activity: Jesus in the Synagogue

(Read Luke 4:16-22)

Jesus reads from a scroll of Jewish scripture in the synagogue in Nazareth. Your teacher may also show you a film clip of this scene.

1. From what scroll is Jesus reading?
2. What does Jesus say that upsets the people in the synagogue?
3. How do the people react to Jesus?

Religious Groups in the Time of Jesus

The Pharisees

God's law was important to the Pharisees.

In Jesus' time the Pharisees were holy men who studied God's law. They were not priests. They were ordinary family men who lived in the towns and villages of Palestine.



The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the local synagogues. They showed people how to keep God's law. They were very strict. They taught the Jews hundreds of small rules about the right way to live. The Pharisees carefully followed all these rules themselves. They expected everyone else to do the same. In fact they avoided anyone who did not follow the laws exactly as they did. The Pharisees called such people 'sinners' and kept well away from them.

The Pharisees did not co-operate with the Romans because the Romans did not follow God's law. The Pharisees ignored the Romans and concentrated on practicing their religion. They looked forward to the day when the Jews would be free of Roman rule.

The Sadducees



The Temple was important to the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were Jews from very rich families. Many of them were priests. They were the religious leaders of the Temple in Jerusalem. The high priest in the Temple was always a Sadducee.

Even though the Romans ruled Palestine, they allowed the Jews to practice their religion. They also allowed the Jews to judge their own people if they broke Jewish religious laws. The Jewish court of law was called the Sanhedrin. It was based in the Temple in Jerusalem. In Jesus' time most members of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees.

The Sadducees therefore had a lot of power over people's lives. The Sadducees did co-operate with the Romans, because they wanted to keep their position in the Temple.

The Zealots

The freedom of Palestine was important to the Zealots.

The Zealots were nationalists and hated the Roman conquerors. They believed Palestine was God's gift to the Jewish people – so they wanted the Romans out of the country at all costs.

The Zealots refused to co-operate with the Romans. They used violence to try and force the Romans out of Palestine. They were ready to go to war if necessary. To the Roman they were terrorists, but many Jews saw them as freedom fighters.



The Essenes



The Essenes lived in the desert where they followed a strict religious life, like the monks of later times. They were even stricter than the Pharisees and tried to keep the Jewish religion pure. They believed that they alone were the true people of God. A collection of scrolls was found in the desert at Qumran, north of the Dead Sea, in 1948. These are probably part of their library.

Task 1

Copy and complete the following passage:

The P_____ were holy men. They were not priests. They lived in town and v_____ all over Palestine. They showed the Jewish people how to obey G_____ L_____.

They were the religious leaders of the local s_____ and kept away from sinners.

The S_____ were Jews from very r_____ families. Many of them were p_____. They were the religious leaders of the T_____ in J_____. They also belonged to the Jewish court of law called the S_____. The Sadducees did co-operate with the R_____.

The Z_____ were ready to use v_____ to force the Romans out of P_____. They refused to c_____ with the Romans. To the Romans they were terrorists, but many Jews saw them as _____ fighters.

The E_____ lived in the d_____ near the Dead Sea where they followed a strict religious life, like the m_____ of later times. They tried to keep the Jewish religion p_____.



Task 2:

Are the following statements True or False?

- The Romans ruled Palestine
- The Sadducees were rich and powerful
- The Pharisees co-operated with the Romans
- The Pharisees were strict about God's law
- The Sadducees were leaders in synagogues
- The Pharisees avoided sinners
- The Sadducees co-operated with the Romans
- The Pharisees were leaders in the Temple
- The Sanhedrin was a Jewish court of law
- The Zealots co-operated with the Romans
- The Zealots used violence
- The Zealots admired the Sadducees
- The Essenes lived in towns and villages
- The Essenes were the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Task 3:

1. The Jews had to pay taxes to the Romans. How do you think a Sadducee and a Zealot would feel about paying taxes to the Romans? Give a reason for your answer.
2. If you had the choice of belonging to one of the religious group at the time of Jesus, which one would you choose and why?
3. Which group (if any) do you think Jesus was part of? Give reasons for your answer.

The Messiah

In the Old Testament a prophet was a holy person who had a special job to do. A prophet was a spokesperson for God.

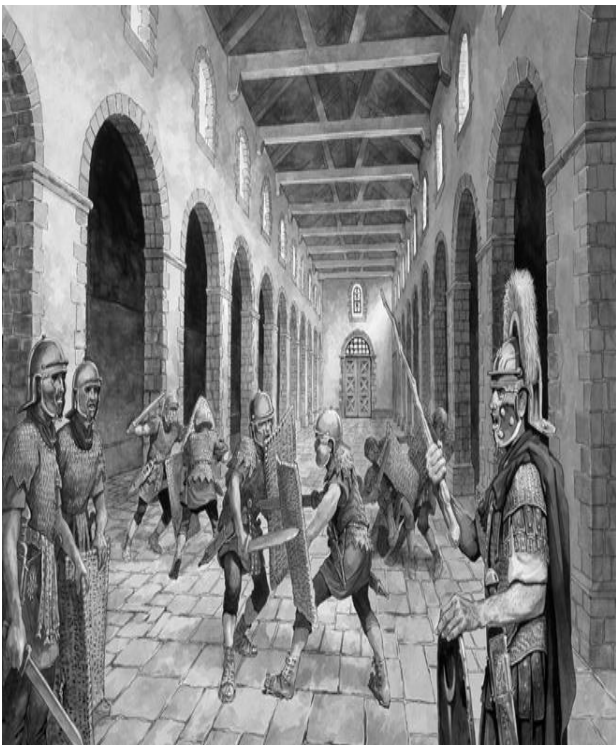
The Prophets

A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. There were many prophets in Old Testament times. Some of the more famous prophets were: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and Ezekiel. The Jewish people believed that God spoke to them through the prophets:



In the Old Testament the prophets:

- reminded the Jews about God's Law
- warned the Jews what would happen if they disobeyed God's Law.



All the prophets told the Jews that if they obeyed God's Law, then God would look after them. They would live in peace in their own country forever. The Jews wanted peace. They had suffered long enough. Over the years many foreign armies had invaded Palestine. The Persians, the Greeks and now the Romans rule Palestine. The Jews wanted their freedom. They realised that they needed a leader to set them free.

Messianic Expectations

The Messiah

The prophets had told the people that God promised to send a great leader. The Jews had a special name for a leader sent by God – a Messiah. The word Messiah means “anointed one”.

Long ago all great leaders were anointed, or blessed, with oil. To be anointed with oil was a sign that a person was sent by God to do good work. When King David was a young boy he was anointed with oil.



Opinions were mixed as to who the Messiah would be. Many believed that he would be a descendant of the great King David, a mighty leader born into luxury and wealth, who would bring them prosperity and liberate them from the Romans. Others looked forward to a saviour, a great warrior, who would use force if necessary in order to drive the Romans out of Palestine.

Today:

- Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah
- Jews believe the Messiah has yet to come

Task 1

Copy and complete the following passage:

In the Old Testament a p_____ was a s_____ for God. A prophet spoke on behalf of G____. The prophets told the J_____ that God would send them a great l_____.

The Jews called him the M_____. The word Messiah means a_____ one.

The Jews hoped the Messiah sent by God would be a strong ruler like King D_____ long ago.

They hoped the Messiah would lead them to f_____ and make them a great Jewish nation once more.

Task 2

Questions:

What was the role of a prophet in Old Testament times?

Name three prophets in the Old Testament.

Who invaded Palestine at different times before Jesus was born?

What does the word Messiah mean?

What does it mean to be anointed with holy oil?

Name one great Jewish leader who was anointed long ago.

What did the Jews expect the Messiah to be like?

What did the Jews expect the Messiah to do for them?

Who do Christians believe the Messiah is?

What do Jews believe about the Messiah today?