

AN INTRODUCTION TO SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

**History and Religion of the Jews in the
Time of Nehemiah, the Maccabees,
Hillel and Jesus**



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CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND SOURCES

The purpose of this chapter is to orient the reader to the history of the people of Judah and the Jewish Diaspora, for the seven hundred years from the mid-6th century BCE to the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt about 135 of the Common Era, what is often referred to in Jewish history as the Second Temple period. It will give you a broad overview of this period of history and provide a chronological framework of events, since the other chapters are more topical and will deal only with some aspects of the history of Judaism.

1.1 Historical and Religious Background

In this section, you will be given a quick survey of Judahite history from the time of the Israelite monarchy to the period after the fall of the temple and Jerusalem to the Romans. Although the detail of this history may be quite new to many readers, enough information is given to provide a context for Chapters 2–5 which describe ‘currents’ within Judaism. When you read Chapters 2–5, you should refer to ‘Chronological Chart’ and then back to this chapter to see how the specific events resonate with events of Jewish history.

1.1.1 The Period of the Israelite and Judahite Monarchies

The origins and early history of Israel are very much debated at the moment (see Grabbe 2007 for a thorough account of this debate and its consequences). Some of this history comes from

biblical books that scholarship has not regarded as historical for the past two centuries. For example, the story of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The story found in the books of Samuel and Kings has often been taken as substantially historical by many scholars until recently. Now, however, there is a good deal of debate about even such major figures as David and Solomon. There is general agreement that we know a fair amount about the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah during certain periods, though that information often comes from outside the biblical text. The history of ancient Israel raises some of the same questions about historical knowledge as we shall encounter with the history of the Second Temple, but the subject is too large to debate here and is, in any case, outside the concerns of the present book.

The period of the 'First Temple' (the Israelite and Judahite monarchies) came to an end in 587/586 BCE when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, executed some of the royal family and took others captive, and destroyed the temple. Some of the people were also deported, though the actual figures preserved in the biblical literature (e.g. Jeremiah 52) suggest only a minority of the population. Those deported may have been some of the ablest and leading members of the society, but the bulk of the population apparently remained in the land, though many people died in the war and from disease or related causes in the wake of the Babylonian conquest. Judeans had already been deported to Babylonia in the captivity of 597 BCE, and the new deportations added to them. Indications are that this community in Babylonia grew and expanded over time to become a significant Jewish population outside Palestine. Some of those returned in the early Persian period, but evidently the bulk of the deportees and their descendants remained in Babylonia. For the next half century, the Jews in Palestine were evidently in a low state, with Jerusalem desolate and the region administered from Mizpah. This is often referred to as the 'exilic period'. During this time Judah was under the rule of the Neo-Babylonian kings, primarily Nebuchadnezzar, Amel-Marduk, and Nabonidus.

1.1.2 Persian Rule

Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in October 539 BCE. This was the official founding date of the Persian empire which continued for more than two centuries. Some scholars have argued that the Persian period was one of the most productive for Hebrew literature. During these two centuries, earlier Israelite literature and traditions were edited and others were written, or so many scholars think; if they are right, this was one of the most prolific times of Jewish literary activity. The difficulty is that this is a very obscure period in the history of the Jews.

Two biblical books claim to describe the Jews of Palestine in the Persian period; these are Ezra and Nehemiah. We also have the prophetic books of Zechariah (especially chs 1–8) and Haggai. As well be discussed under ‘Sources’, not everything in these books is credible, but even if we could accept every word of these two books, we would have enough information to write only a fraction of Jewish history during this time. Much of the Persian period is blank for Jewish history, however you look at it. If a good deal of the work of writing and editing the Hebrew Bible went on during this time, it is hardly surprising that we know nothing about it. Yet we are not completely ignorant: for some parts of this 200-year period we have a fair amount of information, and for other parts we have some outline information provided by archaeology and other sources.

As noted in the previous section, many Jews were left in the land by the Babylonians. The population was not large, however, because many had died as a result of the Babylonian conquest and the hardships caused by it. When the Persians defeated the Babylonians and took over their territories, Judah came under Persian rule, but there was no fighting in Palestine, and the Jews were not particularly affected. Over the next decades some Jews returned from Babylonia, though the numbers were probably small, and the temple was rebuilt, probably by about 500 BCE. We then hear little until the middle of the fifth century BCE when Nehemiah was allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the city. Why it was necessary to rebuild

the walls at this time is not clear, though there is no evidence that they were needed for defence. (If they had been needed for defence, they would not have been left in disrepair for so long.) The existence of walls would, however, make it easier for the leaders to have oversight of and control the population, as when Nehemiah shut up the gates of the city on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13.15–22). It looks as if this was Nehemiah's goal: to make the people conform to a religious ideology of his own. It is clear from the book of Nehemiah that many resisted this aim, though as the duly appointed governor he could enforce conformity. As soon as he left, however, many ceased to follow his dictates (Nehemiah 6.17–19; 13).

The persona of Ezra is a puzzle. He is presented in Ezra 7 as not only as a scribe and bringer of the law but also as a powerful governor, even satrap, who had great authority over the whole region of the Persian empire west of the Euphrates. Yet his actions in Ezra 8–10 do not always show him as a powerful figure but almost as a weak one who needs others to suggest what to do. Furthermore, he brings enormous wealth with him to Jerusalem which is far in excess of anything that the Persians might have bestowed upon an important temple in Babylonia, much less the temple of a small people on the edge of the empire. There is also the problem that Ezra is not the primary lawgiver in other traditions. For example, Ben Sira 49.11–13 ascribes the main activities in Persian Judah to Joshua, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah, while 2 Maccabees 2.13 makes Nehemiah the main collector of scriptural writings; in neither case is Ezra mentioned at all. It seems likely that the Torah (the Pentateuch or the first Five Books of Moses) was composed late in the Persian period, but by whom and how it was promulgated is not presently known. We know that a high priest named Jehohanan was in office not long after this, from a letter preserved among the Elephantine papyri (see below). Nehemiah had died or returned to Susa, and the high priest was once again in charge.

We also have documents from a Jewish military colony living on the island of Elephantine in Aswan area of the Nile in the late fifth century BCE. They had their own temple, in spite of the fact that this is forbidden in the Pentateuch, but there is no

evidence that they had the Pentateuch, even though they evidently observed certain tradition of Jewish laws and customs. About 410 BCE their temple was destroyed by a mob of local Egyptians, instituted by the priest of the god Chnum. Since Chnum was a ram-headed god, it may be that they were offended by the Passover celebrations. The Elephantine Jewish community appealed to the high priest and the Jerusalem community for support (the letter in the Aramaic *lingua franca* of the Persian empire) is preserved, but we have no indication that the high priest replied to the letter. Unfortunately, the Aramaic documents relating to the Jewish colony come to an end in Elephantine about that time, and we do not know the fate of the community (documents continued into the Greek period but do not relate clearly to the Jewish military colony).

As for the Jews in Palestine, our sources also come to an end by 400 BCE, and we have no further information except for archaeology, though we do know something of the history of events in the general region. The Egyptians rebelled against Persian rule during the fourth century, and we read in Greek histories of clashes between the Persian army and the Egyptians. Phoenicia on the coast was a staging area for ships transporting troops to fight and for naval bases supporting the military ships. Since Judah was isolated up in the hill country, however, we do not have any evidence that they were affected in a significant way by these events. From all we can tell they continued to live much as they had before and began to recover their economy and prosperity.

1.1.3 *The Greek Conquest and Ptolemaic Rule*

The next major events affecting the Jews around Jerusalem occurred with the coming of the Greeks. In 334 BCE Alexander led a Greek army against the Persian empire. Darius III failed to stop him at Issus in Asia Minor the next year. Most of Syria submitted to the Greeks at this point, except for two cities: Tyre and Gaza. Alexander besieged Tyre and took it after seven months. He then moved down the coast to Gaza and took it, before marching into Egypt. There is a legend that he also came to

Jerusalem to destroy it but instead prostrated himself before the high priest. This deserves little credence – the historians of Alexander were very interested in such things and would have reported it – but it was probably during Alexander’s progress south along the coast that a representative of the Jewish people came to him and made the necessary submission to this new conqueror. In doing so, the Jews would have been just another small country or ethnic group of the many within the Persian empire. The final defeat of Darius III came in 331 BCE. Alexander himself died in 323, and for the next 40 years his generals (the *Diadochi* or ‘Successors’) fought over his empire. In 301 BCE an agreement gave Syro-Palestine to Seleucus I, but Ptolemy I made a quick excursion from Egypt and seized the region. This began a century of Ptolemaic rule of the Jews.

The early part of the Greek period is not much better known than the Persian period. We know little during the 40-year period of the *Diadochi* or the first couple of decades of Ptolemaic rule. A few pieces of miscellaneous information may be fitted in somewhere, but their dating and even their authenticity is very much up in the air. Ptolemy (I?) took Jerusalem on the Sabbath day (when? why? what were the consequences?), and the high priest (and governor?) Ezechias (Hezekiah) came to Ptolemy, bringing a large group of settlers with him (according to Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.22 §§ 185, 187):

Among these (he says) was Ezechias, a chief priest of the Jews, a man of about sixty-six years of age, highly esteemed by his countrymen, intellectual, and moreover an able speaker and unsurpassed as a man of business. Yet (he adds) the total number of Jewish priests who receive a tithe of the revenue and administer public affairs is about fifteen hundred.

It is in the early part of the Hellenistic period that new sources of information start to become available to supplement and form a corrective to the literary sources. Some are in the form of inscriptions and economic documents. Not too many of these are preserved, though the few we have are valuable. The most important source revealed by archaeology is the *Zenon papyri*. This is the archive belonging to Zenon who was the agent

of Apollonius, Ptolemy II's minister of finance. In 259 BCE Zenon went on a year-long tour of Palestine and southern Syria on his master's business. During the course of that tour he met and dealt with a variety of officials in Palestine, and he continued to correspond with some of them for a number of years afterward. Thus, his personal archive constitutes an important collection of letters and documents which give us a window into the society of Judah and the surrounding region at that time.

One of the figures we meet in the pages of Zenon's correspondence is Tobias who was head of a military colony (called a 'cleruchy') just over the Jordan river. He was a local leader or sheik of considerable power and influence whom the Ptolemaic government made use of in its financial and political administration. Although Tobias' cleruchy was made up of soldiers from a variety of ethnic groups, he himself was Jewish and apparently from a family which had constituted a local power for perhaps several centuries. Some of Tobias' descendents evidently went on to make their mark in Jewish history in the next century or so.

Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.4.1–11 §§157–236) reports a semi-legendary story of Joseph who was Tobias' son or grandson. Joseph was the nephew of the high priest Onias II. For some reason, Onias was refusing to pay a particular sum of tribute to his Ptolemaic overlords. We are not told why, but scholars have inferred that Onias was pro-Seleucid. As noted above, Palestine and Syria had been assigned to the Seleucid empire in 301 BCE, but the Ptolemies took it over and would not yield it. Thus, throughout the entire third century the Seleucids fought a series of 'Syrian Wars' against the Ptolemies to take southern Syria and Palestine under their rule. They did so with a certain legal claim though, as so often in international politics, might makes right and possession is nine-tenths of the law. The Ptolemies had control of Syro-Palestine and aimed to keep it, but they had to defend it periodically with military force. Onias II may have thought that the Seleucids were about to succeed and took the opportunity to withhold the expected tribute.

Whatever Onias' motives, Joseph Tobiad used his actions as an occasion to advance himself in the eyes of both the Jewish

community and the Ptolemaic government: he went to the Ptolemaic ruler, apologized for the actions of the high priest, and paid the tribute. Joseph then bid for and obtained the tax farming rights to the whole region. The Greeks and later the Romans found that the most effective way to collect taxes on goods and sales was by selling the rights to private individuals ('tax farmers') for a specified sum. The would-be tax farmers had to bid against one another, and the right to collect the tax went to the highest bidder. By shrewd bidding and ruthless collection Joseph made himself rich and, at the same time, a powerful figure who was close to the Ptolemaic rulers. It is doubtful that he was tax farmer over the whole region, as the semi-legendary account claims, because we would probably have heard of him in other sources, but he was probably a powerful figure locally, perhaps over Judah or perhaps even a larger region in Palestine.

After some two decades of success, his youngest son Hyrcanus outmanoeuvred his father and took away the tax farming rights from him. We know of this Hyrcanus Tobiad because he had a large sum of money on deposit at the Jerusalem temple (2 Maccabees 3.11). Joseph and Hyrcanus' other brothers were incensed at this but could do little about it. However, things turned their way after not too long a time had passed because the Seleucids finally took Palestine away from the Ptolemies in 200 BCE. It looks as if the Tobiad family became split along political lines, with Joseph and the majority of his sons deciding that the future lay with the Seleucids, whereas Hyrcanus remained loyal to the Ptolemies. When Antiochus III defeated Ptolemy V in 200 BCE and finally obtained Syro-Palestine, Hyrcanus was left high and dry. He retired to the ancestral home in the Transjordanian region and lived there by plundering the local Arab tribes for the next quarter of a century until his death when Antiochus IV came to the throne.

1.1.4 The Seleucids and the 'Hellenistic Reform'

This section and the next one will relate the 'Hellenistic reform' and the events preceding the Maccabean revolt in a good deal

of detail. The reason is the importance of these events for subsequent Jewish history and for scholarly debate. The Seleucid ruler Antiochus III is known in history as Antiochus the Great. He suffered a major defeat at Raphia in 217 BCE fighting against the Ptolemies but came back in less than 20 years to gain the goal his ancestors had claimed for a century: in 200 BCE he took Syro-Palestine. The Seleucid empire now stretched to the borders of Egypt. The Jews themselves seem to have been by and large pro-Seleucid and had opened the gates of Jerusalem to Antiochus. There must have been some fighting in the city because damage was done, as mentioned by Ben Sira (50.1). Antiochus rewarded the Jerusalem establishment by granting the traditional right to practise their religion and by remitting taxes for a short period of time to enable them to repair the damage to their city (*Antiquities* 12.3.3–4 §§ 138–46; quoted at 2.5). The change to Seleucid rule looked as if it would be good for the Jews.

Encouraged by his success against Egypt Antiochus III went on to spread his empire to the north. Alas, at this very same time the Romans were extending their influence into the East. Antiochus was defeated at Magnesia in 190 BCE and required to pay heavy war indemnities, to send one of his sons to Rome as a hostage, and also to hamstring his war elephants. He lived only a few more years and was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV in 187 BCE.

A strange episode took place under Seleucus, if there is any truth in 2 Maccabees 3. Seleucus was informed that a good deal of money was kept in the Jerusalem temple treasury, so he sent one of his officers to confiscate it for the royal coffers. This seems not to have happened, though. According to 2 Maccabees, this was because of a miracle in which an angel of God suddenly intervened. Exactly what happened is unclear, since few of us are willing to take the account of 2 Maccabees at face value. Why would Seleucus attempt to seize the temple money? One of the reasons seems to be that a large deposit of Hyrcanus Tobiad's was being kept there (2 Maccabees 3:11) and, as noted above, Hyrcanus was probably pro-Ptolemy and thus regarded as an enemy of the state by Seleucus. Why Seleucus' minister

failed to take the money remains a matter of speculation, assuming that the story is not sheer legend.

When Seleucus IV died in 175 BCE, his brother Antiochus was just returning from Rome where he had been a hostage. Seleucus' own son (also called Antiochus) was still a minor, and the older Antiochus took the throne as Antiochus IV. Contrary to the impression given by many surveys and introductions to this period of Jewish history, Antiochus did not immediately begin to 'Hellenize' all the peoples under his rule nor to force the Jewish people to conform to some sort of mad scheme he had cooked up. He was not a cultural zealot who wanted to impose Greek forms on the Near Eastern peoples, nor was he demented or deluded. On the contrary, Antiochus was like most rulers in being interested in two things: money and power. He was also evidently a very able ruler, though history was against him. He hoped to expand his territory and influence like his father had done but – also like his father – he had to reckon with the power of Rome.

The question of Hellenization is a complicated one, and it is too often reduced to a caricature. Hellenization was a centuries-long process of synthesis and diversification. It was not the simple imposition of Greek culture on the natives; indeed, the Greeks on the whole did not impose their culture but rather jealously preserved their 'superior' political and cultural position in Near Eastern society. It was mainly the natives who sought to gain status and advantage by learning Greek and adopting Greek customs. The Near Eastern peoples adopted Greek elements that were useful to them, and sometimes adapted them to their own needs as well. Also, a lot of Greek influence spread by osmosis rather than by deliberate acts of 'cultural imperialism'. The lower section of the administration was mainly composed of native peoples, and much of the work of the bureaucracy was carried on in bilingual mode – Greek by no means ousted cuneiform in Babylonia or Demotic in Egypt or Aramaic in Syro-Palestine; however, those who could gain a Greek education – and this was mainly the upper-class of the indigenous peoples – usually found that it conferred benefits. In time Greek identity

became more a matter of language and education than of ethnic origin, but this took many decades.

Hellenistic culture was a synthesis of Greek and Near Eastern. Greek forms did not replace native culture; they rather supplemented it. That is, Greek forms and Near Eastern forms flourished side by side, and only gradually did they begin to intermix in a syncretistic sort of way. To be Hellenistic was not to be Greek; Hellenization was *sui generis* – it was a true synthesis of Greek and Near Eastern into something new. Indeed, much that was characteristic of the Hellenistic empires had more in common with the old Near Eastern empires than with classical Greece. The adoption of Greek elements varied greatly, with the upper-class taking on more of the Greek and the masses of the people borrowing less. Nevertheless, Greek influence percolated through the entire culture as time progressed so that much which came from the Greeks was no longer recognized as being borrowed but was thoroughly assimilated. The Jews were no exception to this process but a full part of it.

So Antiochus did not set out to be an apostle of Greek culture. Rather he spent the first five years of his reign consolidating his power and resources, then he launched the first of his campaigns to extend his empire. This was where his mind was focused, and none of his actions suggest differently. During this time, however, the Jewish high priestly family developed an internal rivalry. The high priest Onias III, the son of Simon II, had a brother named Jason (his Greek, with Joshua his Hebrew name). Jason went to Antiochus and offered him money to be given the high priesthood. The amount offered was 440 talents of silver. The wording of 2 Maccabees 4.8, which gives us this information, suggests that it represented an increase in the annual tribute. Antiochus readily agreed, and why not? Jason was evidently acceptable to him, it was no skin off his nose as to who was Jewish high priest, and he got much-needed cash for his coffers.

Jason also asked for something else, for which he paid an additional 150 talents (apparently per annum). This was the opportunity to build a gymnasium, enrol the inhabitants of Jerusalem as citizens, and draw up an ephebate list. 2 Maccabees 4 which

describes this is not explicit, but it would have been obvious to readers of the time: Jason he had obtained permission to make Jerusalem into a *polis* or Greek city. The government of such a city was considered to be in the hands of the citizens, so citizenship was very important and a considerable privilege. Not everyone who lived in the city was a citizen. Jason was given the right to draw up the citizenship lists, and one suspects that those enrolled paid for the prerogative. The youth of the city were also added to lists of potential citizens called the 'ephebate' and went through a process of formal initiation. The gymnasium was not just a place of physical exercise. It was the educational and cultural centre of the city. The young men of the city would be educated here in language and literature, as well as physical sports and military skills, preparing them for citizenship. It also served as a social centre where people would gather to talk and watch the athletic contests. Building a gymnasium was essential to establish Jerusalem as a Greek foundation.

Yet this did not mean an essential change to the Jewish religion. According to 2 Maccabees 4, Jason was an exceedingly wicked man. We can agree that he usurped the priesthood from his brother, but beyond that we have no evidence of any breach of Jewish religious law. This is quite evident when we read 2 Maccabees 4 carefully: the narrator uses much emotive language, but he cannot point to any specific transgression of law. On the contrary, the temple continued to function, the required daily offering was offered up as usual, people brought their sin-, free-will, and well-being offerings as they had always done. Indeed, it was not in Jason's interest to make substantial changes to the cult because this was his financial and power base. He had to take the people with him, and it seems clear that he did. All indications are that the people of Jerusalem as a whole supported his 'Hellenistic reform'.

One often reads that 'the pious were outraged' by what Jason did. Unfortunately, such statements are sheer fantasy. We have no indication of any active opposition whatsoever to the Hellenistic reform. It *might* have been that some people did not like it; it would be surprising if everyone approved. Nevertheless, we have no evidence of any opposition – the sources are silent on the

subject. This is not accidental, because at a later stage there was opposition to certain actions. This shows that the people were not indifferent to anything which threatened their religion. The silence with regard to Jason is eloquent testimony to his remaining true to the existing religious cult. His changes were political, not religious.

There were some changes that affected the Jews, inevitably, because this brought Jerusalem and its people into the wider Hellenistic world. For example, when some games were held in Tyre and attended by many foreign representatives, Jason sent a sum of money in honour of the celebrations. According to 2 Maccabees 4.18–20 Jason sent the money for pagan sacrifices. The money was not used for such sacrifices, however, but was instead spent on warships. The text claims that this was the decision of the messengers carrying the money to Tyre, but this is incredible. Jason would have chosen his messengers carefully, knowing that they carried a considerable sum. It is most likely that the money was not meant for sacrifices in the first place but to be spent on triremes – and this was simply an anti-Jason calumny.

Yet 1 Maccabees 1.15 claims that some Jews attempted to remove the marks of circumcision. The reason for this would have been that athletes competed in the nude, and some Jewish athletes were embarrassed by their circumcision. No doubt there were a few examples of this happening, but it is unlikely to have affected many. There were not many Jewish international athletes, and any such operation to become ‘uncircumcised’ would have been quite painful (see the description in the medical writer Celsus 7.25.1). It would have taken considerable motivation to undergo such a process. The number of those disguising circumcision was likely to have been very small.

Jason’s new reforms did not last long. After about three years, a man from another priestly family did the same trick as Jason; Menelaus (whose brother Simon was ‘captain [*prostatēs*] of the temple’) was sent as a messenger to Antiochus IV. He took the opportunity to proffer Antiochus an even larger bribe than Jason had done. Once again Antiochus saw no reason to refuse such a generous offer, and Jason was deposed in favour

of Menelaus. Menelaus' reach was greater than his grasp, however, and he failed to pay the amount he promised. Considering that he offered an addition 300 talents on top of what Jason was paying, it is unlikely that Judah could produce so much surplus wealth, especially if it was meant to be an annual payment.

Menelaus tried to solve his problem by bribing some of Antiochus' ministers, allegedly by selling some of the golden temple vessels. The truth of this allegation is difficult to judge now, though it is possible this was only a rumour. What is important is that the people believed it, and they reacted strongly to what they regarded as a breach of religious law. They collected in the streets in protest. Menelaus had gone to Antioch, leaving his brother Lysimachus in charge. Lysimachus brought out a large number of his own men to break up the riot; instead he was killed and his followers routed. Then the Council sent a delegation to protest to Antiochus. Remember that this was the Council (*gerousia*) who governed the 'Hellenistic' city of Jerusalem founded by Jason. In other words, it was evidently some of the so-called 'Hellenizers' who dispatched this mission to Antiochus to protest a violation of religious law. As said before, the people were very concerned about the temple and the proper conduct of the cult. The fact that they supported the initial Hellenistic reform of Jason did not affect their view of the Jewish religion which they still strongly supported. The 'Hellenistic reform' was not a matter of religion but of culture. By means of further bribes, however, Menelaus escaped any punishment and retained his office.

1.1.5 The Maccabean Revolt

It was a couple of years after Menelaus took over the high priesthood, in late 170 or early 169 BCE, that Antiochus proceeded with the plan for which he had spent five years preparing. He invaded Egypt (though in response to an Egyptian attack). It may be that he was not trying for direct conquest but a dynastic change favourable to himself. If so, he succeeded. Ptolemy VI was defeated and then agreed to marry Antiochus' daughter.

Antiochus accomplished all his goals and returned in triumph with a great many spoils. Although the accounts in both 1 and 2 Maccabees are plainly confused, it seems that it was while on his way back from Egypt that he visited Jerusalem, was taken into the temple itself by Menelaus (in violation of the law), and raided the temple treasury to the tune of 1800 talents.

In a short period of time, the rival figures of the Ptolemaic royal family undid Antiochus' grand vision. Therefore, only about a year later Antiochus felt the need to advance against Egypt once again in the spring of 168. This time things did not go so well as before. The Romans had been watching Antiochus and were concerned that he not extend his influence further. A Roman delegation was in the region. Waiting until they had received the news of the battle of Pydna, which the Romans won, the delegation met Antiochus and demanded that he withdraw. He had no choice, for he was not prepared to confront Rome. In July 168 he started back to Syria. In the meantime, events in Judah had come to a head. Jason had heard a rumour that Antiochus was dead and seized the apparent opportunity to attack Menelaus and take back the office which he had stolen fair and square. He entered Jerusalem with his followers, and Menelaus was forced to take refuge in the akra (the citadel).

When Antiochus heard this, he interpreted it as a revolt and sent an army to Jerusalem to sort things out (he apparently did not come there himself). Events from then on become somewhat uncertain because the data given in 1 and 2 Maccabees do not always make sense. It is clear that Jerusalem was taken and the followers of Jason driven away. Allegedly 40,000 inhabitants of Jerusalem were killed and another 40,000 enslaved – though there were hardly so many Jerusalemites at that time! A series of measures followed, some of them inexplicable: governors were put in charge of Judah, a logical enactment for a rebellious province. But then Apollonius the captain of Mysian soldiers was sent to take the city (why?), which he did even though the city was itself peaceful (so why take it by force?), and killed many Jews (how, when they had all been killed or enslaved months

earlier?). Finally, an Athenian was sent to suppress Jewish worship. The daily sacrifice was stopped, and the temple was polluted with an alien cult, apparently in December 168 BCE (so I have argued, though many standard works make it a year later).

The whole incident is very puzzling. Antiochus had interpreted Jason's attack as a revolt, but he had put it down and had put governors in charge of the province. So why send Apollonius to attack Jerusalem *again*? And, especially, why suppress the religion – an unheard-of way of dealing with a revolt in any case, and doubly peculiar here since the revolt had been put down months before? The cause or causes of the Maccabean revolt have been one of the most perplexing in Jewish history. Although one often reads facile statements about Hellenization or religious syncretism or other simplistic solutions, there is no clearly defined reason for what happened. A variety of serious and sober suggestions have been made, and some of these may be on the right track. Nevertheless, a solution which would command a consensus of specialists has not yet been proposed.

It is hardly surprising that this attempt to blot out traditional Jewish worship evoked a reaction. Exactly how the resistance began is still a matter of speculation. It would be reasonable to assume that it was initiated independently in several different quarters. Our sources emphasize the place of the Maccabean family, but that is probably not the full story. What we do know is that Judas Maccabee and his brothers eventually secured leadership of the resistance. The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees recount a series of military encounters. We shall not look at those in detail, though in several cases important victories were won. We can sum up by saying that over a period of three years, the Maccabee brothers and their followers won sufficient victories against the Seleucids to take back the temple and purify it.

This success was not miraculous, because it can be explained by normal military measures, but it was unusual. The result was that Antiochus rescinded his decree of religious suppression. The Jews once again had their temple and the right to worship as they chose. For many Jews this was sufficient; their religion

was safe, and they ceased fighting. Not so the Maccabees. Whatever their initial reasons for fighting, they had now developed a desire to secure independence for Judah as a nation once more. This was a bold dream, for Judah had not been independent for many centuries. For many Jews this must have been an absurd notion, since support for the Maccabees dropped drastically.

Judah himself was killed about 161, and the Maccabean resistance went into a decade of eclipse. Jonathan succeeded his brother, but he and his followers were on the run from the Seleucid army much of the time. The breakthrough came when rivalry developed for the Seleucid throne: two separate dynasties claimed the throne and put up pretenders who fought against each other for another half century and more. This allowed Jonathan to be courted by both claimants to the throne and to support the one from whom he felt he could gain the most. He was thus declared high priest and a friend of the Seleucid king. This was important, because now the high priest was in a different family from the traditional one (the Oniads). Some Jews would never accept the Hasmonaean high priesthood. Jonathan met his death at the hand of one of the rivals when he made a political miscalculation, and his brother Simon became leader in 143 BCE.

1.1.6 The Hasmonaean Dynasty

The Maccabean dynasty is traditionally referred to as the 'Hasmonaean', after an ancestor. Hasmonaean rule can perhaps be formally dated from Simon's rule (143–135 BCE). He negotiated with the Seleucid ruler Demetrius II who made some fairly extensive promises to him. Thus, 1 Maccabees can state that in the first year of his reign, 'the yoke of the Gentiles was removed from Israel' (13:41–42). In the third year of his reign, an assembly of the Jews made a declaration of freedom which reflected the aspirations of the Jews, if not quite the reality (1 Maccabees 14:27–45, NRSV):

On the eighteenth day of Elul [August–September], in the one hundred seventy-second year [of the Seleucid era], which is the

third year of the great high priest Simon, in Asaramel The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise, and that he should be governor over them and that he should take charge of the sanctuary and appoint officials over its tasks and over the country and the weapons and the strongholds, and that he should take charge of the sanctuary, and that he should be obeyed by all, and that all contracts in the country should be written in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold.

In some ways, Jonathan had already become the *de facto* Jewish ruler, with the office of high priest, while the title of king was not to be taken for another 40 years. Yet it is this declaration about 140 BCE more than any other which allows one to speak formally of the Hasmonaean dynasty and Judah as an independent nation.

Simon is said to have finally expelled the Seleucid troops from the Akra, the central citadel of Jerusalem. This removed the last symbol of Seleucid rule from the country. Nevertheless, the Seleucids had not given up their claims. Antiochus VII made demands on Simon and then attacked him when he refused to comply. Since Simon was too aged to lead in battle, his sons led the army and defeated Antiochus; however, Simon was treacherously slain by his son-in-law.

Simon's son John Hyrcanus (I) was a long-lived ruler (135–104 BCE) who began the expansion of Judaeian territory. Even in the early part of his reign, he was not free from Seleucid interference, but the continued rivalry for the Seleucid throne freed John to do much as he wanted through most of his reign. He ceased to pay tribute to the Seleucids and took the important Samaritan cities of Shechem and Samaria. He also conquered Idumaea and forced the inhabitants to convert to Judaism. Surprisingly, they seem to have remained loyal to this new religion for the most part, as indicated by later references.

Aristobulus I (104–103 BCE) was Hyrcanus' eldest son. He lived only a year but is credited with being the first to assume the title 'king'. He also conquered the territory of Ituraea in southern Lebanon and forcibly converted it to Judaism.

Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE) was the brother of Aristobulus and had been imprisoned by him when he died. Aristobulus' widow released Jannaeus, offered him the throne, and married him. Jannaeus turned out to be another long-lived and dynamic ruler like John Hyrcanus. Despite hard work and many successes, however, his reign was a troubled one. He further expanded the territory left to him by Hyrcanus, but a considerable opposition developed among the Jews themselves. This led to the incident about 88 BCE when his opponents invited Demetrius III, one of a number of claimants to the Seleucid throne at this time, to attack him. Demetrius invaded with many Jews in his army; he and Jannaeus fought to a standstill, and it looked as if Jannaeus might be defeated if the war continued. However, in the night after the main battle many of the Jews switched sides (probably because of concern that if Jannaeus was routed, Demetrius might take over control of Judah). Demetrius realized he had lost his advantage and retired, leaving Jannaeus firmly on the throne. Jannaeus now turned his attention to his enemies, crucifying 800 of them in the arena while he and his concubines feasted and watched their death agonies. A large number of those opposed to him fled the country.

Among Jannaeus' opponents were the Pharisees, at least according to one account given by Josephus. Allegedly on his deathbed, Jannaeus told his wife Alexandra Salome to make peace with them. This story sounds apocryphal, and there is a certain air of contrivance in the whole account of the death of Jannaeus and the succession of Alexandra. Yet there still may be a central truth to the story. What is clear is that Alexandra took the throne (76–67 BCE), one of the few female rulers in Israel's history, and the Pharisees dominated her rule. It is one of the few times in which the Pharisees were able to influence the ruler and have their religious laws enforced on the people (see further at 2.6.3).

Alexandra appointed her elder son Hyrcanus II to the office of high priest. His younger brother Aristobulus II was determined to have the rule and rebelled even while Alexandra was still ruler. As soon as she died, he seized the throne, and

Hyrchanus agreed to be contented with only being high priest. Hyrchanus had an advisor named Antipater who had been the governor of Idumaea. Whether he was himself Idumaeian is a matter of debate, but the Idumaeians in any case had been converted to Judaism by John Hyrchanus. Antipater encouraged Hyrchanus not to give up his claims to the throne; eventually Hyrchanus fled to Aretas III, king of the Nabataeans, and returned with an army. He defeated Aristobulus and besieged him in Jerusalem. The Roman general Pompey was in the region of Syria fighting the Armenians and sent his lieutenant to investigate what was happening in Judaea. Both Hyrchanus and Aristobulus appealed to him for support.

Pompey prevaricated about making a decision (allegedly hoping for each side to pay higher bribes), and Aristobulus finally marched off. Pompey pursued him, and he surrendered. However, his followers closed the city of Jerusalem to Pompey's forces. The Romans besieged the city and finally took it in 63 BCE. The priests continued with the temple cult even while fighting took place around them, and many were killed. Pompey himself went into the Holy of Holies, but the next day he ordered the priests to repurify the temple and resume the cult. He did not loot or harm the temple itself. But the Hasmonaean kingdom had come to an end – almost exactly a century after the temple was restored under Judas Maccabaeus.

1.1.7 The Roman Yoke

Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem must have been a terrible blow to many Jews. Judah had been an independent nation for long enough that its position as a small subordinate province had been lost from living memory. To come once again under foreign domination went against the theological views of many: they were God's chosen people – they were not destined to have Gentiles rule over them. Much of the land gained by conquest under Hasmonaean rule was taken away, creating hardship for the Jewish settlers who were now forced out, and Judah returned to being a small territory under foreign rule, this time under a Roman governor. The one consolation (if it was a consolation)

is that the high priest and former king Hyrcanus and his advisor Antipater had important places in the new government structure. Antipater was a formidable leader and an astute politician. Hyrcanus is usually presented as being completely in his shadow, which may be a correct analysis but the biased nature of the sources must not be forgotten.

The new province of Judaea and its leaders became caught up in the internecine warfare of the Late Roman Republic. Pompey himself died at the hands of Antony and Julius Caesar in 48 BCE. The author of the *Psalms of Solomon* (2:29–33) took grim satisfaction in this humiliation and death of the conqueror of Jerusalem:

Delay not, O God, to bring recompense upon their heads,
 To change the pride of the dragon into dishonour.
 And I did not wait long before God showed me his body,
 Stabbed, on the mountains of Egypt,
 Esteemed of less account than the least on land and sea –
 His body, carried about on the waves in great ignominy,
 With none to bury him, because he had rejected him in dishonour.
 He did not consider that he was man,
 Nor did he consider the end.
 He said, I will be lord of land and sea;
 And he did not recognise that God is great,
 Mighty in his great strength.

[Translation from Sparks (ed.) 1984]

Antipater and Hyrcanus came out of the event well. They provided much needed aid to Caesar in his invasion of Egypt and were duly rewarded with Roman citizenship. Hyrcanus was declared *ethnarch* of the Jews. (It is probably from this period that anti-Semitism began to develop in Egypt, because the Jews were seen as having assisted the Romans in defeating Egypt.)

Antipater took the opportunity to introduce his two sons to positions of authority in the governmental structure, making the elder Phasael governor of Judaea and Herod governor of Galilee. Both proved to be capable, energetic, and zealous administrators, but it seems that the younger Herod was the more impressive. Among their duties was to raise a war chest for

the Romans to pay for an earlier unsuccessful expedition against Parthia. Antipater was poisoned by rivals in the mid-40s, leaving Phasael and Herod to avenge his death (which they did).

Phasael and Herod were worthy successors of their father. In the next phase of the Roman civil war, they actually supported Cassius against Antony and Octavian who were on the winning side, but they do not seem to have suffered for it. When Antony came to establish his rule over the Eastern Mediterranean in 42 BCE, he made Herod and Phasael both tetrarchs, despite a delegation of leading Jews who accused the sons of Antipater of governing the country instead of Hyrcanus. Indeed, Hyrcanus backed Herod and Phasael in this episode.

In 40 BCE the Parthians invaded Syria-Palestine. With them was Antigonus the son of Aristobulus II who still had designs on gaining the Hasmonaean throne. Jerusalem was besieged. Phasael was captured through a ruse and committed suicide. Herod realized he was in a desperate situation. He fled secretly at night, left his family protected in the desert fortress of Masada, and made his way to Rome. He met Antony and Octavian who brought him before the Senate. He was declared king of Judaea and promised help in driving out the Parthians and retaking Jerusalem. Herod once more demonstrated what in many ways became the hallmark of his life – he turned disaster into advantage.

1.1.8 The Reign of Herod the Great

The Parthians did not remain long in Palestine; perhaps they always intended their occupation of the Syria-Palestine to be a temporary measure. Antigonus remained stubbornly in Jerusalem and was besieged by Herod. The city fell in 37 BCE, and Antigonus was executed. Herod was now king *de facto*, not just *de jure*. He had a thorn in his side, however: Cleopatra queen of Egypt. Although her influence with Antony was not absolute, she often got her way, and she made many demands with regard to Herod and his territory. Antony often granted her wishes, though he seems to have realized how valuable an ally Herod could be; otherwise, Cleopatra might have had him deposed.

Herod's troubles came to an abrupt end in 31 BCE with the battle of Actium in which the forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra confronted those of Octavian. Antony and Cleopatra lost, and both sailed to Egypt. This only delayed the inevitable for a brief period of time. In one stroke Herod's chief enemy and chief ally were removed. This time he was on the losing side. However, through good fortune or – more likely – astute political manoeuvring, Herod was fighting the Nabataeans at the time and did not participate in Actium. His response to the new order was characteristic of him: he sailed to Rhodes and boldly came before Octavian. He candidly admitted having backed the wrong side in Antony but, laying his crown before Octavian, expressed his willingness to support him and to be a useful ally. Octavian was a shrewd leader and realized the value of retaining Herod on his side. But perhaps he also saw in the chutzpah of the young Jewish king something of himself. He accepted Herod's offer of loyalty.

For the next 20 years Herod's reign was primarily a success. He had the backing of Rome and was on close terms with the family of the Roman emperor. His status as client king or friendly king gave him autonomy in his own territory. (For this reason, it is unlikely that Roman taxes were collected in his kingdom, though he made many generous gifts to Octavian and to various cities and officials in the Roman Empire.) This period saw many large building projects, including the new city of Caesarea on the coast, palaces at Herodium and Cypros on the Jordan, refurbishment of Masada, construction of the old city of Samaria into Sabaste, and many projects in Greece and other areas outside his own territory. The crown of his building projects, however, was 'Herod's temple'. The temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar had been rebuilt in the early Persian period. There is some evidence from archaeology that further changes were made during the period of Hasmonaean rule. What Herod did was only refurbishment in a strict sense, since the old temple was altered and redone only a piece at a time, and at no time was it closed to worshipers. Yet the end product was for practical purposes a new temple, a magnificent structure which paled by comparison the previous temples.

The last years of Herod were beset by many problems. A breach developed with Augustus over a conflict with the Nabataeans. Herod was blamed (probably wrongly) for attacking the Nabataeans. Rome allowed client kings basic autonomy in their own internal affairs, but they did not tolerate unauthorized conflicts between client nations. The contretemps between Herod and Nabataea was eventually settled and Herod restored to favour with Augustus, but it took several years. A chief source of difficulties was Herod's own family. He executed his first wife Mariamme for adultery sometime around 30 BCE, along with his uncle Joseph. Then toward the end of his reign he had several of his sons executed for alleged conspiracy to kill him and take the throne (probably with good reason in some of the cases). He finally died of an atrocious disease in 4 BCE.

Herod has been infamous in history. Some of this reputation is deserved and some of it is not. He was a determined ruler who held on to power despite some major adversities and setbacks. Several times he came close to deposition and even death, yet he always won through in the end. He could not have done this without being ruthless when necessary, and he clearly tolerated no opposition. But in this he not different from the other rulers of the time, including the Hasmonaean rulers that some of Herod's subjects harkened back to. On the other hand, he did many services for the Jews. His taxes were tolerable and he remitted them during times of famine, his building projects brought prestige and employment, the new temple became a major site of pilgrimage, and he lived as a Jew and defended Jewish worship outside Palestine (e.g. lobbying for Jews in Asia Minor to be allowed to remit the annual religious tax to Jerusalem). The economic situation he created in Judaea during his reign was beneficial to Jews as a whole.

Thus, Herod had his faults, but his reign was also characterized by many good points. Any evaluation must consider both sides of the question. One thing he probably was *not* guilty of was the 'slaughter of the innocents'. This is a legend reported only by the writer of Matthew 2:16–18 and has no basis in anything known from the history of that time. No other source mentions it, not even Josephus (who despised Herod), much

less the Gospel of Luke, as they almost certainly would have had it taken place.

1.1.9 A Roman Province Once Again

After Herod's death, several of his sons by various wives rushed to Rome to claim his throne. At the same time, a delegation from the people came before Augustus to plead for direct Roman rule. The delegation did not get their way at the time, for Herod's son Archelaus was allowed to govern Judaea (though without the title of king), while two of his half-brothers were made tetrarchs, Herod Antipas over Galilee and Perea and Philip over territories to the north and east of Galilee. However, in 6 CE Archelaus was banished for misrule and Judaea made into a Roman province once again.

As soon as direct Roman rule was imposed, a census was taken in order to instate Roman taxation. Now that Judah had become a Roman province, a census had to be taken because direct Roman taxation would not be imposed. There were riots and a new revolutionary movement was born (3.5). Herod had his taxes, but there was some tangible benefit for the people. Roman taxes were for Roman good, and the tax burden was certainly not going to be any less. It is evidently this census of 6 CE that is mistakenly associated with the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1–3). Luke dated it a decade too early, but the other details fit. While Herod was a client king, the Romans did not collect taxes directly from the Jews and were unlikely to have conducted a census in Judaea during his lifetime. Writing toward the end of the first century, long after the events, Luke has apparently just got something confused.

Those who wanted direct Roman rule now got their wish – and probably lived to regret it. Roman rule was for Roman benefit. The Roman governors were often ignorant of local traditions and customs, and apparently often did not care, anyway. The ten-year governorship of Pilate (26–36 CE) was a series of clashes with the Jews over various issues; even the Roman historian Tacitus rated his administration poorly. Direct Roman rule over Judah lasted for 35 years and reminded people how much better off they had been under Herodian rule.

Herod's grandson Agrippa was well-known to the emperor's family and became a personal friend of Caligula. When Caligula was made emperor in 37 CE, Agrippa was further given the old territories of Philip (who had died). In 38 CE he was further given the tetrarchy of Antipas (who was removed from office by Caligula). He was able to intervene when in 40 CE Caligula planned to place his own statue into the Jerusalem temple. Then, with the death of Caligula, the new emperor Claudius also made him king over Judaea in 41 CE so that he now ruled over territory comparable in size to that of Herod the Great. Evidently, Agrippa I was generally well liked by his subjects, though he is presented as a persecutor of the early Christians in the book of Acts (ch. 12, where he is mistakenly called Herod). His reign was short, however; he died in 44 CE after ruling only three years over Judaea and seven years in all. Thus after a brief respite, Judaea was once again a Roman province and subject to Roman governors. For the next 20 years the country drifted toward an inevitable conflict with the ruling power.

*1.1.10 The 66–70 War with Rome and its Consequences:
A New Form of Judaism*

The details of the events before and during the 66–70 will be discussed in a later chapter, where various revolutionary sects can also be brought into the picture (see 3.6). The outcome was predictable; why the Jewish leadership ever thought it could win against Rome is a puzzle, as are the many activities of the various revolutionary groups which made them fight each other more intensely than the Romans. In any case, the religious consequences were profound. The war and the destruction of the temple had an extremely significant influence on Judaism. Many groups seem to have been wiped out in the war; this was apparently the case with Qumran (and the Essenes as a whole?; 2.8). Also, up until 70 the chief means of worship for most Jews in Judaea and the surrounding area had been the temple cult. When there was no temple, something had to be substituted for the cult if religion was to be maintained. Those sections of Judaism

which had their base in the temple dwindled in importance: the priesthood and probably the Sadducees (2.7). The groups which grew and developed were those with the potential to continue without a functioning cult. The Christians did not need a temple because they had Jesus, but in a short time they ceased to be a Jewish sect and became a separate religion. Another group which could function without a cult was the Pharisees.

The restructuring of Judaism took place at a small town near the Mediterranean coast called Yavneh (Jamnia). A leading sage named Yohanon ben Zakkai was allowed by the Romans to establish an academy or place of study of some sort. It is not even certain that he was a Pharisee, but Pharisaic views seem to have been well represented at Yavneh. Representatives from a number of groups seem to have gathered there, and it is likely that a variety of these had their input into the new synthesis which became Rabbinic Judaism. One major contribution seems to have come from Pharisaic tradition. The early strata of the Mishnah are dominated by the schools of Hillel and Shammai, as well as a few other pre-70 figures. If these were Pharisees, then Rabbinic Judaism had received a large Pharisaic content in its early stages. Yet the interests of the Pharisees appear to have been somewhat different from those of Rabbinic Judaism.

One of the main changes of emphasis had to do with Torah study as a religious activity. There is little evidence in the pre-70 rabbinic traditions that the Pharisees emphasized study as a part of their religious practice; rather the traditions focus on eating meals in – and otherwise maintaining a state of – ritual purity. Study as an act of worship became the centre of Judaism after 70. One suggestion is that this aspect of Rabbinic Judaism was the contribution of the scribes for whom the study of the written Word was central. If this interpretation is correct, Rabbinic Judaism is a synthesis of various elements of pre-70 Judaism, but two of the main contributors were the Pharisees and the scribes. However, Rabbinic Judaism was not to be identified with any particular pre-70 group; on the contrary, it was a new creation with its own identity even while borrowing various aspects of the earlier pluralistic Judaism.

1.1.11 Further Jewish Revolts against Rome

This new form of Judaism did not develop overnight, of course. The activities of Yavneh covered much of the period between 70 and the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. It is also evident that other ideas continued to circulate. The traditions which have come down from the Yavnean period do not have much in the way of apocalyptic or eschatological elements, yet we know that these had by no means disappeared. The *Apocalypses of 4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and *Abraham* all seem to date from about 100 CE. *2 Enoch* may be from about the same time. *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* both show the acute loss felt over the temple by many Jews and the intense questioning about God and his ways. How could God allow these things to happen to his temple? How could he allow his people to be in this situation?

There were also Jews who were not convinced that Roman rule was inevitable. Whether or not they were bolstered by apocalyptic speculations is not known, but this may have been so in some cases at least. Some Jews certainly expected Rome to fall in the near future, as the Eagle Vision shows (*4 Ezra* 11–12). Whatever the reason, a further series of revolts broke out. As it turns out the Jewish community was not yet ready to bow unconditionally to the Roman will.

During the reign of Trajan matters came to a head in several areas of the ancient Near East that were under Roman rule. A series of revolts took place in the period 115–117 CE. We have only brief information from the Roman historian Cassius Dio (68.32.1–3), and also the Christian writers Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.2.1–5) and Orosius (7.12.6–8). In addition, some papyri relating to events in Egypt are preserved from the archive of a general named Apollonius. These revolts primarily involved the Jewish communities of Egypt, Cyrenaica, Mesopotamia, and Cyprus. As far as we know, Palestine was not involved (though some have argued that it was; however, all surviving accounts are silent on this). We know little about the revolts in the various areas, but they seem to have been quite bloody on both sides, and many Jewish communities were wiped out. The beginning

seems to have been in Egypt. The Jews acquitted themselves against the Roman army for a time, but in the end few seem to have survived.

For Cyrenaica we have hardly any direct information, but many buildings, especially temples, have inscriptions indicating they were rebuilt after destruction by the Jews at this time. Sources indicate the revolt was led by a 'king'. Similarly, the Jews in Cyprus was alleged to have been led by a 'king', suggesting messianic expectations in both cases. After the uprising was put down, an edict was apparently issued forbidding any Jews to settle on the island. We have no details about what happened in Mesopotamia, but it apparently related to Trajan's Parthian war. As he advanced east, the Jews seem to have revolted in the newly created Roman provinces left behind. As far as we know, these were not instigated by the Parthians but originated among the Jews themselves. The years 115–117 thus left large areas bereft of a Jewish population.

Judaea itself, however, did not have to wait too long to follow suit. Fifteen years later it began another revolt under the leadership of Simon ben Kosiba, better known as Bar Kokhba. This was in 132–135 CE. Only a few details are known of this revolt: a few brief references in the Roman writings of Cassius Dio (69.12.1–14.13) and *Historia Augusta* (*Hadrian* 5.2; 14.2) and the Christian writers Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6.1–4) and Orosius (7.13.4–5). In the past few decades some original documents from the time of Bar Kokhba have become available, including some of his own letters. Although we cannot know the course of the war, the available sources indicate that the Romans suffered heavily, to the point that when Hadrian wrote to the Senate, he did not use the usual phrase, 'I and the legions are well'. But the Jews suffered even more greatly. This time the Romans took steps to see that there were no more Jewish insurrections. They turned Jerusalem into a Roman city called Aelia Capitolina, a pagan cult was set up on the temple site, and Jews were forbidden to enter within the walls. (For further information, see 3.7.) There was no doubt that the Jewish people were in for a long period without temple or country.

1.2 The Sources: How Do We Know What We Know?

It is very important for students to be aware of the source of our knowledge of the Jews and Judaism during this period. This survey of history given in the past few pages did not leap fully formed from the head of a university professor – like Venus from the head of Zeus. It comes from painstaking study of the few sources available to us. This work has required a great deal of patience, knowledge of languages, and careful weighing of evidence, but there is nothing mysterious about the historical method as such. On the whole, it is simply the application of many of the common-sense principles we already use in our daily lives. The sources are finite and are the basis of all studies on this period. If scholars differ, it is not usually because of using different sources but because of different interpretations and methodological approaches. This section focuses mainly on the literary sources. Some other sources (e.g. the Zenon papyri) are mentioned in later chapters. For information on the archaeology, see the information in my books listed at the end of the chapter.

1.2.1 Books of the Bible

Several books of the Bible were written during the Second Temple period and serve as useful sources for certain sorts of information. There is a considerable scholarly debate on dating and editing of the various biblical books (for a convenient discussion, see Soggin 1989).

Two biblical books claim to describe the Jews of Palestine in the Persian period; these are Ezra and Nehemiah. One of the most accepted conclusions of today is that much of the book of Nehemiah is based on Nehemiah's personal account (the so-called 'Nehemiah Memorial/Memoir'). Thus, we have some indication not only of Nehemiah's deeds but even of his attitudes and (private?) thoughts. This is valuable material; on the other hand, we must recognize that it is very one-sided and reflects the entrenched opinions and biases of a strong-willed man. We can hardly use it as a dispassionate chronicle

of events. Nehemiah's own firmly held views shape the entire narrative.

The material in Ezra is quite different. In it are a number of alleged documents of the Persian administration. Although these have been widely accepted as authentic in recent English-language commentaries, their genuineness has been strongly questioned in Continental scholarship. Similarly, the Ezra story (sometimes called the 'Ezra Memoir') has been variously assessed, some seeing a good deal of history in it but others arguing that the historical Ezra is too deeply hidden to say much with any confidence. There is no agreement even on when Ezra was supposed to have lived. The end result of the debate is that the book of Nehemiah tells us something about events in Judah of his time, even if from a one-sided perspective, but the events described in Ezra are problematic.

1.2.2 *Josephus*

The backbone of any history of this period is the writings of Flavius Josephus (37–c. 100 CE). He is the only Jewish historian whose works are extant to any degree. Whatever his weaknesses – and there are many – we have no option because there is nothing else with such complete information. The important thing is to use his writings critically, recognizing his aims, his biases, the quality and extent of his sources, and gaps in his information. Too often passages from his works are cited without due consideration given to the normal process of historical criticism.

Josephus lived through many of the momentous events of the first century. He was sent to Galilee when the war broke out. After approximately a year there, he was besieged in the city of Jotapata and captured by Vespasian. He claims to have predicted that Vespasian would become emperor; sure enough, this happened a year or so later. At this point, Josephus was released from his bonds and became the emperor's guest instead of his prisoner. After the war he was taken to Rome, adopted into the Flavian family (hence, the name Flavius), and given a pension. Josephus' first writing was the *War* produced in the 70s. It extends from the Maccabean revolt to the fall of Masada

in 73 CE. Much of the book is given over to the events of the 66–70 war, for which Josephus drew on his own experiences and other contemporary reports. For the earlier period he depended heavily on Nicolaus of Damascus, the secretary of Herod the Great who wrote a universal history.

His next work was the *Antiquities* which begins with Creation and goes all the way up to 66 CE just before the war began. It seems to have been issued in the early 90s. The first half of the book depends on the biblical text. When the biblical material ran out, he had little information for about 200 years until he could pick up 1 Maccabees and then Nicolaus. Another work was the *Contra Apionem* (Against Apion) which was an apology on behalf of the Jews, responding in part to anti-Jewish attacks of Apion who wrote before Josephus was born. Perhaps his final work was his *Vita* (Life) which he wrote in the mid-90s in response to an attack by a fellow countryman. At this time Justus of Tiberias who had been secretary to Agrippa II evidently wrote a work which made certain accusations against Josephus. Josephus' response was an account of his activities during the revolt which by and large parallel the account already given in the *War* but with some important and interesting differences. Sadly, we do not have Justus' account which could have given us another perspective.

Apart from Josephus we have hardly any other Jewish historical writings from this time. Philo has a couple of tractates only (see next section); otherwise, we have some fragments of Jewish writers in Greek who wrote several different sorts of literature including history. Because their works are fragmentary, they do not give us a great deal, but they have a few pieces of interesting information. This includes a few quotations from Justus of Tiberias and a summary of his work.

1.2.3 *Philo of Alexandria*

Philo (c. 20 BCE–50 CE) is known mainly for his biblical commentaries making use of the allegorical method. He is therefore very important for the history of biblical interpretation rather than for history of the Jews. However, he was head of a delegation

sent by the Jewish community to defend them before the Roman emperor against the attacks of the Greek inhabitants (38–41 CE). He wrote about the attacks on the Alexandrian Jewish community in 38, his own mission to Rome, and the plans by the emperor Caligula to place his statue in the Jerusalem temple in two tractates, *Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium* (*Mission to Gaius [Caligula]*). These two are important historical treatises which give us a contemporary Jewish perspective on events of the time.

1.2.4 *The Apocrypha*

The term Apocrypha (Greek “hidden”) is applied to a set of writings which are in the Catholic (Roman and Orthodox) canon but not in the Jewish or Protestant canons (the term Deutero-canonical is sometimes used of most of them): 1 Baruch, Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), 1 Esdras, 4 Ezra (2 Esdras – not in the Roman canon), Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, some additional sections to Daniel (Susanna and the Elders, the Song of the Three Martyrs, Bel and the Dragon). This collection is the result of historical accident. There is nothing special or mysterious about these books. They are made up of a variety of literary genres: epistle, history, tale, wisdom. They are as early as some of the books of the Hebrew Bible, and there is nothing to set them apart from the canonical books.

1.2.5 *The Pseudepigrapha*

The name Pseudepigrapha implies writings falsely attributed. This is not actually very helpful because scholars agree that much of the canonical literature is also pseudepigraphical. In practice, the term tends to include all early Jewish writings which are not part of the canon or of the Apocrypha. The most recent complete collection of the Pseudepigrapha has over 60 writings, though a number of these are from the second century CE or later.

The main pre-70 writings are *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Psalms of Solomon*, *Testament of Moses*, *Testament of Abraham*, and the *Letter*

of *Aristeas*. From about the year 100 CE are *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and probably the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Some other writings are more difficult to date; for example, *2 Enoch* is currently under debate though many would put it in the late first century; the *Book of Biblical Antiquities* (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* or Pseudo-Philo) is also probably first century. Some of the material of *Sibylline Oracle 3* is from the second century BCE, but the present form of the writing is probably from the late first century CE. *Sibylline Oracle 4* seems to come from about 80 CE. *Sibylline Oracle 5* is from the first half of the second century CE. There is also the literature on Adam and Eve (*Life of Adam and Eve*, *Apocalypse of Moses*), the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Testament of Job*, and the *Testament of Solomon*.

There is a strong debate over the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*; some argue they are Jewish writings which have subsequently been revised by Christians; others argue they are Christian writings which have made use of various Jewish traditions. We know that at least two of them are pre-Christian because fragments have been found among the Qumran scrolls, though the present form of these two may be revised from the Jewish originals: *Testaments of Naphtali* and *Levi*.

1.2.6 *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

Since 1947 a great many writings have been found in the Judaeen desert west of the Dead Sea. Many of these were found in the Qumran caves and are the specific writings known as the Qumran scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls also take in writings from other areas, however, including Wadi Murabba'at, Masada, the wadis Naḥal Hever and Naḥal Şe'elim; they include business documents, personal legal documents such as marriage contracts, letters from the Bar Kokhba period, and biblical scrolls.

The Qumran scrolls include a variety of writings. Portions of every book of the Old Testament except Esther have been found among them. Some of the books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are now known in a more original form from remains among the Qumran manuscripts. In addition there are many writings not hitherto known. Some of these seem to be writings taken into the Qumran library from outside, but others

appear to be books written by members of the Qumran sect and are thus often referred to as 'sectarian' scrolls from Qumran. These 'sectarian' writings include the *Community Rule* or *Manual of Discipline* (1QS), the *War Scroll* (1QM), the *Thanksgiving Hymns* or *Hodayot* (1QH), and many biblical commentaries such as on Habakkuk (1QpHab), Psalm 37 (4QpPs^a), and Nahum (4QpNah). One writing already known is the *Damascus Document* (CD). This had been found in the late nineteenth century among manuscripts in an old synagogue in Cairo. It has also surfaced at Qumran, suggesting that it had been found and copied by some Jews in the Middle Ages.

Other writings may or may not have been composed by the Qumran community. For example, the *Temple Scroll* (11QT) covers many of the regulations relating to the temple cult, some of them parallel to those in Deuteronomy but others are different or new, yet scholars are divided over its provenance. A great many other previously unknown writings have been found.

1.3 Guide to Further Reading

For an introduction and survey of the debate about the history of ancient Israel, as well as of the history itself, see:

Grabbe, Lester L. *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know it?* (London/New York: T & T Clark International).

Much of the information not only in this chapter but also throughout this book is discussed at much greater length, citing primary sources and secondary studies, in my book:

Grabbe, Lester L. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992; London: SCM, 1994).

A more detailed study, aimed mainly at specialists is found in:

Grabbe, Lester L. *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period 1: Yehud: A History of the Persian*

Province of Judah (Library of Second Temple Studies 47; London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2004).

Grabbe, Lester L. *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period 2: The Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period (335–175 BCE)* (Library of Second Temple Studies 68; London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2008).

Important specialized studies for parts of this period are:

Schürer, Emil, *The Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (revised G. Vermes, et al.; 3 vols. in 4; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973–87).

Smallwood, E. M. *The Jews under Roman Rule* (SJLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 1976; corrected reprint 1981).

For a standard but easily accessible introduction to biblical literature, see:

Soggin, J. Alberto, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (3rd edn; London: SCM, 1989).

An English translation of Josephus can be found in:

Thackeray, H. St. J., et al. *Josephus* (Loeb Classical Library; London: Heineman; Cambridge: Harvard, 1926–65).

An older translation of Josephus from 1737 has been reprinted many times, most recently:

The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition (translator W. Whiston; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987).

English translations of Philo are provided by:

The Works of Philo: New Updated Edition. Complete and Unabridged (translator C. D. Yonge; updated with foreword by David M. Scholer; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993).

Colson, F. H., and G. H. Whitaker. *Philo* (vols. 1–10; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, MA: Harvard; London: Heinemann, 1929–43).

For a survey of the main Jewish writings during the Second Temple period, see:

Nickelsburg, George W. E. *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2nd edn, 2005).

Stone, Michael E. (ed.) *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2/2; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress; 1984).

For Jewish literature composed in Greek, a good introduction is:

Collins, John J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (The Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers, 2nd edn, 2000).

Translations of the Jewish writings in the Apocrypha are found in many editions of the Bible, such as the Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, Revised English Bible. The most complete collection of the Pseudepigrapha is:

Charlesworth, J. H. (ed.) *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–85).

Less comprehensive but useful is:

Sparks, H. (ed.) *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984),

but despite its name, it does not have the Apocrypha in it, only some of the major Pseudepigrapha. An older collection of the Apocrypha and some of the Pseudepigrapha is still very useful,

not least because of the commentaries, even if now rather out of date:

Charles, R. H. (ed.) *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

For the Jewish historians other than Josephus and preserved only in fragments, a translation is given in Charlesworth (ed.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, pp. 775–919. An edition, with translation and commentary, is given in:

Holladay, Carl R. *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, Volume I: Historians* (Texts and Translations 20, Pseudepigrapha Series 10; Atlanta: Scholars, 1983); *Volume II: Poets: The Epic Poets Theodotus and Philo and Ezekiel the Tragedian* (Texts and Translations 30, Pseudepigrapha Series 12; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); *Volume III: Aristobulus* (SBLTT 39, Pseudepigrapha Series 13; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995); *Volume IV: Orphica* (SBLTT 40; Pseudepigrapha Series 14; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).

For all things relating to Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, see:

Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (eds), *Encyclopaedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

A collection of the main sectarian and some other writings from Qumran in English translation can be found in:

Vermes, Geza. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (4th edn; London: Penguin, 1995).

The text and an English translation of all the non-biblical Scrolls is given by:

García Martínez, Florentino, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (eds and transl.). 1997–98. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study*

Edition: Volume One 1Q1–4Q273; Volume Two 4Q274–11Q31 (Leiden: Brill).

Good introductions to the archaeology and general scholarship on the Qumran community are:

Davies, Philip R. *Qumran (Cities of the Biblical World; Guildford, Surrey: Lutterworth, 1982).*

Magness, Jodi, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).*

Papyri relating to the Jews of Egypt, including some referring to the 115–117 revolt, can be found in:

Tcherikover, V. A., A. Fuks, and M. Stern, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (3 vols; Cambridge, MA: Harvard; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1957–64).