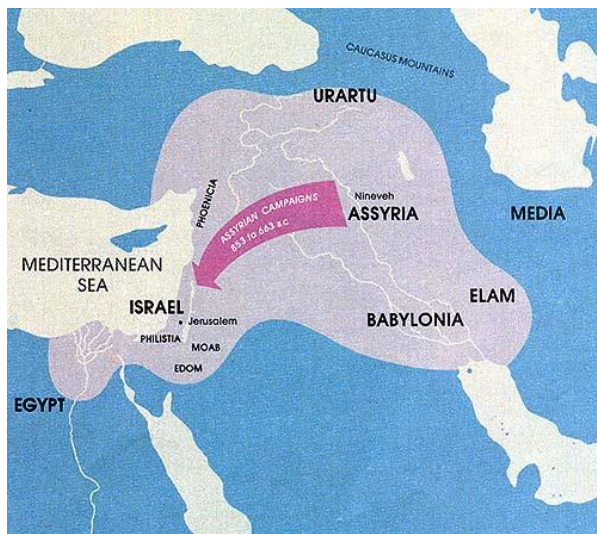


The First Five Empires of the World

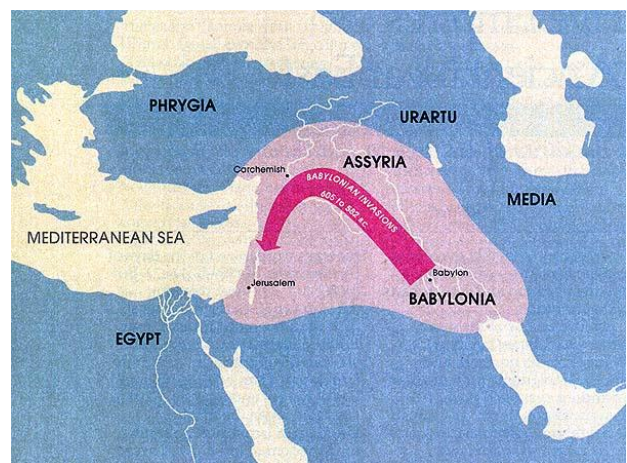
Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, Roman

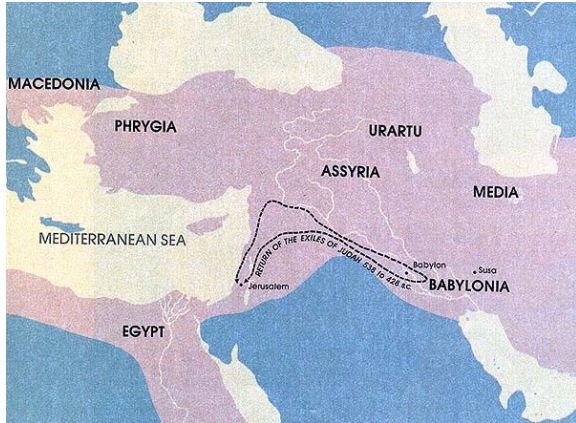
During the period of the second half of the Old Testament (Kings through Malachi) through the intertestamental time period (400 B.C. to Christ), the nation of Israel felt the powerful influences of five successive kingdoms and empires. Much of the fate of Israel was due to the position of its lands at the crossroads of the ancient world. Bordered on the west by the Mediterranean and on the east by the Arabian deserts, Israel lay directly on a virtual land bridge between Egypt and the lands of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. Not always a target for invasion itself, Israel became a victim of empirical armies passing through, marching in pursuit of the riches of Egypt and the dark continent.



By the 931 B.C., Israel had been divided into its northern and southern kingdom. A century after this division, **Assyria**, the world's first empire, moved to conquer lands in the west and south. By 805 B.C. Assyria ruled all of Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, Edom, Philistia, Babylonia, Media, and Persia. During the years when the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were overshadowed by Assyrian rule, there were many revolts. However, numerous Assyrian campaigns into the heart of the land crushed all but the later ones. In 722 B.C., Israel was taken and many of its people deported. Judah was virtually subdued in 701 B.C. (only Jerusalem remained unconquered), Babylon fell in 689, and in 668 B.C. Assyria placed a pro-Assyrian king on the throne of Egypt. In the east, Elam was devastated by the Assyrian army in 639 B.C. The capital of the Assyrian Empire was the ancient city of Nineveh.

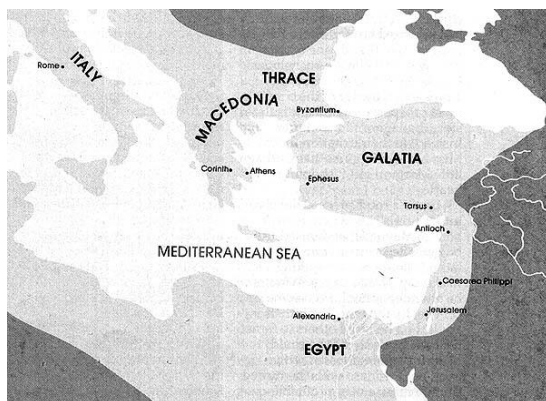
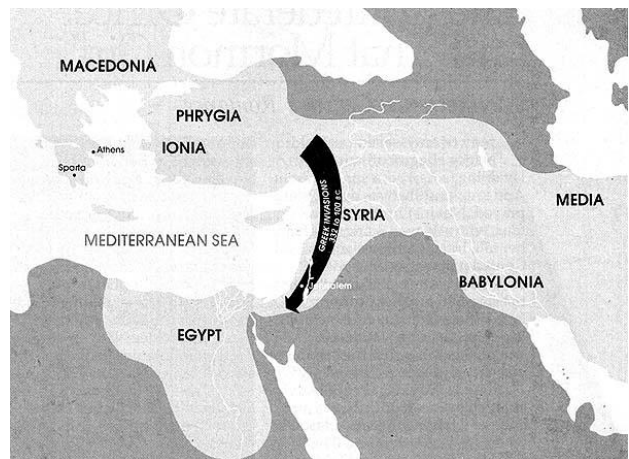
But Assyria's days were numbered. In 615 B.C., the Medes, along with their vassals, the Scythians, Urartu, and Phrygia (all located in what is today called Turkey), united with **Babylon** in a war destined to end Assyrian rule. The end came at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon thought of himself to be king of the world, controlling all of Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine. But he was never fully accepted as such in the area controlled by the Medes or in Egypt. Indeed, the Egyptians tried to stir up some of their neighbors against Babylon; and one of the results of this action was a Babylonian invasion that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews in 586 B.C.





Then, in 555 B.C., the **Persian** king Cyrus the Great united the Persians and the Medes; and over the years, as his strength and reputation grew, he expanded his empire until finally, in 539 B.C., he took Babylon in a bloodless coup and established Persia as the dominant force in the Near East. It was Cyrus whose decree permitted the return of the exiles of Judah to their homeland to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. His son Cambyses took Egypt in 525 B.C., making the Persian empire the largest the world had yet known. But this empire, too, was to pass away, during the “intertestamental period”—the time between the close of the Old Testament and of Christ.

During the years 499–400 B.C., the Greek-speaking Ionians of western Anatolia (Turkey) revolted against Persia and received aid from the Greek city of Athens. The next 170 years were to see Persians pitted against Greeks in such famous battles as those of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis, to name but a few. Finally, it was Philip II of Macedonia who united the **Greek** states and began the final thrust against Persia. Assassinated in 337 B.C., he was succeeded by his young son Alexander, who in 334 B.C. launched his campaign against the Persians. Alexander conquered all of Anatolia, Syro-Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia proper, moving as far east as the border of India, part of Afghanistan, and central Asia. His empire exceeded even the Persian empire in geographical area.



Alexander’s death at Babylon in 323 B.C. split his kingdom into smaller nations which vied for power. Consequently, warring armies crisscrossed the land, including Palestine, and the Maccabean rebellion arose—until, in 66–63 B.C., the Roman Pompey conquered much of the Near East. This set the stage for that which was to follow: in all the ancient world of ever-larger empires in succession, there would be no empire covering more territory than that of Rome, and never would there be more commerce and contact among the nations of the Old World. **Rome was to rule** for more

than five hundred years after Pompey. Into this period came the Messiah with the message of peace for all the world, and it was this world that shaped the rise and fall of the early Church.