

## THE JEWISH NATION BEFORE JESUS

Following the same procedure that we used in the previous chapter, in order to draw a true picture of the Jewish nation at the time of Jesus' birth, we have to delve into the past, just enough to understand in what kind of condition were they when the Messiah came.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the condition of the rest of the world before Jesus, and we concluded that God's choice to come at that time was an excellent one. The world and its people were ready to receive Him, even if they were unaware of it. In this chapter, we ask the question, what was the condition of the people from whom Jesus came? Was that condition the most suitable time for the Messiah to be born? Were His people ready to receive Him?

Our plan in discussing this important question is to describe God's behavior toward the Jews over the years, and their response. By this, we hope to show that the history of the Jewish people, even the early parts of it, contributed in shaping the condition of the Jews when Jesus was born.

God's many covenants :

One of the distinctions that the Jews often boast about is the fact that God chose them over all the other nations of the earth, and that He made a covenant with them. They trace their origin to Abraham, who was selected by God to be the man from whose descendants will come the savior who was supposed to save mankind from eternal death. God in calling Abraham, made a covenant with him that He will bless him, and make his children like the sand on the beach, and that in his descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This covenant was repeated by God five times to Abraham during his life, and to Isaac, and Jacob after him.

This was not the first covenant that God made with mankind. His first was with Adam and Eve, when He told them that as long as they

refrain from eating the forbidden fruit, they will live with Him forever, but if they did eat, they will surely die. The word "covenant" means an agreement between two parties, in which every party has to fulfill certain obligations. For the agreement to continue both parties have to honor their obligations. In this covenant Adam and Eve had to refrain from eating of that fruit. God's obligation was to provide for them and to love them. So when Adam and Eve did not honor their obligation, the covenant ceased to exist, and they were kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

The next covenant was between God and Noah and his descendants. This time God promised Noah and his children that He will not kill every living thing again as He did when He sent the flood. He also gave them a sign, the rainbow, which will remind them every time they see it, of God's covenant. We notice that God in this covenant did not require man to do anything. He was the one who voluntarily offered man this covenant. In the covenant that He made with Abraham, he asked him to be circumcised and all the males in his household, something that they had to do to remind themselves of God's promises to them, and also as a sign of their acceptance and commitment to that covenant.

The next covenant was with Moses and the people of Israel, in which God promised them that the angel of death will pass by their houses when he sees the blood on the door. The Israelites had to kill a lamb and sprinkle his blood on the posts of the door, and when they did, God did His part, and the angel of death did pass by their homes, sparing the lives of their first born, while killing those of the Egyptians.

Then the next covenant was with the Israelites after they left Egypt, when He promised to give them a land that "flows with milk and honey". This time, He required them to obey His commandments. In return, God promised them that he will always fight for them and secure for them the land that He promised.

The next covenant was with David, in which God promised him to

be with him and to help him in defeating the remaining nations which are threatening him and the people. David, to receive that had to obey the commandments. This covenant was repeated by God through His prophets to every king who ruled over Israel.

All the above covenants were steps toward the fulfillment of the most important covenant of them all; the one that God made to Adam and Eve before they were ushered away from the Garden of Eden, when He promised that " The seed of the woman will bruise the serpent's head". This covenant was made to Adam and Eve .i.e. to the whole human race.

Feeling that they are privileged, the Jewish people felt superior to other nations, for they, and they alone were chosen and adopted by God. The irony here is that they did not behave in a way that shows that they really appreciated this distinction. They behaved as a spoiled child who, not only took God's promise for granted, but decided to defy His authority, and disobey His commandments.

As we examine the Jewish religion, we find that it was predicated on a solid foundation provided by God; composed of a covenant, a law , and a system of rewards and punishments. To enjoy those rewards the Jewish people had to obey God. And most of the time, they decided not to. We also find that the Jews somehow felt that the goal of becoming religious, is to prosper materially, and to be blessed in every phase of their worldly existence. This is the positive motivation, but there was also a negative motivation, which was to escape God's wrath, and the severe punishment that came with it. So we can conclude that the underlying emotion in their relationship with God was fear, not love. The question that many ask, were the Jews justified in adopting these attitudes? The answer to this depends on whom you ask. Trying to be objective in this, one has to look at the facts. And when we do that, we find that there is some justification for those attitudes. As we examine the Old Testament, we find that all God's directions to the Jewish people as we said before were a complete set of laws given to them via the prophet Moses, and an extensive system of rewards and punishments, not

spiritual, but physical, not abstract, but concrete. The following passage is an illustration:

" If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last to the time of sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely. And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will remove evil beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. And I will have regard for you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, and will confirm my covenant with you. And you shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. And I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yolk and made you walk erect." (Lev 26:3-13).

This is the passage that describes the rewards that God promised His people if they obeyed Him. We do not need to say anything further about this motivation, except to recognize its nature and its scope. As anybody can see it deals exclusively with material and worldly things and it covers every facet of worldly living.

The punishments that God threatened the Jewish people with, were expressed with equal fortitude. Here it is;

" But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, I will do this to you: I will appoint over you sudden terror, consumption, and fever that waste the eyes and cause the life

to pine away. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it, I will set my face against you, and you shall be smitten before your enemies; those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. And if in spite of this you will not hearken to me, then I will chastise you again seven fold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass, and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield their fruit. Then if you walk contrary to me, and will not hearken to me, I will bring more plagues on you, seven folds as many as your sins. And I will let loose the wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, so that your ways shall become desolate." (Lev 26:14-21).

Again, no comment is needed to show how extensive and devastating these punishments are. One thing here which should be mentioned, is the fact that God threatened the Jews with these consequences for one purpose, to make them realize that they are being punished because they rebelled and sinned before their God, thus giving them a chance to repent of their sins and come back to Him. This is obvious in the fact that He gave these punishments in three stages, which means that He was giving His people many chances to come back to Him. In this case He was willing to forgive them, a concept that He talked about several times through His prophets.

Again, we ask, how strong was this message? The answer is, it couldn't be any stronger. This theme was repeated more than thirty times in the Old Testament, appearing in the following twelve books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 2 Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Amos. And while this theme was relayed to the people many times, we find that the spiritual consequences of obeying God, and of disobeying Him were not mentioned in the Old Testament, not even once. Again, we ask, why did God do that? Didn't He know that by repeating that theme, the Jewish people will adopt the worldly attitude that they adopted? He certainly did. The reason behind what He did, was His

awareness of the human nature, and its inability to obey Him. No matter what motive He provided for man, and even after He provided him with rewards and punishments that touches his immediate life, something that he was absolutely interested in, which should have been a strong motivation for him, he still disobeyed Him, and committed every imaginable, and unimaginable sin under the sun.

Because God knew that man will disobey, committing sin, every chance he gets, He devised a system by which man can obtain forgiveness. He accepted animal sacrifices as a sign of his repentance, so He gave him the chance to wipe the slate clean, and begin a new beginning trying to abstain from whatever sins he has committed.

As we examine the history of the Jewish nation, the chosen people, we find that they really did not appreciate what God did for them. Their history is a long story of defiance, rebellion, and disobedience. From the very beginning, they did not obey God, with the exception of few times when they were hit hard for their transgressions. The fact that when they obeyed they were blessed in every thing they did, and when they disobeyed they were severely punished should have convinced them to obey. Many have wondered, wasn't their behavior outrageous? They ask how can man be that stupid? Where is his intelligence, which God has bestowed on him? Don't wonder. This is exactly what the human race is still doing till now, so we cannot blame the Jewish nation, for behaving this way. It seems that sin is so appealing to man to the extent that he is willing to throw away his eternity to continue to sin. This is the greatest testimony for the unbelievable power of Satan over man. He obviously has tremendous power over him. He is so clever and so crafty, that no human being can resist him. He more or less brain washes people and gets them to obey him, even when they know that obeying him, is not in their best interest.

As we follow the story of the Jewish nation, we find that they almost always behaved the wrong way, which resulted in a punishment

administered by God. To summarize what happened, we will divide the history of the Jewish people into ten periods; the period of their father Jacob, the period that they spent in Egypt, the period they spent in the wilderness., the period they spent in Canaan under the rule of various judges, the period they became one kingdom ruled by one king, the period of the two kingdoms, the period of the Babylonians, the period of the Persians, the period of rebuilding, and finally the period of the Romans.

### 1) The period of Jacob:

Jacob, the son of Isaac, and the grandson of Abraham, and who was renamed by God, and called Israel, is the true father of the Jewish nation. Both Abraham and Isaac had other descendants, but Jacob had no other descendant. His twelve sons were the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. When we reflect on Jacob's life, we find that he was by and large a self made man, who depended on his intelligence and cunning to get ahead. We find that he robbed the birth right from his twin brother Esau, and cheated his father to get his blessings which were intended for his brother , by tricking him to believe that he was Esau. When he fled to live with his uncle, he used tricks to make the flock that he attended produce the kind that his uncle agreed to give him, as his wages for shepherding his sheep.

As he was going back to Canaan, he felt afraid of his brother, and spent the night wrestling with a man (who many either consider him God, or an angel). He was probably fighting God's message to believe in him, and surrender his life to Him. Jacob was resisting that because all his life he depended on himself, and it was extremely difficult for him to switch from complete dependence on himself to a complete dependence on God. Finally, God hit him hard and dislocated his hip, something that convinced Jacob finally to surrender his life to the Lord, and depend on Him to protect him from his brother.

Jacob spent the following years in Canaan. Life was quiet, with the exception of two episodes . the first was what happened to Dinah his daughter, who was raped by Hamor, the son of the top man in the

region; Shechem. When his father suggested that his son marries Dinah, her brothers agreed on one condition that all the males in their family should be circumcised. When they did, Simeon and Levy Dinah's brothers descended on them on the third day, when they were sore, and killed all of them. They did that without telling their father, who was upset when he knew. Here we see two of the fathers of Israel treacherously slaughtering tens of friendly young men who sought a relationship and a union with them. By this act they showed their true character. They were arrogantly independent, brutal, ruthless, unbending, rude, and taking the law into their own hands. They did not seek the advice of any one, even their father who at that time was still the undisputed ruler of the clan.

The other episode was that in which Joseph their youngest brother was betrayed by his own brothers, thrown in a dry well, and later sold to a caravan going to Egypt. Here again, we find the fathers of the Jewish nation hating their own brother, selling him as a slave, because of their jealousy of him. Joseph must have pleaded with them, he must have cried asking for their mercy reminding them that he is their young brother whom they are supposed to protect, but they refused to listen, and with a clear conscience they sold him to the Ishmailites. How cruel can you get? How brutal, and reprehensible?

Jacob must have learned few spiritual lessons from his life especially after he surrendered his life to God. As he had deceived his father, his uncle deceived him giving him Leah as his wife, instead of Rachel. He must have learned that leaning on God's arm is better than leaning on his own.

## 2. The period of staying in Egypt:

As the land of Canaan was hit hard with famine, and hearing that there is food in Egypt, Israel took his family, to the land of Egypt, where he saw Joseph, his favorite son, as the prime minister of Egypt, after he had thought that he was dead. Israel's family at that time was 75 people. They lived in peace with the Egyptians until the friendly Pharaoh died. His successor did not look favorably upon

them. Gradually they became his slaves whom he exploited in making the bricks that he needed in building his new cities. We don't know what was their religious condition, whether they knew God or not, but we do know that when their condition deteriorated, as Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all their male infants, they cried to God. At that time, Moses was born, and his mother putting him in the hands of God, made a basket, put him in it and put him in the Nile. He was picked up by Pharaoh's daughter, who loved him, and raised him as her own. When he knew his origin, he decided to help his people, and killed an Egyptian who was beating up a Jew. The next day he saw two Jews fighting, and trying to reconcile them, one of them mentioned the fact that Moses killed the Egyptian. When Pharaoh heard this, he sought Moses to kill him, so he fled. After forty years, God sent him back to Egypt, to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, to become an independent nation. But when Pharaoh refused, God hit him and the rest of Egypt with ten strong plagues, after which he let them go, and Moses led them to freedom. The seventy five people who came to Egypt 430 years ago, left Egypt, at least two million, if not more. ( The Bible puts the number of the walking men at 600,000 men).

### 3. The Period of staying in the wilderness:

This period began with a remarkable miracle. After Pharaoh let them go, he felt that he made a mistake. So, he followed the Israelites and reached them as they were lodged against the Red Sea. Pharaoh must have rejoiced when he saw that, for he was sure that the Israelites had no chance of escaping, and that they will prefer going back to Egypt, over dying in the desert. The Israelites cried to God, and Moses presenting the power of God as a part of reality to them, uttered his famous statement, " The Lord will fight for you, while you keep quiet". As he raised his arms, who responded by parting the waters of the Red Sea for them to walk on. After they crossed to the other side, and as Pharaoh's army pursued them, the water came back, and the whole army perished.

After this, they followed Moses happy that God saved them from

Pharaoh and his army. Their happiness didn't last long, for they began to complain about the lack of water, and when God provided them with water, they complained about the lack of bread, and He gave them manna from heaven. After this they rebelled because of the lack of meat, and God gave them quail. Every time God gave them what they wanted, they found something else to complain about.

Up to this point in time, God, out of His love, and understanding of the human nature, and of His awareness of their long suffering in Egypt, tolerated their rebellion on those issues, and gave them what they wanted. He did not punish them.

The first punishment that they received as a nation, happened while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. The Bible tells us that the people rebelled against Aaron, and forced him to make a golden calf, to worship. I know that this is unbelievable. How can these people forget the fantastic miracles that God did for their sake, beginning with the ten plagues that the Egyptians were hit with, while they were spared, and ending in His appearance on Mount Sinai, giving them the ten commandments in His voice. In between these, there were the miracles of parting of the Red Sea, and giving them water from a rock, and the manna and quail from heaven. How can they forget all that and worship a golden calf which they made with their hands. When Moses came down with the two tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments, and saw what they did, He threw the two tablets and broke them, and then he ordered the Levites to kill the offenders. On that day 3,000 men were killed.

The second time they were punished was when God decided to make them wander in the wilderness for forty years, thus delaying their entry into the promised land. The reason was that they did not believe what Moses told them, that God will help them to possess the land that He promised them. After Moses sent twelve men, one from each house, to spy the land of Canaan before they take it over. They came back, and told the congregation that the inhabitants are

too strong for them to conquer. Only Caleb son of Jephunneh, and Joshua son of Nun, differed with the rest expressing to the people their faith in God's power to help them take the land. The people did not believe them and cried all night, and murmured against Moses. The result was that God's anger was kindled against the whole congregation, and decided that they will not enter the promised land with the exception of Caleb, and Joshua.

This rebellious nation rebelled against God after that several times. Every time God was so angry with them that He wanted to destroy them, and every time Moses interceded on their behalf, and rescued them from the utter destruction that God intended.

#### 4. The Period of the Judges:

After they entered the land, and God showed them His power in helping them to conquer nations mightier than them, they still disobeyed Him several times, and were punished by God every time. This was the story of the people of Israel during that period as recorded in the book of Judges. They do what is evil in the sight of God, as a result He gives them into the hands of one of the peoples around them, and when they cry to Him, he sends them somebody who delivers them from their oppressor (someone like Deborah, Gedeon, Samson). After that they obey God for a period, then they do what is evil in the sight of God again, and He gives them into the hands of an oppressor again, and so on and so on. The story was repeated over and over again. Every time God punished them severely.

One of those times the Book of Judges, tells us that , He " delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years" (Jud13:1) You think that they should have learned from their experience, but they did not. One of the interesting facts is that the Israelites never completely destroyed the nations whose land they were to take, as directed by God. This was similar to their attitude of feeling sorry that they left Egypt, something that they expressed to Moses several times during their wondering in the wilderness, which really meant that they never

left Egypt. They may have left it physically, but they never left it spiritually. The remnants of those nations had a strong influence on them. They adopted many of their sinful ways, the worst of which was worshipping their gods, and provoking God to be angry with them. They were also used by God to punish the Israelites when they disobeyed Him.

### The Period of One Kingdom:

After the period of judges, the people asked the prophet Samuel to anoint a king for them. In asking for this, they were not only imitating the people around them, something that God did not like, but they were also rejecting God as their king. This represented a drastic event in their relationship with God. By this they showed a lack of confidence in God's ability to take care of them. When Samuel expressed his disagreement, feeling snubbed by the people, God told him, "they did not reject you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7)

The first king Saul, was the son of a wealthy farmer from the tribe of Benjamin called Kish. He grew up in Gebeah, a hill town, three miles north of Jerusalem. He was married and had a son called Jonathan. He was handsome and taller than most men. He was chosen by God, and anointed king by the prophet Samuel. After he was anointed, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he began to prophesy. The other tribes resented him as their king, but God provided him with the opportunity to consolidate his power, when he called on all tribes to send armed men to battle the Ammonites. When Saul conquered them, he became a hero, around whom the tribes united to become one nation. He soon found that his real enemy were the Philistines who had weapons made of iron while the Israelites had bronze weapons. In his war with them, Saul wanted Samuel to offer a burnt offering to God. When Samuel delayed his coming, Saul presented the offering himself, and the Spirit of God left him from that day. Then God asked Samuel to anoint David king, to succeed Saul. After the confrontation between David and Goliath, jealousy began to invade Saul's heart. From that time until he was killed in battle, Saul was consumed with one desire, to kill David. He did not live long

enough to do it, for he was killed at the age of 50, after he ruled Israel for twenty years.

David was thirty years old when he reigned over Israel, and while Saul did not do what was right in the sight of God, David was one of God's favorite people. He was an exceptional human being, to the extent that God said once, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will fulfil all my will" (Acts 13:22)

David reigned over Israel for forty years, which are considered by historians as the best years in the short lived kingdom of Israel. He was successful in every thing he did. He conquered his major enemies, especially the Philistines, and established the nation of Israel as the dominant force in that part of the world. The Jewish nation during his rule, was at its spiritual height, they worshipped God, keeping His commandments and statutes, and they were blessed in every phase of their life.

After David, his son Solomon reigned in his place. Solomon began a good beginning, by choosing wisdom over wealth or fame, when God asked him what he wanted. Solomon built a magnificent temple for God, and worshipped Him, but gradually he began to be fascinated by the world and the things of the world. As a result he lived a very extravagant life, in which he did not deny himself anything or any pleasure he can think of. He was also fascinated by women, and took many wives. The Bible tells us that he had 300 wives, and 700 concubines. His foreign wives made him worship their gods, and God was upset with him. It does not appear that Solomon repented before he died, for the Bible tells us that, "his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of david his father" (1Kg 11:4). God appeared to him and warned him that "if he or his descendants turned to other gods, Israel will become a proverb, and a byword among all peoples, and this house will become a heap of ruin" (1Kg9:7,8). This happened as the nation split into two warring nations after Solomon's death. So Israel remained one nation under one king only for one hundred years, twenty under Saul, forty under David, and forty under Solomon. A hundred years, united under one king, in the life of a nation that existed for more

than 1,200, is an awfully short period that points to the fact that God was not pleased with them, and on few occasions called them, a nation with a stiff neck, or a nation with a cruel heart, or whose heart is made of stone.

### The Period of the Divided Kingdom :

The kingdom which united the twelve tribes of Israel into one nation , was divided into two kingdoms, right after the death of king Solomon. The rebellion against the central rule of Jerusalem began in the days of Solomon, when he put heavy burdens on the people in order to finance his extravagant life style. But because he was a strong leader, and had the loyalty of the army, nobody dared to rebel against him. But as soon as his son, Rehoboam was declared king, those who were unhappy with Solomon, gathered themselves under the leadership of Jeroboam , who had fled from Solomon's wrath and went to Egypt, and came back to challenge his son. The result was that Solomon's son kept only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, while the ten other tribes followed Jeroboam, made him king, and called their new kingdom " Israel". The other kingdom which Rehoboam ruled was called "Judah".

These two kingdoms which were never united again, fought each other continuously, and were enemies that hated each other more than they hated the nations whom they conquered and took their land. As we examine the life of those two nations, we notice that the kingdom of Judah did not live the sinful life that the other kingdom lived. As we scan the Old Testament, we find that the kingdom of Judah remained independent for about 338 years before it was conquered by king Nebuchadnezzar in the year 597 B.C. In this period the people guided by their kings did what was evil in the sight of God for a total of 50 years. On the other hand when we look at the kingdom of Israel, we find that during the 200 years that they survived, not one day did they do what was right in the sight of God. Every one of their kings was worse than many of those who preceded him, as if they were competing with each other for the honor of who will aggravate the wrath of God more than the rest. No

wonder God terminated their kingdom only after 200 years, when Shalmaneser, king of Assyria in the year 722 B.C., conquered Samaria (named Israel before), and took many Israelites captives.

As mentioned before the name of the kingdom of Israel was changed to "Samaria". this name was used interchangeably with the name "Israel" by the writers who wrote the two books of kings, and the two books of Chronicles. The first time the word "Samaria" was used, was in 1 Kings 13:32, during the reign of King Jeroboam. But at that time it was the name of a city in the kingdom of Israel, however, it was named the capital of the kingdom, by Omri, the last king in the dynasty of Jeroboam. Omri and the kings who came after him allowed gentiles mainly Assyrians to live in Samaria, and worship in it. These established bazaars and built temples for many pagan gods, among these was Baal, which was worshipped by the Israelites under many of their kings. Idolatry was wide spread in Samaria that the Jewish prophets such as Elijah and Alisha considered it the center of idolatry in that region of the world. After the Assyrian conquest most of its leaders were taken to Assyria, and those who were left behind married gentiles and gradually lost their identity as Jews. They became a mixed breed. This is the reason why the Jews of Judah despised them, and had many wars with them. What deepened the hostility between them, was the Samaritans claim that they are the chosen people, not the Jews living in Judah. The final breach between them happened around the year 200 B.C., when the Maccabean revolt occurred. The Samaritans did not support the revolt, but bowed to the Assyrians. Their temple on mount Gerizim was spared and dedicated to the god Zeus.

So it appears from the above that ten out of the twelve tribes of Israel were lost very early in the life of the new nation, which stayed united under one king for only one hundred years. Only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained with God. At the time of Jesus, the Jews had been back in their land for about 500 years. The number of returnees was low in the beginning, and the nation was shaky, and insecure. As time went by, the number went up, and more stability began to show itself in the reborn nation. Those who came back were mainly from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but others

from the other ten tribes did go back, but in much smaller numbers. After this, the new re-established nation was subjected to another war because of their revolt against Artaxerxes III, which happened around the year 350 B.C. Then the country was conquered by Alexander in the year 332 B.C., then overrun by Antigonos in 315 B.C. a, and by Ptelomy I in 312 B.C., and again in 301 B.C. The next invasion happened in the year 218 B.C., when Antiochus III attacked the region and conquered it. In the year 167 B.C., he sent a new force which conquered Jerusalem and destroyed its wall, and issued his famous edict, according to which the Sabbath worship, circumcision, and the dietary regulations were banned. The Temple was stripped of all the objects needed for worship, and a new altar for the god Zeus was built. This triggered the Maccabean revolution, which ended in defeating the Antiochus forces, and restoring the proper worship to the Temple. This was followed by a period of confusion, a civil war, revolts and counter revolts. During that time, Rome began its struggle to dominate the world, and by the year 60 B.C. Rome had conquered the Greeks and became a world power. In the year 47B.C. Julius Caesar conquered the jewish state, and in the year 40 B.C., Horod the great was crowned in Rome, and was supposed to reign in the name of Rome.

These were the circumstances that existed when Jesus was born. The Jewish State was under Roman rule, with a puppet king loyal to the hated Rome, and a Roman governor who was the true ruler of the country. Rome demanded high taxes from the territories which they occupied, so the Israelites had to pay those taxes, which were collected by Jewish tax collectors, who were hired by Rome, and given some authority to collect those taxes. These abused their authority, and treated the people badly in collecting from them. Most of the people were poor, and disease ridden, and few were rich mainly those who cooperated with the invader.

Going back to the original question; as far as the Jewish nation is concerned,was this time the most suitable time for Jesus to be born? Looking at the goal of the coming of Jesus, we may be able to see some reasons behind His coming at that particular time. We know

that Jesus came to our earth, with one goal in mind; to offer us salvation. The only way He could accomplish that was by dying in our place, so we can get the Father's forgiveness. He was also supposed to be slaughtered like the lamb, which was slaughtered as a sin offering . Who was supposed to kill Him? And for what reason? Since He will not do anything, which would even come close to something that would justify this severe punishment, or justify His death, how is he going to be condemned? As we examine these questions, and review the condition of the Jews, we can see that the stage was uniquely set for the birth of Jesus, for salvation to happen, the way God planned it for the following reasons.

First, since Jesus will not do anything evil, He had to be condemned on religious grounds. And for this to happen, there should be a religious conflict between Him and the religious leadership of the nation. This happened because of the rigidity of those leaders, and their obsession with the letter of the law, something that was helped by many years of the slavery of the nation to foreign powers who were pagans and worshipped false gods. The Israelites under these conditions were prevented from practicing their religion. So once they got the chance they stuck to the letter of the law, and became rigid and unswerving in their wrong interpretations. Here comes Jesus, an outsider, a carpenter who did not learn in their schools, and who was never a disciple to any of them. Then that imposter begins to interpret the Law in a way that was drastically different from them. They began to see that their influence on the people is fading. Then he began attacking their teaching, and insulting them in public. As they saw that more people were following Him, they had to think of a way to put Him away. The public was ready. As a result of almost six centuries of suffering under foreign invaders, they were anxious for somebody to deliver them from the rule of Rome, as happened several times before in their long history. The Bible tells us that because of their extreme anxiety, they tried to crown Him king few times, while they already had a king, but He refused. The people were disappointed in Him for His refusal to be their earthly king, especially when they observed His supernatural powers, which He could have used to overcome the Roman garrison. So, when the

Scribes and the Pharisees condemned Him, the people did not object, because if they did, they could have prevented His condemnation, and interfered with His crucifixion.

Another possibility is that God used the Romans who were more ruthless, and cruel than many of the other nations who dominated the world before them, to provide the most agonizing, inhumane and humiliating method of execution the world has ever known, the crucifixion. God wanted to show His love for mankind by dying the most agonizing and humiliating death there is. Then there is also the thought that because He did not want Jesus' blood to be added to the long list of transgressions that the Jewish nation had committed, He arranged for a Roman governor to be the one to formally condemn Jesus to die, and a Roman army to execute Him. When He was on the cross, the first sentence that He said, was "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing". Jesus did not want to condemn any one, while He was on earth, because He came not to condemn the world, but to save it.