CHAPTER 4

Jerusalem

When the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan in about the thirteenth century BCE, they did not immediately establish the city of Jerusalem as their spiritual and political epicenter. The majestic hilltop city would not gain its legendary reputation until about three centuries later, during the reign of King Solomon.

The first Israelite king, Saul, probably established his capital in a small town called Gibeah in the eleventh century BCE. But when Saul's successor, David, made Jerusalem his capital city, Jerusalem soon became the seat of Israelite leadership and religious life, where prophets came to preach and from which religious and social leadership emanated.

David's selection of Jerusalem as his capital made strategic sense. It was a central locale, close to the Spring of Gihon and to the roadways that linked it to the more populated cities of Shehem and Hebron. It was also militarily desirable. The city's elevation—it was buttressed by valleys on its western, southern, and eastern borders[1]—made it difficult to conquer.

David's son Solomon built a Temple just north of the city, thereby expanding Jerusalem's limits and concretizing Jerusalem's role as the spiritual and political nucleus of the Israelite nation. With its three adjacent valleys and looming Temple to the north, visitors approaching the city were no doubt impressed by the view. As Solomon embarked on campaigns that would expand the borders of the empire, Jerusalem remained at the center of his monarchy.

Solomon's son Rehoboam was next to rule. He imposed high taxes

to offset the costs of the building projects his father had initiated. The people demanded lower taxes, and when Rehoboam refused, some of the Israelites revolted. The upshot was a split in the kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, encompassed the territory allotted to ten of Jacob's sons when they first entered Canaan. The Southern Kingdom, known as Judah, retained Jerusalem as its capital and comprised two tribal regions: Judah and Benjamin.

In general, the kings of the Northern Kingdom were not as loyal as the Southern kings to the Israelite God. Geography was a primary factor. The Northern Kingdom shared borders with non-Israelite, polytheistic kingdoms. To make peace with these kingdoms, the Israelites formed treaties, which sometimes involved marrying an Israelite to a foreign prince or princess. This, in turn, led to cultural integration that drew the Israelites away from their religious traditions. The Southern Kingdom, on the other hand, was more isolated, since its southern border abutted a desert.

From the tenth through eighth centuries BCE, the Northern Kingdom was in a state of almost continuous decline. According to the Hebrew Bible, prophets living at the time warned that unless the people repented and ceased to worship false gods, they would be punished and ultimately expelled from their land. These predictions were fulfilled in 722 BCE, when the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III conquered and exiled the Northern Kingdom, forcibly moving the conquered Israelites to a new and unfamiliar territory.

Distanced from the land they associated with their national origins, the Israelites were prevented from becoming a cohesive nation that could unite in rebellion against the Assyrians. The Assyrians' military strategy appears to have been so effective that the Northern Israelites who were dislocated from their land assimilated into other regions of Assyria. We do not know what happened to these "ten lost tribes."

The Judean kingdom narrowly avoided Assyrian exile as well, managing to survive the entire seventh century BCE, as the Assyrian Empire waned and the Babylonian Empire waxed. But the threat of a Babylonian conquest

grew more imminent beginning in the 620s BCE. Judean prophets such as Jeremiah interpreted this growing threat as evidence of God's disapproval of the people's sins.

In 586 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed the great Temple of Jerusalem and exiled much of the Judean population. This heralded an approximately seventy-year period known as the Babylonian exile.

Rather than assimilating into Babylonian culture, the Judeans living in exile found ways to practice their ancestral tradition that did not require a Temple. Scholars believe that it was in exile that Judeans first began to gather together regularly to read their scriptures—which would later give way to the formal institution of the synagogue.

Once the Jews instituted recurring meeting times to read their holy texts, the Jerusalem Temple would never play as central a role as it once did. The Judeans had developed modes of worship that would endure through the Second Temple period and beyond. Among these modes was the regular public reading of the scriptures, which enabled all Jews, regardless of where they lived, to connect to their ancestral tradition without participating in Temple ritual.

In 539 BCE, Babylonia was conquered by the Persian Empire, and Judeans who had been in exile were soon permitted to return to Judea. Jews in this region were now subjects of the Persian Empire, a status that was to last until 333 BCE. The Persians permitted the Jews to practice their ancestral tradition freely. This freedom was especially meaningful in Judea, because it allowed the Jews to rebuild their holy Temple, a project that was completed in about 515 BCE. The Jews were also permitted to oversee the Temple's administration with virtually no outside interference.

Life under the Persians was mostly peaceful, except in the last years of the Persian Empire, when the Jews suffered from persecution. According to Early Church historians, the Persian King Artaxerxes III Ochus (425–338 BCE) captured and exiled thousands of Jews living in Judea amid one of his campaigns against Egypt. Some were relocated to Hyrcania, a region lying along the Caspian Sea that Cyrus the Great (559–530 BCE) had

incorporated into the Persian Empire.[2] Why Artaxerxes III initiated this persecution, particularly after a long period of seemingly peaceful relations between Jews and their Persian host government, remains unclear.[3]

Other political changes in the second half of the fourth century BCE would soon eclipse Artaxerxes III's operations. In 334 BCE, a young general named Alexander, whose father, Philip, was king of Macedonia, headed an ambitious campaign to conquer Persian territories. By the time he died in 323 BCE after a brief and sudden illness at the young age of thirty-two, Alexander had extended his empire from the Danube River to the Beas River in India—an area totaling about two million square miles.[4]

Alexander did not leave a will with instructions regarding how his massive kingdom was to be divided. His generals, known as the Diadochi (meaning "successors" in Greek), subsequently split his massive empire into four smaller empires. Seleucus I Nicator assumed control over most Near Eastern territories, Lysimachus ruled over Thrace and most of Asia Minor, Ptolemy took command over Egypt, and Cassander led Macedonia and Greece. These men would vie for additional territory for decades.

Centered in the middle of these rulers' ever-shifting borders was the land of Judea, a tiny region along the Mediterranean coast that connected Syria with the Sinai Desert. Despite its small size, Judea was coveted: It had potential as a trade route to connect the various empires that inherited Alexander's kingdom. Judea's prime location thus made it vulnerable to the territorial wars of the third century BCE.

Jewish Literature of the Time

Hardly any nonbiblical Jewish literature written during the period leading up to Alexander's conquests has survived. One notable exception regards apocalyptic stories about the biblical figure of Enoch. Many Jews found Enoch to be a fascinating figure because, according to Genesis 5:24, Enoch did not die but "walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him." In these stories, Enoch has grand visions concerning the end of days and the ultimate judgment of all creatures. Over time, different stories about Enoch were interwoven with one another. Enochic material

focused on the events that would transpire as humankind moved toward a final divine judgment. Writings attributed to Enoch became increasingly relevant as more and more Jews came to believe that the end-time was imminent during the Second Temple period.

Stories about the legendary hero Daniel were also being written and circulated in the Persian period. These stories emphasized Daniel's religious piety and unparalleled cleverness. Daniel was said to have prayed regularly while facing Jerusalem, a practice not known to have become widespread until the Rabbinic period, and to have observed dietary law. He also interpreted visions that befuddled others in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. In the Greek version of the Bible known as the Septuagint, Daniel saves the innocent Susanna from false accusations of adultery and, in another episode, proves to the king that the god he has been worshiping, Bel, is in fact not a god at all. All of these stories seek to correlate Jewish piety and worldly wisdom.

The many stories about Enoch and Daniel testify to the diversity of Jewish writings being produced at this time, a diversity that would extend and grow well into the Greek period.

Judea under the Ptolemies: 333–200 BCE

Over the course of the third and early second centuries BCE, the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Macedonians vied for territory—and sometimes their battles had devastating effects on the Judeans. In 301 BCE, Ptolemy I Soter took control of Judea at the Battle of Ipsus against the Macedonian king Antigonus I Monophthalmus and his son Demetrius Poliorcetes. Ptolemy then proceeded to deport thousands of Jews to Egypt and enslave thousands of others.[5]

Yet life for the Judeans was not always oppressive under the Ptolemies. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–247 BCE), for example, released some of the Jewish captives taken by Ptolemy I—an initiative regarded as a gesture of goodwill shortly before Ptolemy II began the project to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek.[6]

The Jewish texts written in Judea under the Ptolemies span a wide

spectrum of literary genres, from apocalyptic visions to wisdom texts to adventure tales. But Jews living at this time probably did not think in terms of genre, or mentally categorize their stories in the way that readers do today. Jewish authors may not even have thought of their stories as books. Many of the legends they wrote down were transmitted orally for generations before being recorded in writing. These stories, and how they were transmitted, were therefore retold with a degree of fluidity. And the fact that so many kinds of stories were being transmitted, both orally and in written record, suggests that most Jews enjoyed a high degree of creative freedom.

Judea under the Syrian Greeks: 200–164 BCE

Between around 270 and 168 BCE, the Seleucids and Ptolemies fought a series of intermittent wars, known as the Six Syrian Wars, in which they battled over regions that included Judea.[7] The Ptolemies maintained control over Judea following the first four wars, but the Seleucid king Antiochus III (also known as Antiochus the Great) conquered the area during the fifth war, at the Battle of Paneion in 200 BCE.

The Jews soon had to accustom themselves to a new political situation: They were no longer living under the Egyptian Greeks, but under the Syrian Greeks. Some Jews were no doubt optimistic that, like the Ptolemies, the Syrian Greeks would treat the Jews with tolerance. But after Antiochus III died in 187 BCE and his son Antiochus IV Epiphanes assumed control over Judea, the new ruler instituted a series of legislations that prohibited the Jews in Judea from observing their ancestral laws.[8] Violators of these prohibitions were to be killed.

Accustomed to permissive rule under the Ptolemaic Greeks, the Jews became despondent, and some were moved to take arms in rebellion. One Jew named Mattathias, a member of a family known as the Hasmoneans, encouraged his sons to resist Antiochus IV Epiphanes' harsh legislation, but died before he could oversee the rebellion. With his son Judas Maccabeus ("the Hammer") at the helm, Mattathias's five sons led a revolt

against the Syrian Greeks to free the Jews from Antiochus's oppressive legislation. The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, as well as the writings of the first-century CE historian Josephus, record this rebellion, which led to the successful establishment of a Jewish monarchy.

The social dynamics at play during this period were not simply a matter of Greek versus Jew. Intra-Jewish tensions over how to integrate Greek culture and practice into the Jewish community had been fomenting since the rise of the Greek Empire. Historical records written down just decades after the Hasmonean rebellion, especially 1 and 2 Maccabees, reveal that the conflict between Jews who advocated for Hellenization and those who resisted assimilating into the Hellenist world inflamed the conflict with Antiochus.

Both 1 and 2 Maccabees were written sometime toward the end of the second century BCE but are different in tone and content. The author of 1 Maccabees was likely a member of the Hasmonean court, as he aims to provide a historically accurate record of the Hasmonean rebellion while portraying the Hasmonean family in a positive light. This book largely focuses on the heroic deeds of the Hasmonean family.

While 2 Maccabees portrays the same events, it focuses primarily on the fate of Jerusalem and the Temple. The author argues strongly against "Hellenism," which he believes was in inherent tension with "Judaism" (and this book is the earliest Greek text to use the word "Judaism"). The book of 2 Maccabees opens with a statement by a nameless editor, noting that he had condensed a five-volume version of the book, written by a Jew named Jason, who lived in the North African city of Cyrene. Some of the historical details he includes are inaccurate or hyperbolized, since he was not an eyewitness to the events recounted in his story. In fact, the entire writing style of 2 Maccabees is more "Hellenist" than that of 1 Maccabees: 2 Maccabees uses sophisticated Greek, well-known literary techniques, and dramatic elements that would have worked well on stage. But as we will see, it is 2 Maccabees, rather than 1 Maccabees, that rails against Greek culture.

For historical reconstructions of the events of 175–164 BCE, scholars turn to 1 Maccabees and Josephus's account in *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus (37–c. 100 CE), however, lived two centuries after the Hasmonean rebellion, and probably relied on some historical sources lost to modern readers. Some of the details in his account may also be exaggerated. Josephus's record of one of Judah's speeches, for instance, differs from the same speech recorded in 1 Maccabees. Some scholars believe that Josephus altered this speech to make it mirror the speech that Eleazar, a leader in the Jewish rebellion against Rome, delivered to the Jews at Masada just before they committed suicide in lieu of surrendering to Rome. Parallels between Judah's and Eleazar's speeches in Josephus's works suggest that Josephus saw the 66–70 CE rebellion against Rome as another Jewish attempt to resist a political power that threatened the survival of the Jewish people.[9]

The Maccabean Dynasty: 164–63 BCE

Like many Jews living under Greek rule, Jewish leaders in Jerusalem argued with one another over the degree to which Jews should embrace the Hellenistic world. Some contended that Jews should participate in Hellenistic culture by attending events in public theaters, engaging in activities held in local gymnasiums, and observing Greek festivals. Other Jews resisted all manners of active engagement with Hellenistic culture. But most Jews took a middle stance, striking what seemed to them a natural balance between observing their ancestral traditions and participating in Greek life.

This issue came to a head in the beginning of the second century BCE, when a Jew named Jason assumed the Jerusalem Temple's high priesthood. Jason's brother Onias III, who had previously served as high priest, was known for his devotion to Jewish ancestral law. But when the Syrian-Greek king Seleucus IV died and his brother Antiochus IV Epiphanes succeeded him, Onias's brother Jason promised the new king 440 talents if he were to be instated as high priest. He also promised the king another 150 talents if he were to authorize the building of a gymnasium for the

people of Judea and give the Jews of Jerusalem Greek citizenship. Jason's intentions to "buy" the high priesthood, and his interest in installing a gymnasium that would feature naked athletes, angered Jews who sought to inoculate themselves against Greek life. Tensions between Jews who advocated for integration into Hellenist culture and Jews who resisted integration began to mount.

In about 172 BCE, a Hellenized Jew named Menelaus wrested the priesthood from Jason by promising Antiochus IV Epiphanes three hundred more talents of silver than Jason had been paying Antiochus for the position. Once in office, Menelaus stole treasures from the Jerusalem Temple in order to make the pledged payments. He also had the former high priest Onias III executed for publicizing his actions.

Sometime later, a false rumor spread that Antiochus had died, and Jason seized the opportunity to amass an army and attack Menelaus. When Antiochus got wind of the chaos plaguing Jerusalem, he assumed Judea was in a state of rebellion. His consequent invasion of Jerusalem, desecration of the Temple, and decree that Jews could no longer observe their ancestral laws on pain of death provided the reasons for the Hasmonean rebellion.[10] Antiochus may not have realized that he was entering a situation already rife with internal tension. Many Jews perceived his attack as the culmination of forced Hellenization put into place decades before by the Jews themselves.

The author of 1 Maccabees opens his account by describing Mattathias's reaction to this oppressive new legislation. Mattathias tells his five sons to actively resist Antiochus. Mattathias's sons, in turn, understand that this resistance is part of a larger struggle against both the Syrian Greeks and the Hellenized Jews who support them. Mattathias's battle cry, "Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" echoes Moses' cry in the Book of Exodus when he castigates the Israelites for having built a Golden Calf and calls for volunteers among the Israelites to fight against those among them who have sinned.[11] This implicit comparison indicates that the enemy was as much the Jewish apostate as the Greek foreigner.

By 164 BCE, Judas and his brothers had successfully established an independent state that would remain autonomous until Rome incorporated Judea as a province in 63 BCE. Still, as the Hasmoneans worked to secure and expand their boundaries over the next half century or so, military conflicts would continue. And as members of the Hasmonean ruling family vied for power, the family became increasingly Hellenized and fraught with internal friction.

One Hasmonean king named Alexander Jannaeus, who rose to power in 104 BCE, was notorious for his animosity toward the Pharisees, a sect of Jews who adhered to certain religious tenets, such as the authority of an Oral Law that complemented the written scriptures. Like the Rabbis who came after them, the Pharisees were credited with being teachers who disseminated information about the scriptures and oral traditions. But Alexander believed that the Pharisees threatened his political interests, which required rejecting ancestral Jewish law in favor of Hellenization. The Pharisees, in turn, regarded him with suspicion and animosity.

The Pharisees had good reason to be concerned about Alexander, who was notorious for governing his subjects with calculated ruthlessness. When Alexander conquered Gaza, for example, he slaughtered all of its residents. And like his predecessors, Alexander assumed the high priesthood, which for some Jews was as deplorable as his cruelty to his subjects. This position was meant to be inherited, not appropriated.

Over time, the Judean population, especially the Pharisees, rallied against Alexander. On the harvest festival of Tabernacles in the fall of 94 BCE, the Jews pelted him with citrons at the Temple—an act of sedition which, according to Josephus, incited Alexander to kill six thousand Jews.[12] A full-fledged rebellion broke out two years later, but in 86 BCE Alexander quashed the rebels. After reestablishing his throne, he crucified eight hundred rebels while simultaneously murdering their wives and children.[13]

Shortly before his death, Alexander commanded that control of the monarchy be passed on to his wife, Salome Alexandra, who became queen regnant in 76 BCE and remained ruler of Judea until her death in 67

BCE. During this time, Salome increased the Judean army by 50 percent and succeeded in securing the kingdom's borders, which Alexander had expanded. According to Josephus, Salome was a fearsome commander who reinforced treaties and established trade routes with neighboring countries. She engaged in military conflict when necessary but also sought to make peace with Alexander's long-standing enemies, both locally and abroad.

Salome's enduring legacy lies in her repairing the broken relationship between the Pharisees and the Hasmonean ruling family. In both *Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*, Josephus criticizes her for these efforts, arguing that Salome allowed herself to be completely controlled by the Pharisees, who took advantage of her goodwill by becoming virtually irrepressible, assassinating and arresting enemies as they saw fit.[14] At the same time, Josephus depicts Salome as being manipulative, ingratiating herself to the Pharisees to gain the goodwill of the people, who tended to look to the Pharisees for political guidance.

Salome must have appreciated the political benefits of allowing the Pharisees more power: According to Josephus, many people living in Judea did not identify as Pharisees but nevertheless regarded them as their religious and political leaders. And empowering the Pharisees would not have required great personal sacrifice if, as Josephus and Rabbinic literature indicate, she identified as one of them.

Unlike Josephus, Rabbinic sources extol Salome as a great queen. According to midrashic legend, during her time as ruler, rain came on Wednesday and Friday nights, signs of divine approval.[15] So much rain fell during this time that produce became unusually large; grains of barley, for example, were the size of olive pits. One of the talmudic legends that describes this plentiful time does not mention Salome Alexandra by name, but notes that rain fell "in the days of Simeon ben Shetaḥ," Salome's brother. In a parallel passage in the Rabbinic collection known as midrash Leviticus Rabbah, Salome is mentioned by name.[16] This same legend suggests that the Rabbis viewed Salome as one of the greatest rulers of their past—which is not surprising, since the Rabbis perceived themselves to be continuing the

legacy of Torah study and teaching perpetuated by the Pharisees. Had literature about Salome written by anti-Pharisaic communities survived, we might have a very different portrait of the great queen today.

Judea under the Romans: 63 BCE–135 CE

After Salome's death, the Hasmonean kingdom descended into a period of instability as her two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, competed for control of the monarchy. Salome had appointed Hyrcanus II to succeed her as ruler of Judea after her death. Like his mother, Hyrcanus supported the Pharisees in adhering strictly to both written and oral Jewish tradition. Aristobulus II, however, followed his father's tendency to oppose the Pharisees and support the powerful priestly class of Sadducees, who rejected the Oral Law and the Pharisaic tenet of resurrection. While Hyrcanus was initially installed as king of Judea, Aristobulus organized a successful coup in 66 BCE to wrest the monarchy from Hyrcanus. Ultimately, the two agreed to a treaty in which Hyrcanus would surrender his position as monarch and high priest but receive the revenue of the high priest.[17] According to Josephus, an Idumean named Antipater convinced Hyrcanus that Aristobulus would never let him live, so Hyrcanus retreated to Nabataea, where he allied with the Nabataean king, Aretas III, and with his help attacked Jerusalem. Hyrcanus and Aretas besieged the Temple where Aristobulus was hiding and soon took control of the Temple.[18]

After this incident, both Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II appealed to the Roman general Scaurus, who was traveling through Judea, for aid in fighting one another in exchange for four hundred talents. Scaurus accepted Aristobulus's offer because Scaurus assumed that Aristobulus had the money, whereas Hyrcanus did not. (It may also be that Scaurus did not want to aid Hyrcanus, who allied with Pharisees, a sect that did not generally have friendly relations with the Romans). Supported by the Romans, Aristobulus besieged and defeated Hyrcanus in battle. Yet the question of who would reign supreme remained unresolved.

When the Roman general Pompey reached Damascus some time later,

both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus again pled their cases. Instructing the brothers to cease their fighting, Pompey promised to resolve the matter when he arrived in Judea. Aristobulus, however, incited the people into further rebellion against Hyrcanus, who had remained the nominal king. Infuriated by the news, Pompey amassed an army and besieged Jerusalem.[19] In 63 BCE, after a three-month siege, Pompey wrested control of the city. From this point on, Jerusalem and the rest of Judea fell under Roman control as a client state, meaning that Judea had limited independence and had to pay taxes to the Roman Empire.[20] It would take more than another half century for Judea to be fully incorporated into the Roman Empire.

Herod the Great

In the decades following Pompey's takeover, from 37–4 BCE, Antipater's son, the infamous Herod I, ruled Judea. Herod was a descendent of the Idumeans, who had been forced to convert to Judaism after the Hasmonean king Hyrcanus I conquered them in 125 BCE.[21] Julius Caesar appointed Herod's father, Antipater, as procurator of Judea in 48 BCE, and Herod as governor of Galilee one year later.[22] In 40 BCE, the Romans acknowledged Herod's rule as king of Judea, Galilee, and Perea.[23]

Herod's establishment as king of Judea began tumultuously. After the Romans declared him king, the Parthians invaded Judea and placed Hyrcanus II's nephew Antigonus on the throne. Herod escaped to Rome and returned with Roman infantry to attack and defeat Antigonus.[24]

Herod was enormously unpopular among the Jews, particularly among Pharisees who resented his allegiance to the Roman Empire. Many Jews were horrified by his treatment of his Hasmonean wife Mariamne's family. They believed that Herod's ruthlessness served as confirmation that Herod saw himself as an outsider who viewed the Hasmoneans as competitors for power. In one incident, Herod had Mariamne's seventeen-year-old brother, Aristobulus, drowned in a pool in Jericho.[25] Aristobulus was a popular member of the Hasmonean family and a newly elected high priest; Herod must have viewed him as a direct political threat who had to be eliminated. Herod later ordered the death of Mariamne herself

because he believed she had been adulterous.[26] Mariamne's murder was viewed as especially egregious because she was a Hasmonean princess whom some Jews regarded as having a more legitimate claim to the throne than Herod himself. Mariamne's mother, Alexandra, testified against her own daughter, and still Herod had her killed later as well.[27] Herod even ordered his sons born to Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus, to be strangled to death.[28]

Herod also did not exercise restraint in response to perceived threats outside of the Hasmonean family. He killed another son, Antipater, whose mother, Doris, he had divorced when he decided to marry Mariamne. Antipater had helped Herod to carry out the murders of his half-brothers Alexander and Aristobulus, on the grounds that they had plotted against Herod.[29]

One legend about Herod's ruthlessness is recorded in the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew. Having heard that a "king of the Jews" had been born, Herod was determined to find and kill this baby. It was due only to divine intervention, via an angel who informed Jesus' father, Joseph, to escape to Egypt, that Jesus' life was saved. Angry that Jesus had eluded him, Herod proceeded to have all children under the age of two living in the vicinity of Bethlehem murdered.[30] Whether or not this story occurred in the way the Gospel retells it, this legend reflects the first-century CE attitude toward Herod: He was so evil and ambitious that he would go so far as to murder innocent babies in order to strengthen the security of his throne.

Aware of how despised he was, Herod was concerned that when he died, the Jews would not give him an honorable burial. He commanded, therefore, that elite Jews be killed upon his death in order to ensure that the Judeans would be in a state of true mourning at the time of his funeral. Thankfully, Herod's sister Salome rescinded this edict after he died.[31]

Herod's notoriety and cruelty cast a shadow over his reign that obfuscated his accomplishments as a diplomat who maintained good relations with the Romans, and as a visionary who oversaw construction of ambitious

building projects. Among his grandest building achievements were his renovation and expansion of the Jerusalem Temple, his construction of a personal summer estate known as Herodium, and his founding of the city Caesarea, which boasted a large port called Sebastos. Herod also constructed sports arenas, recreational facilities, and temples, all intended for public use, as well as private palaces for his family. In addition, he built and reinforced military fortifications, such as the famous desert fortress of Masada, later used by Jews resisting the Roman takeover of Jerusalem in the Jewish War.[32]

By the time Herod died in 4 BCE, Jerusalem was a diverse city comprising Jews and gentiles from all regions of the empire. Thousands of gentiles had moved to the city to work on Herod's building projects, and many settled in the region after the projects were completed. The New Testament book of Acts, written toward the end of the first century CE, describes Jerusalem as being as diverse as any other major city in the Roman Empire, a city where people from all over the Roman Empire gathered.[33]

After Herod died, his kingdom was split into a tetrarchy of three parts: Herod's son Archelaus was appointed tetrarch of Judea; another son, Antipas, became tetrarch of the Galilee and Berea; and a third son, Herod Philip, was elected tetrarch of Gaulonities, Trachonities, and Paneas.[34] Herod also bequeathed some regions—including Jamnia, Ashdod, and Phasaelis—to his sister Salome. Archelaus, however, who received the bulk of Herod's kingdom, was unable to maintain control over the region to Rome's satisfaction: In 6 CE he was exiled to Gaul.[35] From this point on, Judea became a Roman province. It would be ruled by prefects until Herod's grandson Agrippa I became king of Judea in 41 CE, following Caligula's death.[36]

Agrippa I ruled Judea from 41–44 CE, during the same time that Claudius ascended the throne of the Roman Empire. The two had a close connection dating from their childhoods. Agrippa was sent to Rome as a boy to escape the hands of his grandfather, Herod, who had killed his

own son (and Agrippa's father) Aristobulus IV. Agrippa received a Roman education in Tiberius's court, and as a young man was appointed tutor of Tiberius's grandson. He also forged a personal relationship with Tiberius's son Drusus and Tiberius's nephew Claudius, who would later become emperor. The close relationship between Agrippa and members of the Roman government did not wane over time. Yet he also managed to maintain a positive relationship with the Pharisees. During his rule, Herod's territories were finally reunited under a single monarchy.

A story is told in the Mishnah that Agrippa observed the Pharisaic practice of publicly reading a portion of the Torah at the Temple on the last day of Tabernacles, the fall harvest holiday. On one occasion, when he reached the verse in Deuteronomy that reads "you must not set a foreigner over you" (Deut. 17:15), Agrippa began to cry. Seeing him distressed, the rabbis in the synagogue responded with words of consolation: "Agrippa, you are our brother, you are our brother!"[37] It is unclear whether this legend is referring to Agrippa I, who had close ties to the Judeans; his son, Agrippa II; or a figure representing a conflation of both Agrippa I and Agrippa II. If Agrippa I and Agrippa II had different relationships with the Pharisees, it is likely that this Mishnah, and other Rabbinic references to these men, would have made a clear distinction between them.[38] All we can say with certainty is that this legend attests to the ambiguous relationship between the last ruling members of Herod's family and the Judeans. On the one hand, Herod's grandson and great-grandson identified as Jews and on the other, they—or perhaps just Agrippa I, or just Agrippa II—worried that as descendants of Idumeans and of the notorious Herod, they would never be fully accepted as Jews, despite their sincere intentions.

While he was probably well liked in Rabbinic circles, Agrippa I, who is called Herod in Acts, did not have a good relationship with early Jewish followers of Jesus. According to Acts, he persecuted members of the Jerusalem church. He had an apostle, James, killed, and arrested another apostle, Peter, who, Acts tells us, miraculously escaped from prison.[39] The author of Acts interprets Agrippa's death in 44 CE as a divine punishment for allowing some of his subjects to treat him as a god.[40]

The Search for a Messiah in Judea

The rising numbers of Jews studying the teachings of Jesus in the middle of the first century CE was probably not of great interest to the broader Jewish population. Growing tensions with the Romans and the pockets of resistance cropping up throughout the empire were more concerning. Josephus records, for instance, that in 48 CE a Jew named Judas instigated a rebellion against the Roman Empire, along with his two sons, Jacob and Simeon. The Romans soon executed all three of them. According to Josephus, Judas was but one of many rebels who stirred sedition against Rome.[41]

In the early decades of the first century CE, many Jews believed they were living on the cusp of the end-time. Some Jews who were angered by Rome's continuous insults, which included increasingly high taxes and little or no interventions when local Roman rulers treated Jews with bias, believed that their challenging circumstances portended forward movement on the inevitable path toward messianic redemption. Many of these Jews were spurred to rebel against the empire.

Other Jews, however, believed they could help bring about the end-time by following the teachings of a messiah who would be responsible for transitioning the people into the final age. One such messianic figure was Jesus. In around 32 CE, Roman authorities crucified Jesus in Jerusalem, where a community of his Jewish followers was slowly growing. The leaders of this Jerusalem church did not want to cut off ties with the broader Jewish community. They observed certain Jewish practices, such as dietary laws, and focused on spreading the words of Jesus, whom they regarded as a great teacher. Acts 15 recalls that in about 50 CE, members of this church met at what is now called the Council of Jerusalem to discuss what Jewish practices gentile converts to their community would be required to observe. They decided that gentiles would be prohibited from practicing idolatry, violating certain sexual proscriptions, eating blood, and eating meat that contains blood.[42] All of these practices would later become cornerstones of the Rabbinic Noahide Laws.[43] In the middle of the first century, then, the followers of Jesus living in Jerusalem likely saw themselves as nothing other than devoted Jews.

The Role of the Temple

While at this time the Jewish population was scattered throughout the Roman Empire, the Jerusalem Temple remained a focal point of Jewish religious life. Many Jews in the late Second Temple period did exactly what the Torah proscribed regarding the festivals of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles: They offered sacrifices and worshipped the Jewish God at the Temple.[44] Thousands of Jews made the trip up to Jerusalem—"up" not in the sense that Jerusalem was topographically elevated, but, rather, they went up to a more spiritually elevated place.

While not all Jews made this trip regularly, evidence indicates that many did make the effort. The opening of the Jewish book of Tobit, preserved in the Apocrypha, describes the eponymous hero as being virtuous primarily based on his commitment to making this long pilgrimage to Jerusalem from his home in Assyria. Moreover, significant archaeological discoveries attest to this kind of pilgrimage. The father-son team Yotam Tepper and Yigal Tepper recently discovered an approximately five-and-a-half-foot-wide path with curved steps about ten miles from Jerusalem.[45] Unlike wider roads built during the Roman period, which featured mile markers and were sturdy enough to accommodate different kinds of transportation, this path would have been able to accommodate pilgrims coming to Jerusalem only by foot. Scholars believe that other paths were made as well.

The existence of paths leading to Jerusalem from multiple directions conjures an image of the influx of Jews who likely overwhelmed the city of Jerusalem on pilgrimage holidays. The mass gatherings and the thousands of sacrifices at the Temple must have been a grand sight to behold, and a pungent one. According to Josephus's account in *The Jewish War*, Roman officials counted 256,500 paschal lambs sacrificed over the course of just one Passover holiday. Given the mandate that the lamb had to be eaten communally, and assuming that about ten people gathered to eat one lamb, it can be inferred from Josephus's statement that 2,565,000 people were present in Jerusalem on Passover.[46] In another passage, Josephus

comments that more than three million people would come to Jerusalem during Passover.[47]

Other historical data exist as well. A passage in a Rabbinic collection called the Tosefta states that Agrippa (here, too, it is unclear whether the Tosefta refers to Agrippa I or Agrippa II) conducted a census of Jerusalem's population during Passover by counting the hind legs of paschal lambs. This figure amounted to 1.2 million, which suggests a total presence of twelve million people.[48] This number, however, is likely exaggerated.

The Jewish Rebellion against Rome

Although Claudius (41–54 CE) regarded Agrippa I, the last Hasmonean king of Judea, as a friend and ally, some of the Roman procurators whom Claudius appointed over Judea fueled tensions between the Jewish population and Roman officials who occupied the region. One such figure was the governor of Judea, Tiberius Julius Alexander (46–48 CE). Josephus attributes the Jews' strong critique of Tiberius to his being an apostate, but Tiberius was more than simply a wayward son: During the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, Tiberius was the chief of Titus's army.[49]

Another Roman official blamed for fueling bitterness toward the Roman Empire was Procurator Ventidius Cumanus (48–52 CE). In one incident, a Roman soldier exposed himself indecently to a crowd of Jews who had come to the Jerusalem Temple to celebrate the Passover festival, leading to a public outcry. Asked to restore order, Cumanus responded by bringing in soldiers to forcibly remove Jews from the Temple. This, Josephus writes, led to a disastrous stampede that killed about ten thousand Jews.[50]

Gessius Florus, the Roman procurator of Jerusalem from 64 to 66 CE, also magnified Jewish yearnings for independence by antagonizing the Jews. Trouble began when some Jews complained to Florus that gentiles in Judea were harassing and stealing from the Jews, and Florus refused to intervene.[51] The relationship only continued to deteriorate. On one occasion, for example, a gentile ruffian aggravated the Jews of Caesarea by sacrificing birds

on the Sabbath on an upside-down pot just outside a synagogue. When a delegation of Jews approached Florus to argue that this man's behavior was an act of mockery toward their Temple, Florus had them arrested. He then raided the Temple treasury and seized seventeen talents on the grounds that they were owed to him for imperial service. From there, he established a tribunal and demanded that Jewish leaders hand over those Jews who had protested his behavior. The Jewish leaders responded by claiming that all of the Jews in Judea were favorably disposed toward Florus. Florus, knowing this was certainly not the case, commanded his soldiers to sack the marketplace in Jerusalem and kill whomever they saw.

The enthusiasm of Florus's soldiers exceeded Florus's own expectations: According to Josephus, Florus's men killed 3,600 Jews in one day, a figure that includes women and children. Also included in this figure are men who were scourged and crucified on the cross.[52] Josephus notes that the calamities that befell the Jews under Florus played a major role in inciting the Jews to support a rebellion against the Romans.

Josephus also attributes the Jewish rebellion to members of what he calls the fourth "philosophy" of Judaism—a group that may have been associated with the Zealots, who sought to create an independent Jewish state by rebelling against Rome.[53] The members of this group were incensed by high Roman taxes, and by the antagonism of lower-level Roman officials toward the Judean populace.

Herodian client kings of the Roman Empire also agitated the population. Some Jews accused Agrippa II, who was the last member of the Herodian family to rule the Judeans, of not properly advocating on their behalves to the Roman Empire. Instead, Agrippa II supported Vespasian's military excursions to quell the Jews' rebellion, and he provided Vespasian with troops. This, too, increased unrest among the Jews.

Rebellion against the Roman Empire was further complicated by internal conflicts within the Judean population. One group of Zealots was led by a man named Eleazar bar Simeon. Eleazar achieved a surprising victory over the Romans early in the war at Beit Horon, where some six thousand Roman soldiers were killed.[54] Despite his unexpected victory,

moderate Jewish leaders were concerned about Eleazar's impulsive and violent methods and refused to allow him to bear an official title in the war.[55] Eleazar therefore decided to maintain an independent operation against the Romans that did not cooperate with the main Jewish army.

Another Jewish rebel named John did likewise, encouraging thousands of Jews in his Galilean town of Gischala to join him in rebellion against the Romans. When the Romans sent troops to Judea with Titus at their helm, John pled with Titus to place a respite on the war so the Jews could properly observe their Sabbath day. Titus relented, and John escaped to Jerusalem that evening. Titus then took the city of Gischala, but he was furious that he was unable to capture John.[56]

Meanwhile, the Zealots in Jerusalem, led by Eleazar, had wrested control of the Jerusalem Temple and were being besieged by Ananus and his men. Ananus, a Sadducean who had been the Temple's high priest, opposed the Jewish rebellion against Rome.[57] When John arrived in Jerusalem, he first attempted to play both sides: He entered the Temple on the pretense of establishing a treaty with the Zealots on behalf of Ananus, but then told the Zealots that they would need outside help, since Ananus was planning to appeal to Vespasian to help defeat them.[58]

Desperate to find a way to survive the siege, the Zealots agreed to send a message to the Idumeans asking for help, and they in turn sent twenty thousand men to support the Zealots. The Idumeans broke into Jerusalem and released the Zealots from the Temple, whereupon a rampage ensued in which the Idumeans killed thousands of Jews living in the city, including Ananus.[59] After the Idumeans retreated, John once again broke off from Eleazar, and led a separate group of rebels against the Romans.

At this time, a rebel named Simon bar Giora amassed a following of forty thousand men to fight against the Romans. Simon threatened the security of both the Romans and the Zealots. Wanting to establish himself as king, he roamed Judea with his troops, plundering supplies and killing people who resisted him. In order to rein in Simon's growing power, the Zealots abducted his wife and some of her attendants. In response,

Simon killed and tortured so many Jerusalemites that the Zealots were compelled to release his wife. Soon afterward, the elders of Jerusalem invited Simon into the city to help overthrow John of Gischala, whom they regarded as a tyrant.[60] Simon took control of the upper region of Jerusalem, and John held fast over lower Jerusalem.

The infighting among Jewish rebels weakened them against their common enemy. Other factors beyond the rebels' control made the difficult situation even worse. According to Rabbinic sources, the fall of 69 CE was a sabbatical year, during which, according to biblical injunction, Jews could not plow, sow, or harvest their land. The following year yielded a smaller crop than usual, making the siege of Jerusalem even more unbearable and catastrophic than it otherwise would have been.[61]

Events came to a head in 70 CE, when Roman forces besieged Jerusalem. According to Jewish tradition, the siege ended on the ninth day of the month of Av, in the heat of summer. After the Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem, they destroyed the Temple and killed many thousands of residents—1,100,000, according to Josephus. They also took thousands of captives, which Josephus numbers at 97,000.[62]

Josephus's calculations may be too high, but it is certain that the Roman response to the Jewish rebellion devastated the Jews. The Babylonian Talmud recalls a legend in which a thousand boys and girls, taken as captives from Jerusalem to Rome, presumably to be brought into sexual slavery, committed suicide by jumping over the ship transporting them to Rome.[63]

The Romans presented the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the quelling of the Jewish rebellion as a major victory, and ritualized it in the same way they celebrated victories over non-Roman territories. The celebration climaxed with a triumphal procession through Rome that featured notable items plundered during the war—both precious objects and high-ranking captives. This triumph was unusual, though, in representing a victory over what had long been Roman territory. In this sense, it testified to how damaging the war in Judea had been for the Romans, and how relieved they were to have finally put the rebellion

to rest. It also suggests that even when Jews were living within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, they were viewed as outsiders who had never wholly accepted Roman rule and who were never wholly accepted as Romans.

The Judean uprising tapped into the Romans' military resources, diverted their energies, and drained their finances far more than anyone could have predicted. They were determined to send the message that their quelling of the Jewish uprising was utterly final. High-quality coins were minted with the phrase "Judaea Capta" in gold, silver, and bronze, and the quantity of coins produced—more to commemorate the capture of Judea than any other triumph—is another testament to the importance with which the Romans viewed their victory.[64]

Another commemoration of the Romans' victory was the Arch of Titus. Domitian, Titus's brother who ruled from 81 to 96 CE, erected it on the western edge of the Roman Forum early on in his reign. The arch depicts the victorious Flavians carrying vessels that had been used in the Jerusalem Temple, such as the showbread table and the menorah. These objects symbolized both the Jews' worship of their God and the sacred space that housed their God. Also on the arch is Titus, who stands at a passageway above the panel depicting the Temple spoils with Victories flanking him in the spandrels (the space between the straight horizontal surface of the arch and the curve below it). The arch's message was clear: The Jewish God had been defeated at the hands of Titus, with the help of his god Jupiter, the god responsible for Roman kings' military victories. Unlike other gods, whose cults were incorporated into Roman culture after conquest, the Romans depicted the Jewish God not as being incorporated but as being defeated. In keeping with this message, Vespasian required that Jews who had previously donated money to the Jerusalem Temple now pay the same amount to the cult of Jupiter.[65]

In addition to the Arch of Titus, a second, larger arch was built in 81 CE to commemorate Titus's victory over the Jews. This arch, built in the middle of the Circus Maximus, a massive Roman arena used for sports

and other entertainment, has not yet been excavated. Its enormity—over eighteen yards wide, ten yards high, and sixteen yards deep—again testifies to the seriousness with which the Romans regarded their victory over Judea.

So much loot was plundered from Judea that Vespasian was able to use the goods to fund the construction of the greatest amphitheater built in the Roman Empire. The Colosseum hosted gladiator games, theatrical entertainment, and other public events. Holes at the bottom of a stone inscription found at the site are evidence of metal letters that had once been attached to pegs and placed into the stone. Based on the location of these holes and their relationship to one another, the letters can be reconstructed to read: "The Emperor Titus Caesar Vespasian Augustus ordered the new amphitheater to be made from the (proceeds from the sale of the) booty." This booty is likely the treasure taken from Vespasian's successful war against the Jews.[66]

Rabbinic Legends about the Temple's Destruction

Rabbinic traditions recall the destruction of Jerusalem and its great Temple with emotive detail. The midrashic collection *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, for example, describes an encounter between Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and the Roman general Vespasian that occurred when Jerusalem was burning to the ground. In this account, students of Rabbi Yochanan place him in a coffin and escort it out of the city, facilitating the rabbi's escape from Jerusalem. Vespasian, standing with his cavalry just outside Jerusalem, has the coffin opened, and discovers Rabbi Yochanan alive and well inside. Vespasian asks Rabbi Yochanan, "What shall I give you?" By asking this question, Vespasian may be requesting that Rabbi Yochanan acquiesce to the Roman takeover of Jerusalem. He may also be expressing his willingness to cease fomenting antagonism between the Romans and the Jews. Rabbi Yochanan answers, "I only ask for Yavneh, where I might teach my students, and establish prayer, and keep all of the commandments."[67] Rabbi Yochanan, it seems, seeks to ensure the continuity of the Torah's transmission, and the authority to oversee the practice of Judaism without Roman intervention.

A number of Rabbinic versions of this story recount the episode with slight variations.[68] In the version preserved in the midrashic book *Eikhah Rabbah*, for example, Rabbi Yochanan does not mention Yavneh (or Jamnia in English) at all. In the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Yochanan asks Vespasian for "Yavneh and its sages," in addition to medical care for an ailing priest, Rabbi Zadok, and the rescue of the patriarch Rabban Gamaliel and his family. This latter version, in which Rabbi Yochanan is concerned with protecting the establishment of the priesthood, the patriarchy, and a place to conduct lay leadership, is carefully curated and probably an edited version of an older legend. Nevertheless, the fact that this account appears in multiple Rabbinic versions reflects a broad concern regarding how to ensure the survival of Rabbinic tradition in the years following the Temple's destruction.

Another Rabbinic story recalls Rabbi Akiva walking past the ruins of the Temple with Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, and Rabbi Yehoshua. When they notice a wolf walking upon the wreckage of the Holy of Holies, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues lament, but he responds with laughter. The rabbis react incredulously to Akiva's laughter, but he explains that since the prophecy in Micah 3:12 predicting the total destruction of Jerusalem has been fulfilled, the time will soon come for the prophecy of Zechariah 8:4, which envisions the restoration of Jerusalem, to be fulfilled as well.[69] This story speaks to both the personal devastation the rabbis felt in the wake of the Temple's destruction, and also to their hope that Jerusalem would one day be restored to its former magnificence.

The legend of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's encounter with Vespasian and the story of Akiva's seeing the wolf on the Temple Mount capture the popular Jewish belief that the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE was a fulcrum in time—a moment in which the entire course of Jewish history was about to dramatically change.

The Aftermath of Destruction

One reason the Jewish rebellion lasted so long—and then was quashed with a powerful show of force—has to do with the Roman Empire's state of

turmoil during this period. Nero's reign, which ended in his suicide, gave way to a period of instability that saw four men—Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian—staking a claim to the empire in a single year. It was not until Vespasian successfully established himself on the throne that the question of how to deal with Judea was fully addressed. To distinguish himself from his capricious predecessors, Vespasian presented himself as a seasoned general interested first and foremost in the empire's security and stability. This, in turn, motivated his harsh and swift response to the Jewish rebellion.

Jewish hostility toward the Roman Empire did not soften in the years following the Temple's destruction. After the war, Vespasian imposed the Fiscus Judaicus, a high taxation imposed on Jews throughout the empire,[70] and many Jews in regions far from Jerusalem must have resented having to suffer the consequences of a rebellion that had occurred in Judea. Clashes between Jews and Romans punctuated the first century and extended into the first half of the second century. In 115 CE, Jewish riots broke out throughout the Roman Empire, and by the time they were quelled in 118 CE, thousands of Jews and Romans had lost their lives.[71] Many Jews were probably eager to reconcile with the Romans at this point, but other Jews continued to use military resistance as a means of defying Roman rule.

Aelia Capitolina and Rabbinic Settlement of the Galilee

In around 130 CE, the Roman emperor Hadrian (117–38 CE) decided that instead of rebuilding Jerusalem, which the Romans had ravaged sixty years earlier, as a Jewish city, he would build a city on the site that featured a Roman temple at its center. This city was to be called Aelia Capitolina, after Hadrian's family name, Aelia, and the god Jupiter, who was also known as Capitolinus.

For some Jews who were already distraught by the Roman presence in Judea and the destruction it had wreaked, this was the final straw. In 132 CE, a Jew named Simeon Bar Kosiba (or possibly Simeon Bar Koseba) amassed an extraordinary following of thousands of Jews who believed

he was the Messiah. Bar Kosiba went by the name of Bar Kokhba, which meant "son of a star" and had typological significance, as it alluded to Numbers 24:17, which cites the gentile prophet Balaam predicting a time of salvation for Israel: "What I see for them is not yet, what I behold will not be soon, a star [*kokhav*] rises from Jacob, A scepter comes forth from Israel; It smashes the brow of Moab, the foundation of all children of Seth." While many knew him as Simeon Bar Kokhba, personal letters discovered in what scholars call the Cave of Letters in the Judean desert are signed by one Simeon Bar Kosiba, with the possible pronunciation of Koseba.

Bar Kokhba convinced his followers that the successful overthrow of Roman rule and the resulting establishment of Jewish autonomy would signal the beginning of the Messianic Era. His followers, in turn, hoped that, as an embodiment of the star mentioned in Numbers, Bar Kokhba would "smash the brow of Moab," which they interpreted to be a prediction of Rome's impending defeat.

Rabbinic passages that reference this figure deny his claim to messianic rule by calling him Bar Kosiba, which can be rendered as "son of a lie," or "bearer of deceit." Rabbis who used this appellate held Bar Kokhba responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews who were killed by Hadrian's forces during and following the rebellion. Indeed, the destruction that occurred in the wake of Bar Kokhba's rebellion was one of the worst catastrophes in Jewish history, with perhaps as many as 250,000 Jewish casualties, and the loss of access to Jerusalem.[72] Under Hadrian's oversight, Roman legions razed Jerusalem to the ground and rebranded Judea as Syria Palestina.

The loss of life and mass destruction during these years became imprinted on Jewish memory. A legend in the Babylonian Talmud describes the slaughter of Bethar, one of the last towns in Judea to fall to the Romans. The Talmud interprets a biblical verse in light of Bethar's destruction:

> "In blazing anger He has cut down all the might of Israel" (Lam. 2.3): Rabbi Zera said in the name of Rabbi Abbahu who cited Rabbi Johanan: This refers to the eighty [thousand] battle trumpets which gathered in the city

> of Bethar when it was taken. Men, women and children were killed there until their blood ran into the Great Sea. Do you think this was close? It was a whole mile away . . . the Gentiles fertilized their vineyards for seven years with Israel's blood without using manure.[73]

Even if the historical details in this legend are exaggerated, it preserves the trauma and desolation that engulfed the Jews of Judea during this time.

Economic factors also contributed to the turbulent events of the late first and early second century CE. Thousands of Judean residents were impoverished and unemployed, in part for reasons dating back to the end of the first century BCE. King Herod had initiated massive building projects throughout Judea: expanding the Temple, founding new towns, and building fortresses. To complete these immense projects swiftly, Herod had hired Jerusalem residents and thousands of foreign employees. But once the buildings were complete, the workers found themselves unemployed. Thousands of these workers stayed in the region, resulting in a large proportion of residents who became either unemployed or under-employed. Poverty plagued the region and eventually contributed to discontent with the Roman Empire that fanned the flames of rebellion.

While Jewish literature presents the Jerusalem Temple's destruction as a calamitous turning point in Jewish history, some scholars argue that it may not have had the great social and religious impact many Rabbinic texts suggest.[74] Still, there can be little doubt that the loss of the Temple led to changes in social and religious leadership for Jews living in the Land of Israel. Without the Temple to administer, the ruling priestly class of Sadducees abruptly lost the medium through which they exercised control over Jews who had looked to the Temple as a central means of worship. The Pharisees soon emerged as authoritative leaders whose competitors no longer wielded political and religious authority. And in the course of the next six or seven centuries, the heirs of the Pharisees' teachings, the Rabbis, would be instrumental in developing Rabbinic Judaism and its legal system.

The Jews who experienced the violent events of 70 and 135 CE did not reach a consensus regarding what all of these changes meant in the larger scheme of God's divine plan. Some considered their suffering at the hands of the Romans a sign of the coming end-time, when the city of Jerusalem and its Temple would finally be restored. Others, interpreting these changes through a political lens, saw the Jewish rebellion as an act of foolish resistance to the Jews' inevitable assimilation into Roman culture.

The Literature of Judea

Starting with the turn of the second century BCE, the Jews of Judea became extraordinarily prolific in their literary output. Some of the texts written during this period were soon preserved in the Apocrypha. Others were copied over the centuries and later preserved in the modern collection of ancient books known as the Pseudepigrapha. One example of a book that would be preserved in the Apocrypha is Tobit, an adventure tale about a young man who embarks on a long journey to retrieve treasure and who finds love along the way. Another example is the Wisdom of Ben Sira, a guidebook for Jewish students regarding personal conduct that was written fifteen years or so prior to the Hasmonean rebellion. Two generations later, the author's grandson translated the text from Hebrew into Greek.

Another book written in the late second century BCE, around the same time Ben Sira was being translated into Greek, is 1 Maccabees. Its Jewish author was most likely a court insider familiar with the history of the Hasmonean dynasty, and someone who had personally traveled the Land of Israel.

Jerusalem's capture by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BCE was fertile ground for Jewish writers to explore the theme of God's relationship with—and apparent abandonment—of the people. One text written at this time, the Psalms of Solomon, alludes to Pompey's invasion. Without mentioning Pompey by name, the author describes a general's invasion

of Jerusalem and his murder of Judean laypeople, princes, and government officials.[75]

Similar to the Psalms of Solomon, which were written following a calamitous assault on Jerusalem in 63 BCE, the books 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch were composed following the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in 70 CE. While the Psalms of Solomon is a collection of eighteen psalms that consider how Jerusalem's fall influenced Israel's relationship with God, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch feature apocalyptic visions and predictions of Israel's ultimate destiny: God's Chosen People will enjoy salvation and restoration, and the enemies of Israel will be destroyed.

The majority of the documents stored in the Dead Sea caves were originally composed in Judea in the second and first century BCE. These texts represent a diverse array of literary genres, including wisdom literature, novellas, poetry, apocalyptic texts, rewritten Bible texts, and biblical interpretation.

Most of the texts found in the caves, including Jubilees and Ben Sira, were written in Hebrew. While some documents, such as 1 Maccabees, have survived in Greek, most of these texts include turns of phrase that scholars believe would have looked more eloquent in Hebrew, which suggests that they were originally composed in Hebrew as well.

Jews living in the Land of Israel in the late Second Temple period wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, and sometimes Greek. The Jews who spoke these languages did not live separately from one another. The book of Acts, for example, recalls that Paul spoke to the Jews in Hebrew while Roman authorities were arresting him outside the Jerusalem Temple—yet Paul wrote his letters to gentiles living throughout the Roman Empire in Greek.[76] Early Rabbinic texts that are preserved in Hebrew and Aramaic also show knowledge of Greek. These documents remind us that regardless of how committed Jews in the Land of Israel were to observing their ancestral tradition, and how resistant they were to integrating into a Roman way of life, they were still living in an environment in which cultural aspects of both worlds were inescapable.

The siege of Jerusalem in 69–70 CE unleashed massive death and devastation in Judea. But for Jews who wrote about the rebellion in the decades that followed, the greatest catastrophe of all was not the death toll but the destruction of the majestic Temple that had served as a centripetal force for Jews throughout the Roman Empire. The loss of this Temple would eclipse all the other effects of the war in Jewish national memory, and the meaning of this loss would occupy Jewish writing for centuries to come.

CHAPTER 5

Alexandria

In the late Second Temple period, the city of Alexandria was a center of learning, culture, and commerce. Its philosophical schools housed the greatest intellectuals of the age, and its library was renowned as one of the largest and most beautiful in the world. Alexandria's proximity to the Nile made it a fertile region where produce could be grown and exported, and so the city was also an agricultural and mercantile thoroughfare. Its streets and bustling harbor were crowded with visitors who were captivated by its beauty and liveliness.

A massive and diverse workforce thrived in Alexandria since the rural regions beyond the city produced more food than any other Roman province. During this time, the resident population included native Egyptians, Greeks who had settled there following Alexander the Great's founding of the city in the fourth century BCE, Romans, a large community of Jews, and hundreds of thousands of slaves. Overall, the city was regarded as one of the most important in the Roman Empire, a kind of modern-day New York City to which thousands of immigrants and visitors flocked from across the empire.

Alexandria boasted a grand museum where scholars worked and shared ideas. This museum housed the famous Alexandrian library, the greatest library in the Hellenist Empire. King Ptolemy I Soter, who inherited the Egyptian region of the Hellenist Empire after Alexander's death, had built the library in 306 BCE. By 262 BCE, the library held 532,800 books, and, by 47 BCE, it held about one million books.[1] This figure is staggering, given

that every volume was copied by hand, and many were copied specifically to be part of the library's collection. A collection of this size was unparalleled in the Greco-Roman world. It is no wonder that the museum, and by extension the city of Alexandria itself, became a center of intellectual activity under Ptolemaic Greek rule.

Inside the museum, elite philosophers studied the writings of Homer, Aristotle, and Plato. And outside, Egyptians, Greeks, and Jews lived among one another, without establishing clear cultural and religious boundaries. Greek citizens in Egypt began to incorporate Egyptian gods, such as Isis, into their pantheon, and native Egyptians in turn took on Hellenist practices.

The Jews were not immune to these multidirectional influences. They incorporated religious and cultural aspects of the world around them into their Jewish writings and conversations, and also effected changes in the religious worship of non-Jewish Greeks. Evidence of these changes is reflected in Roman complaints that gentiles were adopting Jewish customs, such as Sabbath observance.[2] Most of these gentiles, however, probably did not convert to Judaism.

During this time, Alexandria's Jewish population was thriving and contributing to all aspects of city life.[3] The largest concentration of Egypt's Jews resided in the city. According to Josephus, Jews had settled in Alexandria at the very moment that it was founded by Alexander the Great.[4] By the late Second Temple period, there may have been some 180,000 Jews living in Alexandria, making up between 30 to 40 percent of the city's population.[5]

Perhaps the most important eyewitness to Alexandrian Jewish society in the first century is the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–c. 50 CE), who offers fascinating details about the Jews of his city, their internal organization of limited self-leadership, and their synagogues. Philo estimates that Alexandria was home to a million Jews in his time. This figure is probably too high, based on how large scholars believe the city was in the early first century. At the same time, the Jewish population in Alexandria was large enough to draw the attention of the Romans, Greeks,

and Egyptians living among them.[6] Many Greek and Roman documents that mention the Jews reference their large community in Alexandria. During the three centuries or so that Alexandria was under Ptolemaic Greek rule, this attention was not problematic, and life was relatively peaceful for Alexandria's Jewish population. Dangerous tensions between Alexandrian Jews and the non-Jewish population would arise only after Rome incorporated Alexandria into its empire.

It appears that Ptolemy I Soter (c. 367–283 BCE) was directly responsible for the initial Jewish settlement in Egypt. When he assumed control over Egypt and the Land of Israel following Alexander's death, Ptolemy took Jewish captives from Judea and Samaria and resettled them in Egypt. Some of these captives were integrated into his newly formed military garrisons, and, according to Josephus, Soter gave these men equal rights alongside the Macedonians.[7] Other Jews at this time came to Egypt of their own accord, settling throughout the region in cities such as Leontopolis, Heliopolis, and, of course, Alexandria.

Substantial literary evidence survives from other Jewish communities in Egypt besides Alexandria. About five hundred miles south of Alexandria, a cache of ancient papyri was discovered on the island of Elephantine, located on the Nile River. These papyri attest to a vibrant Jewish community, which appears to have lasted for a few hundred years. The papyri, which include records of business transactions, marriage documents, and private letters, were written in Aramaic and mostly date to the fifth century BCE, when the Persians established a military garrison of Jewish mercenary soldiers on the island.[8] Some of the papyri allude to a Jewish temple that the soldiers built on the island. One letter, for example, suggests that this temple was built as early as the late sixth century BCE, following the end of the Babylonian exile. The letter, dated to 407 BCE, petitions a Persian governor of Judea named Bagoas to aid the Jews of Elephantine in rebuilding their temple, which had been destroyed in an act of anti-Jewish violence. The letter writer says that the Jews' forefathers had built this temple during or prior to the reign of Cambyses (530–522 BCE). About three hundred ostraca (broken shards of pottery bearing inscriptional

material) with Aramaic writing and dating to the fifth century BCE have also been found on Elephantine.

The discovery of papyri and ostraca indicate that Jews who were committed to observing ancestral law, including Sabbath, the holidays, dietary law, and circumcision, also saw fit to bring sacrifices to a temple outside of Jerusalem. The Rabbis would later condemn such practices, but no evidence suggests that anyone at Elephantine perceived that building a local temple and bringing sacrifices there constituted acts of impiety.[9]

The existence of a Jewish Temple at Elephantine in the early Second Temple period suggests that, before the Rabbis living in the Land of Israel and Babylonia would try to create a normative religion whose laws all Jews could observe, some Jews in the Diaspora did not believe their worship was dependent on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These Jews may have regretted being unable to worship at the great Jerusalem Temple. Alternatively, they may have believed that their temple at Elephantine was a sufficient replacement for the Temple at Jerusalem.

While some Jews in Egypt were worshipping their God at Temples, others were building synagogues where they would gather to read the scriptures. Two entire sectors of Alexandria, for instance, eventually became inhabited primarily by Jews, and Philo says that the entire city was home to many synagogues.[10] Indeed, one of the earliest archaeological remnants of a synagogue is in Alexandria.[11]

To a certain extent, Alexandrian Jewry functioned as a single community with an internal leadership structure in the first century BCE. The Jews of the city were governed by a Jewish leader, or ethnarch, an elected Jewish official who presided over the Jews by settling local legal matters between Jews and acting as a mediator between Jews and the Roman government.[12] The Jewish community in Judea, ruled by an ethnarch in earlier times,[13] may have served as a model for the Alexandrian ethnarch. This system of leadership provided Jews with a degree of social and political independence, but, at the same time, Jews were free to interact with the many gentiles who lived throughout the city. According to the first-century BCE Roman historian Strabo, the ethnarch of the Jews was

responsible for ensuring that the Jews remained loyal to Rome and, at the same time, that they lived in accordance with their ancestral laws.[14] Surely this would have been no small feat.

Following or contemporaneous with ethnarch rule, a council of elders called the *gerousia* ruled Jews in Judea and in some diasporan communities. By the first century BCE, Alexandria had its own *gerousia* to establish and enforce certain laws in keeping with ancestral Jewish practice. This council, perhaps in cooperation with the ethnarch, enabled the Jews to observe their traditions while presenting themselves to the public as being totally loyal to the Roman Empire.[15]

Philo records one particularly disturbing incident regarding the Alexandrian *gerousia*. A Roman procurator named Flaccus arrested and publicly tortured thirty-eight members of this council whom Emperor Augustus had appointed after the Jewish ethnarch died.[16] For Philo, this incident was representative of Flaccus's overt antagonism and disdain for the Jewish community. Flaccus and other Romans probably regarded the Jews as outsiders whose separate system of local governance "proved" that the Jews had no interest in integrating into Roman life. Indeed, official Roman policy and local Roman leadership were often not in sync: While Roman emperors and many of their officials granted Alexandria's Jewish community rights to conduct their internal affairs independently and enjoy a degree of religious freedom, some local leaders and laypeople felt that the Jews were undeserving of such liberties, and were unwilling to enforce them.[17]

Despite remaining a separate social entity, the Jews were deeply influenced by cultural and academic developments occurring in Alexandria, particularly under the Greeks in the third and second centuries BCE. Alexandrian Jews became extraordinarily prolific, and their works, mainly written in Greek, suggest they were aware of Greek literary techniques and styles, which they must have admired. In many of their writings, which range in genre from fictional adventure tales to scriptural interpretation, Jewish authors sought to demonstrate that their tradition and Greek culture were consonant with one another. The influence of Stoicism—a school

of Greek philosophy founded in the third century BCE — on many such texts suggests that these Jewish writers had access to the philosophical schools that lay at the heart of Alexandrian life.

Jewish Life in Roman Alexandria

Many Jews living in Alexandria received Greek and Roman educations, were financially successful, and integrated well into Alexandrian society. Their integration was the result of the fact that most Greek and Roman rulers affirmed the Jews' freedom to practice their ancestral religion without intervention.[18]

Josephus states that Alexandrian Jews were given citizenship from the time that Alexander founded the city, but this claim is either inaccurate or hyperbolic since we do not have evidence that Alexandrian Jews were given citizenship. It is more likely that what Josephus took as a fact of citizenship was instead probably a special right granted to the Jews to freely practice their ancestral religion. Josephus also claims that in the middle of the first century BCE, Julius Caesar granted the Jews of Alexandria citizenship, and inscribed their rights as citizens on brass pillars, publicly displayed for all to see.[19] Again, Caesar may have given the Jews rights to practice their traditions freely and without harassment, but in all likelihood, most Jews did not have citizenship.[20]

Alexander does appear to have singled out the Jews, however, giving them certain privileges that allowed them to practice their ancestral laws, which included dietary restrictions such as abstinence from pork, and the observance of the Sabbath and holidays. Alexander may have also given the Jews formal exemption from participating in public festivals that celebrated the gods. This would have likely upset some Greeks, who felt obligated to attend such events in order to display their patriotism. It is important to recall, after all, that at this time there was no formal distinction between religious life and public civic life. If the Jews were not attending festivals that celebrated the gods, it would have been natural for some Greeks to interpret their absence as not only disrespectful to

the gods but disrespectful to Hellenist authorities. Seeds of tension may thus have been sown starting from the moment Alexander granted the Jews special exemptions from participating in civic life.

After the rise of the Roman Empire in the first century BCE, the Jews and gentiles of Alexandria began to clash. It is possible that Jewish-gentile relations soured during this period because, when Alexandria was incorporated into the Roman Empire, the Greeks of the city lost their standing as an upper caste. One way to ensure their social position and establish themselves as being on par with the Romans would have been to push the Jewish community down a rung on the social ladder, so they would be regarded as lower class like the indigenous Egyptians, and thereby forced to pay the *laographia*, the census tax meant for subjects without full citizenship. In this scenario, the Greeks would have been socially superior to the Jews and closer in status to the Romans.[21]

The rising resentment against Jews in Alexandria is memorialized in *For Flaccus,* a speech the great orator Cicero delivered to the Roman senate. In 59 BCE, the Roman procurator in Alexandria, Lucius Valerius Flaccus, initiated legislation to ban gold exports from various regions to Jerusalem. Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire, including prominent families living in Alexandria, were sending donations to Judea to support the Jews of the Land of Israel and specifically the administration of the Jerusalem Temple. So much money was being sent to this region that some Roman authorities believed the empire's economic welfare was being compromised.

In his speech, Cicero defends Flaccus's initiative, arguing that the export of gold to Judea reflects the Jews' disloyalty to Rome:

> It was the practice each year to send gold to Jerusalem on the Jews' account from Italy and all our provinces, but Flaccus issued an edict forbidding its export from Asia. Who is there, gentlemen, who cannot genuinely applaud this measure? The Senate strictly forbade the export of gold on a considerable number of previous occasions, notably during my consulship.

> To oppose this outlandish superstition was an act of firmness, and to defy in the public interest the crowd of Jews that on occasion sets our public meetings ablaze was the height of responsibility.[22]

Cicero elsewhere characterizes the Jewish practice of sending gold to Jerusalem as a *superstitio*—the Latin word alluding to the practices of outsiders viewed as incompatible with the official *religio* of the Roman Empire.[23] Associating Jewish customs with *superstitio* helped Cicero to make the case that loyalty to the Jewish religion was incompatible with loyalty to the Roman Empire.

More than a century later, however, Josephus notes that Jews living throughout the Roman world continued to send sums of money to support the Jerusalem Temple: "But no one need wonder that there was so much wealth in our Temple, for all the Jews throughout the habitable world, and those who worshipped God, even those from Asia and Europe, had been contributing to it for a very long time."[24]

Cicero's speech, alongside the writings of Josephus, indicates that many Jews living in the Diaspora in the first century BCE and first century CE had no intention of moving to Judea, but nevertheless looked to the region, and to the Jerusalem Temple in particular, as a homeland to which they felt deeply connected. They expressed this connection by sending money to the Jewish community in Jerusalem, which distressed Roman authorities both in terms of the massive sums being diverted to a remote region of the empire, and in terms of the lack of patriotism that Roman authorities believed this diversion implied.

Anti-Jewish Riots in Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria confirms that the Jewish practice of sending money to support the administration of the Jerusalem Temple was popular during his lifetime, but controversial. Some Roman emperors did in fact defend the practice, arguing that as long as the Jews remained loyal to the Roman Empire, they were permitted to financially support the Jerusalem Temple.[25] In his treatise *On the Embassy to Gaius*, Philo praises the Emperor Tiberius

(14–37 CE) for allowing Jews to continue donating money to the Jerusalem Temple and contrasts Tiberius's benevolent policy with that of Tiberius's successor, Gaius Caligula (37–41 CE). While Caligula's harsh treatment of the Jews was perceived as an explicit message to gentiles that their harassment of Jews would be tolerated, Tiberius encouraged his subjects to practice tolerance when it came to the Jews. According to Philo:

> [Tiberius] knew, therefore, that [Jews] have houses of prayer and meet together in them, particularly on the sacred sabbaths when they receive as a body a training in their ancestral philosophy. He knew, too, that they collect money for sacred purposes from their first-fruits and send them to Jerusalem by persons who would offer the sacrifices. Yet, nevertheless, he neither ejected them from Rome nor deprived them of their Roman citizenship because they were careful to preserve their Jewish citizenship also, nor took any violent measures against the houses of prayer, nor prevented them from meeting to receive instructions in the laws, nor opposed their offerings of the first-fruits. Indeed, so religiously did he respect our interests that supported by wellnigh his whole household, he adorned our temple through the costliness of his dedications, and ordered that for all time continuous sacrifices of whole burnt offerings should be carried out every day at his own expense as a tribute to the most high God.[26]

While Philo defends the practice of sending money to Jerusalem, he also takes care to present the Jews living under Roman rule as entirely devoted to their host country.[27] His paramount objective was to argue that the Jews did not threaten the welfare of the Roman Empire and did not regard themselves as outsiders or dissidents. In short, his defense of Jewish contributions to the Jerusalem Temple was part of a larger goal: to defend the Jews against accusations that they were enemies of the Roman Empire.

Philo's points, however, did not change the reality on the ground: The tensions between Jews and non-Jews that had been present from the time Alexandria became Romanized were fomenting in his own city and rose to the surface during Caligula's reign. One of the most calamitous incidents

of anti-Jewish violence in Alexandria occurred in 38 CE, when riots broke out on the heels of a visit from the Judean client king Agrippa I.

Agrippa I, who would rule Judea in 41–44 CE, but at this point ruled other regions of the empire, was known to be a friend of the Pharisees and committed to Jewish ancestral tradition. He had a close relationship with Claudius, who would reign as emperor from 41–54 CE; some would later credit him as influential in helping Claudius ascend the throne. But even before Claudius's tenure as emperor, many Romans resented Agrippa's close friendship with Claudius and his influence over the Roman court. They associated Agrippa with what they believed was an exclusivist and unpatriotic community of Jews living in Judea and elsewhere in the empire.

Agrippa was probably aware of his unpopularity in Egypt. He took pains, Philo tells us, to enter Alexandria in the dead of night in order to avoid public attention.[28] Yet wind of Agrippa's impending visit began to circulate throughout the city. And when Agrippa finally arrived in Alexandria en route to Judea from Rome, the people of the city gave him a mock welcome celebration, parading a town fool through the city's streets. This insulting charade instigated violent anti-Jewish riots throughout the city.[29]

The riots in 38 CE proved devastating to the Jews living in Alexandria. Thousands of Jews were killed, and many others were driven out of the city. Jewish homes and synagogues were plundered and burned. According to Philo's account, the prefect of Egypt, Aulus Avilius Flaccus (a different Flaccus than the one Cicero defended), harbored hostility toward the Jews and sanctioned the riots.[30] During the earlier reign of Tiberius, Flaccus acted as a friend to the Jews, but when Tiberius died and his nephew Caligula assumed power, an Alexandrian named Lampo promised Flaccus the support of the Alexandrian population if Flaccus would agree to turn on the Jews of Alexandria. Afterward, Flaccus began to consistently favor non-Jewish parties in legal disputes involving Jews.

When Agrippa learned that Flaccus had allowed anti-Jewish violence to break out in Alexandria, he sent a message to the emperor, Gaius Caligula, accusing Flaccus of instigating the violence and requesting that Caligula intervene on the Jews' behalf. Surprisingly, Caligula took action: Flaccus

was accused of treason, arrested, and placed in exile.[31] Sometime later, Caligula had Flaccus killed.[32]

Besides the prosecution of Flaccus, however, Jewish communal leaders' continued appeals to Roman authorities were met with apathy and indifference, and the anti-Jewish violence in Alexandria continued. Having not received aid from local Roman officials, the Alexandrian Jewish community decided to send a delegation of five representatives to appeal to Caligula in Rome on behalf of the Jews.[33] Among the men was Philo, who was by this time a well-regarded leader of the Alexandrian Jewish community. In *On the Embassy to Gaius*, Philo writes about Caligula and his subordinates treating the Jewish delegation with mockery and disdain. Caligula began his interview with the delegates by asking them, "Are you the god-haters who do not believe me to be a god, a god acknowledged among all the other nations but not to be named by you?"[34]

The Jews' rejection of Caligula's status as a god was no laughing matter. Since the reign of Octavian (27 BCE–14 CE), who changed his name to Augustus (which means something like "Revered One") and claimed to have been transformed into a deity, Roman emperors were treated like gods during their lives and worshipped as gods after their deaths. While Tiberius did not enforce Augustus's practice, Caligula went a step further than Augustus by demanding that a statue of his likeness be placed in the Jerusalem Temple, which resulted in a major outcry among the Jews. The line between being treated *like* a god and being treated *as* a god was very fine indeed, and must have presented a difficult challenge to Jews throughout the empire.

Caligula's statement to the Jewish delegates, which was more accusation than question, was followed by what Philo depicts as "an invocatory address which it was a sin even to listen to, much more to reproduce in the actual words." Caligula then repeated his accusation that the Jews were guilty of not sacrificing to him as a god. At this point he rose to walk through the palace and outdoor gardens to oversee his workers and various building projects, and Philo and the rest of the Jewish delegation had to follow Caligula as he walked. As Caligula asked the delegates questions

regarding why the Jews separate themselves from gentiles, the people in Caligula's palace mocked and derided the Jewish men. Philo found the entire experience, especially the delegates' subjection to Caligula's "befooling and reviling," to be exhausting and humiliating.[35] The delegation went home to Alexandria, and the turbulence in Alexandria continued.

Josephus also mentions the confrontation between Philo and Caligula. He writes that three Jewish delegates traveled to Rome to request Caligula's intervention on behalf of the Alexandrian Jews, and that three Roman delegates also visited Caligula to argue, on behalf of the Jews' opponents, that the Jews' refusal to dedicate altars and temples to Caligula proved that they were not loyal to the emperor.[36]

Caligula's successor, Claudius (41–54 CE), sought to quell the violence in Alexandria. Josephus cites an edict Claudius wrote on behalf of the Alexandrian Jews, stating that their privileges must be preserved and protected. Claudius also sent an edict to other regions of the Roman Empire, declaring that the "rights and privileges" granted to Jews living throughout the empire were to be protected, and the Jews were free to practice their customs as they pleased. Claudius decreed that this edict should be engraved on tablets and publically displayed for thirty days in cities throughout the Empire.[37]

In 41 CE, Claudius wrote a letter to the people of Alexandria that addressed, among other matters, the conflict between the Jews and gentiles in the city, which had reached a boiling point. In a papyrus document recording the letter that was discovered in Egypt in 1924, Claudius declared that the two sides must find a resolution to the conflict:[38]

> As for the question, which party was responsible for the riots and feud (or rather, if the truth be told, the war) with the Jews, although in confrontation with their opponents your ambassadors, and particularly Dionysios the son of Theon, contended with great zeal, nevertheless I was unwilling to make a strict inquiry, though guarding within me a store of immutable indignation against whichever party renews the conflict. And I tell you once and for all that unless you put a stop to this ruinous and obstinate

> enmity against each other, I shall be driven to show what a benevolent Prince can be when turned to righteous indignation. . . . Wherefore, once again I conjure you that, on the one hand, the Alexandrians show themselves forebearing and kindly towards the Jews who for many years have dwelt in the same city, and dishonor none of the rites observed by them in the worship of their god, but allow them to observe their customs as in the time of the Deified Augustus, which customs I also, after hearing both sides, have sanctioned; and on the other hand, I explicitly order the Jews not to agitate for more privileges than they formerly possessed.[39]

Claudius seems to hold both Jews and gentiles responsible for the clash that had begun three years earlier. But it is striking that he refers to the Jews' antagonists as "Alexandrians," which suggests that even though the Jews had inhabited Alexandria for centuries, they were not considered Alexandrians.

There are strong similarities between this letter and the edict cited by Josephus, in which Claudius declares that the Jews are citizens (*isopoliteia*) and their rights should be protected.[40] Because Josephus presents Claudius as affirming the special status of the Jews, and Claudius comes across as more empathetic to the Jews in the edict Josephus describes than in the papyrus letter, some scholars suggest that Josephus intentionally changed the content of Claudius's letter in order to present the Jews' status as unambiguous and Claudius as being a great friend to the Alexandrian Jews. But it could also be the case that Josephus was citing a different edict. As some scholars have pointed out, there is no reason for Josephus to have changed a document from the format of a letter to the format of an edict.[41]

Claudius's efforts to achieve a lasting resolution to the tense situation in Alexandria were unsuccessful. Discussing an incident during the reign of Nero (54–68 CE), Josephus writes:

> On one occasion, when the Alexandrians were holding a public meeting on the subject of an embassy which they proposed to send to Nero, a large number of Jews flocked into the amphitheater along with the Greeks;

> their adversaries, the instant they caught sight of them, raised shouts of "enemies" and "spies," and then rushed forward to lay hands on them. The majority of the Jews took flight and scattered, but three of them were caught by the Alexandrians and dragged off to be burnt alive. Thereupon the whole Jewish colony rose to the rescue; first they hurled stones at the Greeks, and then snatching up torches rushed to the amphitheater, threatening to consume the assembled citizens in the flames to the last man. And this they would actually have done, had not Tiberius Alexander, the governor of the city, curbed their fury.[42]

This confrontation led to further tragedy. The governor of Alexandria, Tiberius Alexander, sent two Roman legions to stop the carnage and quell the Jews' unrest. The situation quickly grew out of control:

> The troops, thereupon, rushed to the quarter of the city called "Delta," where the Jews were concentrated, and executed their orders, but not without bloodshed on their own side; for the Jews closing their ranks and putting the best armed among their number in the front offered a prolonged resistance, but when once they gave way, wholesale carnage ensued. Death in every form was theirs; some were caught in the plain, others driven into their houses, to which the Romans set fire after stripping them of their contents; there was no pity for infancy, no respect for years: all ages fell before their murderous career, until the whole district was deluged with blood and the heaps of corpses numbered fifty thousand; even the remnant would not have escaped, had they not sued for quarter. Alexander, now moved to compassion, ordered the Romans to retire. They, broken to obedience, ceased massacring at the first signal; but the Alexandrian populace in the intensity of their hate were not so easily called off and were with difficulty torn from the corpses.[43]

According to Josephus, the massacre of Jews was put to an end when the Romans, led by Tiberius Alexander, intervened and stopped the violence. And when some Alexandrians continued their assault, the Romans had to physically force them to desist. This Tiberius Alexander, then governor

of Alexandria, later procurator of Judea and prefect of Egypt, was in fact Philo of Alexandria's own nephew.[44] Josephus characterizes Tiberius as not adhering to ancestral tradition, but whether he was a complete apostate or one of the many Jews who relinquished certain aspects of Jewish practice in order to integrate into Roman society is not known.[45]

The Demise of Alexandrian Jewry

After the Romans quelled the Jewish revolt in Judea in 70 CE, tensions between Jews and non-Jews remained throughout the empire. The mandatory Fiscus Judaicus tax Vespasian had levied upon all Jews living in the Roman Empire, regardless of their involvement in the rebellion, must have infuriated many Jews. The tax of two drachmae was not only a financial burden. It was also the same sum many Jews had donated annually to the Jerusalem Temple. Now it would be used to support the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.[46]

During this time, acts of overt antagonism against Jews were becoming increasingly common in Rome. The Roman historian Suetonius (c. 69–c. 140 CE) recalls that during Domitian's reign (81–96 CE), he saw Roman authorities forcibly strip an elderly Jewish man of his clothes in a public and crowded court to see whether he was circumcised.[47] These kinds of humiliations undoubtedly incensed the Jewish population.

In 115 CE, matters came to a head when Jews throughout the empire rioted in protest against their mistreatment at the hands of Rome. These riots compelled Roman authorities to intervene, engaging in a conflict known in Jewish sources as the Kitos War. This war may have gotten its name from a corruption of the name Quintus Marcius Turbo, a military advisor to Trajan who helped quell the Jewish uprising in Egypt.[48] Alternatively, the name might refer to Lusius Quietus, a Roman general and governor of Judea, who suppressed the rebellion.[49]

The early church historian Eusebius (c. 260–c. 339 CE) describes the violent chaos of this war in his *Ecclesiastical History* and *Chronicle*. He writes that a Jew named Lucas (Lukuas in Greek) led the Jewish rebels in a campaign involving the destruction of Roman temples and other public

property. Eusebius refers to Lucas as the "king" of the Jewish rebels, possibly suggesting that the Jews believed they would achieve autonomy from the Roman Empire and elect Lucas as their Jewish monarch. Lucas and his men set about attacking and plundering regions of Egypt and later fled to the Judean town of Lydda, headquarters of the Jewish rebellion.[50] When the Romans got wind of their location, they besieged and later invaded Lydda, killing thousands of Jews.[51]

Eusebius describes Emperor Trajan's policy of killing Jews beyond the Cyrene area, where the rebellion was fomenting: "The Emperor suspected that the Jews in Mesopotamia would also attack the inhabitants and ordered Lusius Quietus to clean them out of the province. He organized a force and murdered a great multitude of the Jews there, and for this reform was appointed governor of Judea by the Emperor."[52] Likewise, the Roman historian Appian (c. 95–c. 165 CE) reports that the burial plot housing the head of Pompey, who was killed in 48 BCE, was destroyed when "the Roman Emperor Trajan was exterminating the Jewish race in Egypt."[53]

Another Roman historian, Lucius Cassius Dio (155–235 CE), provides a shocking account of what happened during this war. In his *Roman History*, Cassius Dio writes that a Jew named Andrew (or Andreas) led a rebellion that began in Cyrene and quickly spread to the Greek islands. On the island of Cyprus alone, he claims, the Jews murdered 220,000 people. Because of the disastrously high number of casualties there, an edict was later issued forbidding Jews to live on or even visit the island.[54] Cassius Dio contends that among the atrocities Andrew and his men committed was eating their enemies' flesh. In addition, the fourth-century historian Paulus Orosius (c. 375–c. 418 CE) reports that so many people in North Africa were killed during the rebellion that Emperor Hadrian (117–138 CE) had to actively repopulate some North African regions.[55]

These descriptions, especially Cassius Dio's, should be taken as gross hyperbole, since there is no evidence of such devastation. But it is certain that this war had a profound impact on Jewish-gentile relations throughout the empire.

While Roman historians focused on the damage done to gentiles, the war's devastation also affected Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora and Judea. Circumstances were especially dire in Alexandria, where tens of thousands of Jews were killed and Jewish neighborhoods set on fire. With their homes in ruins, the Jews who survived the war either fled or abandoned their Jewish identities altogether, assimilating into Hellenist society for good. There is no evidence of a prominent Jewish presence in Alexandria after 118 CE.

A number of Rabbinic sources memorialize the devastation of the Alexandrian Jewish community. One moving passage that is preserved in the Talmud opens by interpreting Genesis 27:22:

> The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau: "the voice" here refers to [the cry caused by] the Emperor Hadrian who killed in Alexandria of Egypt sixty myriads on sixty myriads, twice as many as went forth from Egypt. "The voice of Jacob": this is the cry caused by the Emperor Vespasian who killed in the city of Bethar four hundred thousand myriads, or as some say, four thousand myriads. "The hands are the hands of Esau": this is the Government of Rome which has destroyed our House and burnt our Temple and driven us out of our land.[56]

The first half of this passage recounts Hadrian's destruction of Alexandrian Jewry. While his predecessor, Trajan, also worked to quell the rebellion, Hadrian, who secured the throne after Trajan's death in 117 CE, completed the job of putting down the rebellion with violent finality. The destruction of the Alexandrian Jewish community is therefore attributed to him. The second half of this passage concerns the destruction of Bethar. While Vespasian is mentioned in surviving editions of this talmudic passage, this is probably a copyist's mistake. In all likelihood, the original version of this passage mentioned Hadrian, not Vespasian. Hadrian was emperor in 135 CE when the Roman army viciously responded to the Bar Kokhba rebellion, besieging Bethar and murdering its inhabitants.[57]

The loss of the Alexandrian Jewish community must have been devastating to Jews living in both the Diaspora and Judea. The Jews residing

in Alexandria were part of a community that had not only endured, but thrived, for centuries. Its synagogues were visible testaments to a flourishing Jewish presence in Egypt, and the remarkable beauty and size of one of the city's many synagogues is even described in the Babylonian Talmud.[58] Without the presence of Alexandrian Jewry, the city's synagogues were destroyed or repurposed. The loss of these buildings signified the end of this illustrious Jewish community.

Jewish Writings in Alexandria

Some of the most popular and well-circulated Jewish books composed in the Second Temple period are thought to have been written in Alexandria. Among these is arguably the greatest Jewish literary achievement of the Second Temple period: the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Bible. A number of ancient documents attest to the remarkable events surrounding this translation. Most significant among these is a second-century BCE book called the Letter of Aristeas, which retells how the Egyptian king Ptolemy II Philadelphus (281–246 BCE) invited seventy-two Jewish scholars to Alexandria in order to translate the Hebrew Bible into a Greek text that would be housed in the Royal Library of Alexandria.

The author of the Letter of Aristeas suggests that this translation was intended to be a crown jewel of the library—worthy of such attention that Ptolemy himself interviewed the Septuagint's translators to assess their philosophical acumen. According to the Letter of Aristeas, the Jewish translators of the Hebrew Bible so impressed Ptolemy that after they completed their translation, Ptolemy sent them home with lavish treasures including clothes, furnishings, gold, and other valuables.[59]

Interestingly, the Letter of Aristeas never clarifies whether the Septuagint was ultimately placed in the library, and scholars debate whether Ptolemy II really initiated this project with the idea that the Septuagint would be stored there. The book does not close with the translation's placement into the Alexandrian library, but with the king's sending the Jewish translators back to their homes with expensive gifts. It is also unclear

precisely what motivated the author to compose this work. Perhaps he sought to convince other Jews that the Septuagint was equal in religious significance to the Hebrew Bible. Or perhaps he believed the Septuagint was even superior to the earlier Hebrew version. Alternatively, he might have wished to introduce this foundational text to Greeks who may not have been familiar with it. The author certainly wanted to argue for the legitimacy of the Jewish scriptures and its laws, as he includes a long passage articulating a rational explanation for Jewish dietary laws, and depicts the Jewish translators as engaging in a philosophical discussion with Ptolemy, which ultimately leaves Ptolemy with the impression that Judaism is a sophisticated religion.

Philo's *On the Life of Moses* and Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* also tell the story of how the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek.[60] Like the author of the Letter of Aristeas, Philo believes the Septuagint is an extremely impressive work that merits the respect of both Jews and Greeks alike. His lengthy description of the Bible's translation from "Chaldean" to Greek includes many details from Aristeas, especially regarding the hospitable manner with which Ptolemy hosted the Judean translators.[61] Philo may have relied on a version of the Letter of Aristeas as well as another source, since some details in his account do not appear in Aristeas.

One intriguing feature of the story that appears in both the Letter of Aristeas and Philo's account is that the translation was carried out just outside of Alexandria on Pharos, a tiny island upon which the Alexandrians had built a lighthouse for incoming ships.[62] Afterward, Philo tells us, an annual festival commemorating the translation of the Bible into Greek was instituted and celebrated on this island.[63]

The story of the Hebrew Bible's translation into Greek also appears in a number of Rabbinic accounts.[64] At least some Rabbinic figures must have regarded the translation as both important and auspicious. The second-century CE rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel, for example, ruled that the only language outside of Hebrew in which Torah scrolls may be written is Greek.[65] His statement allows for the possibility that, in the Rabbinic period, some Jews were reading the Torah in Greek on the Sabbath.[66]

Other Rabbinic traditions, however, present the Hebrew Bible's translation into the Septuagint as a catastrophe. An eighth-century CE text, for instance, refers to a fast meant to be observed on the eighth of the month of Tevet, the day the translation project supposedly concluded. A later text called *Megillat Ta'anit Batra* comments that on the eighth of Tevet, "The Torah was written in Greek and darkness descended on the world for three days."[67]

These passages attribute different symbolic meanings to the Hebrew Bible's translation. Philo and some Rabbinic authors present the production of the Septuagint as a significant milestone for non-Hebrew-speaking Jews, which enabled them to more piously practice their religion. Other Rabbinic sources, however, treat the translation as an act of unacceptable assimilation into the Greek world. For the author of the Letter of Aristeas, the Septuagint was important because positive relations with gentiles undergirded its creation, and it gave non-Hebrew-speaking Jews and gentiles valuable access to Jewish scriptures.

Many other texts surviving from the Second Temple period are also thought to have been written in the vicinity of Alexandria. For example, the novella Joseph and Aseneth, which recalls the romance between Joseph and his wife Aseneth and focuses on her "conversion" to Judaism, is set in Egypt and thought to have been written in Greek, but scholars continue to debate when and where in Egypt it was written. Some scholars believe the author was an Egyptian Jew living in the second century BCE who was influenced by Greek culture, as indicated by his allusions to other Greek texts and well-known philosophical ideas. Other scholars believe the text was written four or five centuries later, possibly by a Christian. It is probably best, however, to avoid assuming that Jewish texts that do not mention distinctively Jewish laws, such as keeping the Sabbath and dietary laws, were not written by Jews. There may have been a thriving community of Jews in Egypt who emphasized aspects of Judaism that would have appealed to the ethical sensibilities of their Egyptian, Greek, and Roman counterparts.

Another text almost certainly written in Alexandria is the wisdom book the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides. The writer's critique against conducting autopsies on corpses points to its Alexandrian origin, since the practice by doctors and medical students was known to be commonplace in this city.[68] Pseudo-Phocylides emphasizes ethical behavior and does not mention commandments specific to Judaism, such as the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary law.

Because of its generic content, some scholars believe Pseudo-Phocylides was not written by a Jew, or that it was composed by a Jew hiding his identity. Yet the author's choice to open his book by paraphrasing the Decalogue in Exodus 20, among other decisions, may suggest otherwise. Most Jews would have easily recognized that the book's introduction comprised sayings adopted from Exodus 20, whereas most gentiles of the time would likely not have been familiar with Exodus or other biblical books. The author also paraphrases Deuteronomy 22:6–7 regarding not taking a mother bird along with her young from a nest, and Exodus 23:5, which discusses helping the fallen beast of an enemy to rise. These paraphrases, as well as Pseudo-Phocylides's belief in the resurrection of the dead, which was a specifically Jewish belief in the first century, indicate that the book's author may have been Jewish. If so, this author was interested in presenting Judaism as a religion whose foundational values include wisdom, self-control, and benevolent care for those in need, all of which correlate with Greco-Roman values.[69] If, on the other hand, the author of Pseudo-Phocylides was a gentile, as some suggest, this book instead reflects a Greek author's decision to draw from the Jewish scriptures because he admired some of their ethically oriented passages.

The Jewish origins of other ancient Greek documents are less contested. The Jewish poet known as Ezekiel the Tragedian, for example, rewrote the story of the Exodus in iambic trimeter, paying special attention to Moses, whom he portrayed as a great hero in the tradition of Homeric protagonists.[70] Likewise, the Jewish writer Artapanus retold the stories of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, focusing on the theme that these men

integrated successfully into Egyptian society and even made important contributions to the fields of mathematics and astronomy.

In writing these texts, Ezekiel and Artapanus were probably responding to accusations that the Israelites had been expelled from Egypt by Pharaoh, and not redeemed miraculously by their omniscient god. Other stories circulating at the time proclaimed that the Israelites who left Egypt worshipped the head of an ass, or were leprous, or suffered from other humiliating conditions and degenerate characteristics. By presenting the Jews as the very opposite of how they were portrayed in Greek literature, writers like Ezekiel and Artapanus subtly rebutted popular anti-Jewish claims.

Many books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are presumed to have been written in Alexandria, where they are thought to have been written in Greek, the main language spoken in Egypt in the late Second Temple period. It is possible, however, that these books were written in other Jewish communities in Egypt, or were originally composed in other languages, such as Palestinian Aramaic or Hebrew.

While Alexandria has become too much of a "catch-all" location for the genesis of many Second Temple period texts, there is still good reason to believe that in the late Second Temple period, the Jews of Alexandria were producing a high volume of literature that spanned the genres of wisdom, poetry, fiction, and biblical interpretation. A number of Jewish texts written in Greek take place in Alexandria, or bear stylistic similarities to other texts that scholars believe were written in the city's vicinity. Moreover, the philosophical sophistication of some of the Jewish texts composed in this region indicates that relations between Jews and gentiles were not entirely bad at this time and that there was significant cultural interaction between Greeks and Jews.

The Jewish community of Alexandria thrived for about four centuries because its members were committed to observing foundational aspects of their tradition. They built synagogues, read from their scriptures, observed dietary laws, kept the Sabbath and holidays, and practiced circumcision. Yet, at the same time, these Jews were remarkably innovative when it came

to understanding their traditions within the frameworks of Greek and, later, Roman cultures. They sought to present their religion as sophisticated and rational by justifying Jewish laws, idealizing biblical heroes, and presenting the Jewish people as ever loyal to their host empire. The result of these efforts is reflected in a body of literature that protectively embraces Judaism and yet is sensitive to the benefits enjoyed by those who were assimilated into Greek and Roman life.