

The Jews in Late Antiquity

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The Hellenistic period begins formally with Alexander's arrival in the Near East in 334 B.C.E. However, this date should not be seen as the beginning of Hellenistic influence in this region. The Near East as a whole and the Land of Israel and its Jewish residents more particularly were subject to increasing Aegean influence beginning already in the fourteenth century B.C.E. Due to increased trade connections, this influence became much more extensive during the Persian period when Greek coinage became the standard in the Land of Israel. The cultural phenomenon we call Hellenism was a power which would have a lasting impact on Judaism and the Jewish people.

1. Hellenism as a Cultural Phenomenon

Hellenism may be regarded as the synthesis of Greek (Hellenic) culture with the native cultures of the Near East. This was a dynamic phenomenon whereby the ever evolving Hellenistic ("Greek-like") culture, itself an amalgamation of the Greek and the native, becomes the raw material for further synthesis with other native cultures not yet under the sway of Hellenism. Indeed, it was not the Greeks themselves who spread their own culture to the East. Rather, it was the Macedonians, whose civilization was itself derivative from that of the true Hellenes, who greatly intensified the process which led to the spread of Hellenism to the East. As Hellenism penetrated the Near East, an amalgamation of the Hellenistic with the native took place. It is this amalgamation with which we deal. It was Alexander's conquest which made possible this fateful union between East and West.

But in fact there were deeper cultural reasons for the ease with which these two civilizations entered into this symbiotic relationship. Greek culture by this time had developed to its pinnacle. It had been liberated from the limitations of geography, and one could now be a Hellene by education and culture, not just by birth. Humanism had resulted from the primacy attributed to reason in Greek thought. Man now was at the center of the cosmos, rather than merely the polis (the Greek city) as he had been earlier. It was this culture which sought not only to occupy the territories newly conquered by Alexander, but to foster in them a cultural symbiosis, in short, to Hellenize the Easterners.

The native Near Eastern civilizations had run their course and were on the decline. At this time, therefore, they were in no position to resist the cultural onslaught of the Macedonians and their armies. From Egypt and in Mesopotamia little of literary or intellectual import survives from this period. Widespread tendencies toward new religions were observable, indicating a hunger for new means of spiritual fulfillment. The time was ripe for the new cultural movement known as Hellenism.

The Greek city, known as the polis, was the vehicle for the assimilation and Hellenization of the natives. These cities, populated mostly by native Near Easterners, were the cultural melting-pots of the East. The institutions of the Greek way of life were opened to those who wished to participate. Greek language was rapidly adopted as a sign of Hellenization. The local populace streamed into these cities which quickly gained the legal and economic advantages of the polis. The citizens of the polis were exempt from certain customs and duties and participated in ruling their city. In the Greek cities the

upper classes of the Near East were acculturated through the schools and the various institutions of the Hellenistic world.

Most interestingly, the native Near Easterners gravitated as well to the arts and sciences of the Hellenic world and soon took the lead in such disciplines as literature and philosophy. Indeed, the Greek emphasis on physical culture and on beauty spread as well throughout the Near East. The religion of the Greeks was fused with that of the natives in many different varieties and local cults. All of this was abetted by the polis and its official city cult, in which the Greek and the Near Eastern were in constant symbiosis.

Yet these natives not only absorbed the Hellenic and Hellenistic, they redefined and reinterpreted their own traditional cultures in light of the "modern" civilization in which they now found themselves. It is this process of reinterpretation which led to the several varieties of Hellenistic Judaism. These developments, furthermore, set the stage for the struggle over the extent of accommodation to Hellenism which would soon engulf the Jewish homeland.

2. Under Ptolemies and Seleucids

In the summer of 332 B.C.E., the Land of Israel was conquered by Alexander the Great. The land and people of Judea were now part of the Hellenistic world. Alexander passed through the Land of Israel first on his way to Gaza during his conquest of the Phoenician coast and then on his way from Egypt to Babylonia. He may have spent some time in the Land of Israel dealing with a revolt in Samaria, and it is possible that he met then with Jewish leaders. By the time Alexander died at age thirty-three in 323 B.C.E.,

he had conquered the entire area from Macedonia to India. The Land of Israel was now part of this new empire.

After Alexander's death, his generals, known as the Diadochi ("successors"), were unable to maintain the unity of the empire, and it soon fragmented. Individual generals were appointed to rule as satraps over particular areas on the Old Persian pattern. In 323 B.C.E., Ptolemy took control of Egypt. This date is taken as the beginning of the Ptolemaic Empire, although he was only officially crowned in 305 B.C.E. Seleucus was made satrap of Babylon in 322 B.C.E. After some difficulties, he established himself and his empire on sound footing in 312 B.C.E. He extended his kingdom to the entire eastern part of Alexander's empire. The rest went to Cassander in Macedonia and Lysimachus in Thrace. The Ptolemaic and the Seleucid kingdoms were destined to play a profound role in the history of the Land of Israel in the Hellenistic era.

During the period of the Diadochi, the Land of Israel changed hands between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids five times. This instability allowed Hellenism to make only a modest beginning in the country in these early years of the Hellenistic period. Further, some degree of local autonomy must have been fostered by the instability, and the already significant role of the high priest in the affairs of Judea must have been enhanced.

By 301 B.C.E., however, Ptolemy finally established his hold on the Land of Israel. During the third century, Ptolemaic and Seleucid armies fought five times. Despite the heavy damage, the Ptolemies were able to maintain at least de facto control over the Land of Israel. Considerable information about this period comes from the Zenon papyri, a collection of administrative documents from the archive of the Egyptian finance minister, some of which were sent to him by his agent in the Land of Israel.

These documents tell us of a land under the rule of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283- 246 B.C.E.). The country was often beset by Seleucid attacks and bedouin incursions.

Ptolemaic military units were stationed throughout the Land of Israel, and many Greek cities were established. Many of these were set up as cleruchies (military colonies) in which soldiers who married native women were given fields. In addition, an extensive Ptolemaic bureaucracy existed in the Land of Israel to manage the affairs of government and taxation. Central to this officialdom was the goal of developing economic life and trade. Among the exports to Egypt from the Land of Israel and Southern Syria were grain, olive oil, smoked fish, cheese, meat, dried figs, honey, and dates. The Land of Israel also assumed importance as a crossroads for the spice trade.

At the same time, virtually no information exists from this century regarding Jewish political affairs. Judea continued to be governed by the high priest and the priestly aristocracy. It is known that the high priest Onias II quarreled regarding taxation with Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221 B.C.E.) who was reported to have visited the Jerusalem Temple. The end result of this dispute was the imposition in 242 B.C.E. of the young Joseph, son of Tobiah, a nephew of the high priest, as a tax collector for the entire country. The rivalry between the Tobiad family and the Oniad high priests would eventually play a part in the attempts at radical Hellenization of Judea later on in the second century B.C.E.

In 221 B.C.E. the Seleucid king Antiochus III tried to invade the Land of Israel for the first time. Despite the failure of his initial attempt, he persisted in seeking an opportunity to take control of this important land bridge. The death of King Ptolemy IV Philopator in 205 B.C.E. opened the way for Antiochus III. In 201 B.C.E. he invaded

the country and quickly conquered it. By 198 B.C.E. the Seleucids had established firm control which would continue up to the Maccabean revolt. By the time Ptolemaic rule came to an end in the Land of Israel, the Hellenistic cities had been firmly established throughout the country, and Hellenism had sunk strong foundations, ultimately to tear the nation apart before Judea would regain its independence.

In the years of conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids, Jews were divided into parties each supporting one of the rivals. We hear of the Gerousia, the council of elders, for the first time here, and they emerge as supporters of the Seleucids. Indeed, the high priest Simon the Just (ca. 200 B.C.E.), who probably headed the Gerousia, is known to have supported the Seleucids. He must have regained the power over taxation which had been assigned to the tax farmer Joseph ben Tobiah and was now charged with refurbishing the Temple and the city. After his conquest, Antiochus III affirmed the right of the Jews to live according to their ancestral laws. Yet only some thirty years later, the Jewish proponents of extreme Hellenization would see in his son, the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the agent of their plans for the Hellenization of Jerusalem and its people.

3. The Jerusalem Temple and Priesthood

It had been a difficult undertaking in the Persian period to reestablish the Jerusalem Temple, and the Judean leaders struggled hard to make even a modest Temple building a reality. Over the years, various improvements were made so that by the eve of the Hellenistic reform the Temple complex had been expanded and refurbished. Further, the position of the Temple on a hill overlooking the city of Jerusalem gave it

great strategic value. The entire hill, the Temple Mount, was occupied with the Temple precincts, although the mountain itself was no doubt somewhat smaller than the present-day structures which were built by King Herod. Antiochus III confirmed the Jewish law that non-Jews could enter only the outermost area of the Temple Mount. Further, those afflicted with ritual impurities were excluded from the Temple precincts.

The Temple was much more than just a religious and cultic institution during the third and second centuries B.C.E. It served as the governmental center of the Jews to the extent to which the Jewish community operated as an autonomous unit within the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires. The high priest and his assistants, over time, accumulated vast temporal and financial power and controlled the internal affairs of the Judean populace. When, later on, Hellenizers would attain the priesthood and attempt to turn the Temple into a Hellenistic cult center, they would therefore challenge not only the religious tradition, but also the very nature of the Jewish nation. When inexorable historical forces would lead by the end of the first century C.E. to the destruction of the Temple and the abandonment of sacrifice as a primary religious activity in Judaism, a new page would be turned in the history of Judaism.

Evidence points to the existence among the Jews of a representative body during the early Hellenistic period. The Talmud identified those who were associated with Ezra and Nehemiah in the restoration period, and those who continued their work after them, as forming such an early representative group, known as the "Men of the Great Assembly." Such representative bodies included members of the various leadership and aristocratic classes of Jewish society. Some scholars, while accepting the existence of such a group, have seen it as a kind of ad hoc body, convened only at momentous

occasions in the history of the nation. It is the Gerousia (a Greek word meaning “council of elders”) which occupied this role in the Hellenistic period. In some parts of the Hellenistic Diaspora there were Jewish “Gerousias” as well. We see this council as a forerunner of the later Sanhedrin, known from the Herodian period.

In Antiochus III's edict following his conquest of Jerusalem he spoke of how he was given a distinguished reception by the Jews represented by the Gerousia, rather than by the high priest. During the Maccabean period we find the Gerousia, not the high priest, again as a representative body to whom Antiochus IV writes. Jews outside of the Judea also saw the Gerousia as representative of their people. The composition of the Gerousia seems to have included both priestly and lay leaders, the latter no doubt coming from the aristocracy connected closely with the priesthood. This is consistent with the composition of the later Sanhedrin which represented both Pharisaic and Sadducean (priestly) elements.

4. Hellenistic Trends in Palestinian Judaism

It was not long before the Jews of the Judea faced the Hellenistic reform (ca. 175 B.C.E.) and the subsequent Maccabean revolt (168-164 B.C.E.) The two preceding centuries were years in which, as we have seen, Hellenistic influence on the country was great. A confrontation of cultures was fostered by the presence of the Greek cities as well as the many foreigners, and the extensive commercial and cultural connections with the Hellenistic world. The old traditional Jewish way of life was now severely challenged by this new amalgamation of the Hellenic and the native. However, the

effects of this confrontation were not uniform throughout Palestinian Jewish society and throughout the country.

The group within the Jewish population which was least affected by the process of Hellenization is the rural peasantry. When they visited the cities to sell their produce, they certainly came into contact with more Hellenized Jews and with non-Jews. Yet their language and culture remained Hebraic, and the influence of Hellenism on them tended to be mainly in the area of material culture.

The urban masses, mostly artisans and traders, lived in predominantly Jewish cities like Jerusalem. There the extent of contact with the Greek world and with their more Hellenized coreligionists was much greater. The urban population found itself having to use Greek words and language to be understood, and increasingly, throughout the third and second centuries B.C.E., seeing greater and greater impact of Hellenism on architecture and cultural life even among traditionally pious Jews. Certain aristocratic families, already closely connected with the priesthood, were tending, perhaps as a result of their greater contact with the wider Hellenistic world, or for political and economic reasons, toward greater Hellenization.

Those Jews who were interested in a much greater form of Hellenization gravitated to the Greek cities, mostly on the seacoast and in the area to the east later known in Roman times as the Decapolis. In these areas Greek was the everyday language, and the dominant culture was Hellenistic. Such Jews had to compromise with the pagan cults, and they did this primarily by radically reinterpreting the Jewish Scriptures. These Jews were willing to pay a price for the economic and cultural advantages of the polis. They would attend the theater and send their children to the

Greek educational institutions, the gymnasium and the ephebion, where they in turn were inducted into greater extents of Hellenization and, ultimately, assimilation.

These trends continued to co-exist within Judean society until they came into confrontation. Beginning in the late second century B.C.E., extreme Hellenizers, of the type previously known only in the Greek cities, would take control of the Jerusalem priesthood and attempt to transform Jerusalem into another Hellenistic polis. This event would set the stage for the Maccabean revolt.

5. Hellenistic Reform and the Maccabean Revolt

The political background of the struggle over Hellenization must be sought in the years following the final Seleucid conquest of the Judea under Antiochus III in 198 B.C.E. Throughout the years of warfare between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies each empire had its supporters among the aristocracy of Jerusalem. When Seleucid rule finally became stabilized, the pro-Ptolemaic party was left disenfranchised. The high priest Onias III, during the reign of King Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175 B.C.E.) had been a supporter of the Ptolemies. The pro-Seleucid party, therefore, denounced him to the Seleucid rulers. In an effort to shore up his rule, Onias headed for Antioch to meet with the king.

After the death of Seleucus IV (175 B.C.E.), the infamous Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.) succeeded to the throne. Onias did not convince him of his loyalty and was forced to remain in Antioch. His brother Jason then bought the high priesthood from Antiochus. This disruption of the hereditary succession of the high

priests set a precedent that would hasten the decline of this office in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Along with his purchase of the office of high priest, Jason also bought the right to establish a gymnasium and ephebeion in Jerusalem, and, on the basis of these central educational and cultural institutions, to turn the city into a Hellenistic polis to be named Antioch for its founder, Antiochus IV. The right to live according to the Torah, granted to the Judeans by Antiochus III, was now rescinded. In its place, the Jews were to live under the law of the Greek city. Among other changes, this meant that the majority of those who previously had enjoyed full rights under the laws of the Torah now found themselves second-class citizens in an oligarchy. Athletic activities became prominent and the Gerousia was probably purged of those members who did not support this reform.

It is not surprising that an already Hellenized aristocracy would have undertaken these changes. Throughout the Hellenistic world the rulers were encouraging the establishment of the polis in many of the ancient cities. The polis was allied closely with the kings and could be depended upon to control the rural, less Hellenized, citizenry. At the same time, citizenship in a Greek city held out to its inhabitants the commercial benefits of trade with other such cities, the minting of coins, and other advantages that would have been particularly attractive to the aristocracy. Further, the polis afforded its citizens the opportunity to see themselves as part of a wider and more open world.

Jason and his followers were not extreme in their tendencies to Hellenize. Beyond these political and commercial changes, they did not seek to change the Jewish faith. They maintained the Temple and its rituals according to the tradition, even if certain compromises with the Hellenistic way of life were made elsewhere. They sought

to find a way to live as Jews within the wider Hellenistic world without abandoning the age-old traditions of Israel.

Jason's brand of Hellenization was apparently not enough for some. As a member of a family which had been pro-Ptolemaic, he soon found himself opposed by the pro-Seleucid Tobiad family, and by the three brothers Simeon, Menelaus and Lysimachus. The Tobiads plotted to have Menelaus replace Jason as high priest. Menelaus succeeded in buying the office from Antiochus, as his predecessor had done only a few years earlier. After an armed battle, Jason was forced to flee Jerusalem. Now in control, Menelaus appropriated funds from the Temple treasury to present gifts to Antiochus.

Menelaus's misappropriation of Temple funds and his lack of Oniad family ties turned the people bitterly against him. Violence broke out in Jerusalem, and Lysimachus, who had taken over in his brother's absence, he fell in the battles. Despite an appeal from representatives of the Gerousia to replace Menelaus, Antiochus allowed him to continue in office, and the representatives were executed. It was not long before, under new leaders, popular discontent would become full-scale revolt.

Antiochus had long been trying to conquer the Ptolemies of Egypt. His first attempt failed, but his second, in 168 B.C.E., almost succeeded. The Romans, however, already looking toward the East, forced him to abandon Egypt. The false rumors of Antiochus's death which spread in the aftermath of this humiliation led Jason, the deposed previous high priest, to leave his hiding place in Transjordan and to mount an assault on the city of Jerusalem. He succeeded in driving Menelaus and his supporters into the citadel. Yet Jason was not able to reassert his rule. Apparently, popular forces

arose against him, remembering that he had begun the Hellenistic reform, and forced him to again flee the holy city. Despite a slaughter led by Antiochus himself, insurrection continued in Jerusalem. The attempt of the Seleucid general Apollonius to control matters by establishing a fortress, known as the Akra, at the center of the polis, and by stationing a Hellenistic garrison there, led only to further popular opposition and to massive flight of Jews from the city, some of whom had been dispossessed to make room for the garrison.

It is probable that at this time foreign deities were introduced into the Temple, creating further friction. The Jewish Hellenizers, Menelaus and his party, saw these gods as equivalent to the God of Israel. To them, this was not really foreign worship. They regarded the ancestral God of Israel as simply another manifestation of the supreme deity known in Syria as Baal Shamin (Master of Heaven) and in the Greek world as Zeus Olympius. In this way they rationalized their behavior.

Earliest attempts at organized rebellion were probably led by the Hasidim ("the pious"), a group of pietists who found the religious compromises in Hellenistic Jerusalem totally unacceptable. Rebellion was mounting, and Antiochus had to do something to stem it. It was for this reason that he conceived of the infamous persecutions, which, far from being the beginning of our story, come after years of struggle and insurrection fueled by the attempt of Hellenistic Jews to foist their way of life on the entire nation of Israel. There is no evidence at all that Antiochus pursued a policy of Hellenization anywhere else in his kingdom. Rather, he took up this banner in Judea in response to the nature of the rebellion which confronted him. For Antiochus, the way to defeat the rebels

was by an onslaught against the forces which propelled them—the Torah, the commandments, and the culture of the Jewish people.

We cannot be sure if the accounts in the books of I and II Maccabees describing the beginning of the revolt are historical. The accounts in the books of Maccabees state that the refusal of Mattathias, the priest of Modiin, and of men and women like him to submit to the persecutions soon led many to repair to the forests. Several thousand soon coalesced around the Hasmonean family, led by Judah the Maccabee, and his brothers John, Simon, Eleazar, and Jonathan. Together with elements of the Hasidim they began to take control of villages throughout the countryside. By Mattathias's death in 166/5 B.C.E. they had taken Judea.

Under Judah the Maccabee ("hammer") the Jewish armies defeated successive Seleucid generals who attempted to put down the uprising. After defeating the best of Antiochus's generals, Judah soon was master of the entire country. Menelaus and the Hellenizers sought a peaceful settlement, asking that the Jews be allowed to return to their homes and that the persecution be officially suspended. The Seleucids realized the need for a political compromise. In October 164 B.C.E., they restored the rights of the Jews as granted by Antiochus III, providing amnesty as well. While some may have in fact taken advantage of this amnesty, the soldiers of Judah did not. In December of that year Judah and his men took Jerusalem, although the Seleucids continued to hold the Akra, the Hellenistic fortress. On the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev Judah purified the Temple and reorganized its sacrificial worship to conform to the Jewish tradition. This event is commemorated in the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah ("rededication"). The

main objective of the revolt, eliminating the persecutions and restoring Judaism to the nation, had been achieved.

Throughout the persecutions and revolt, the Hellenistic pagans in the Land of Israel had sided with the Seleucids and had participated in the persecutions. It was therefore natural that Judah then turned on these enemies as well as on the Hellenizing Jews who had them brought on the horrible persecutions. These Hellenizers, many of them of aristocratic origins, fought on the side of the Seleucids against Judah. Their center was the Akra, and it was here that they finally took refuge when Judah conquered Jerusalem.

Judah undertook wars throughout the Land of Israel to defend the Jews from their pagan neighbors, and at the same time to extirpate paganism from the country. After the death of Antiochus IV in 164 B.C.E., his son Antiochus V Eupator advanced on Judea, came to terms with Judah, and again restored the rights of the Jews. Menelaus, the Hellenizing high priest, was executed by the Seleucids who blamed him for embroiling them in the persecutions and wars with the Jews. Alcimus, a moderate Hellenizer, was appointed high priest. By 162 B.C.E. Judah and his party had barred Alcimus from taking up office. Alcimus sought the help of the Seleucids. They confirmed him and the Hasidim hastened to compromise with him. The Hasmoneans, on the other hand, continued to resist his rule. After a brief honeymoon, the Hasidim were back in Judah's camp. The Syrians had again succeeded in putting the Hellenizers in power over Judea.

Alcimus sought Seleucid help to maintain power against Judah. The force dispatched to aid him was defeated, and Alcimus fled to Syria. He returned with the Seleucid general Bacchides, and Judah fell in battle against him in 160 B.C.E. The

Hasmoneans now rallied around Jonathan, Judah's brother. Again the Hellenized Jews sought to rule and again the Hasmoneans plagued them on all sides. For several years the post of high priest remained vacant as war raged. Finally, Bacchides entered negotiations with Jonathan. A treaty was established, and Jonathan controlled most of Judea from a stronghold at Michmash.

When internal affairs in Syria in 152 B.C.E. led to civil war over succession to the throne, both sides began wooing Jonathan. Finally, in response to the competing offers of both sides, on Tabernacles of 152, Jonathan, with the support of the Syrian pretender Alexander Balas, appeared in the robes of the high priest. Judea was now united under the rule of the Hasmonean high priest. A dynasty had dawned which would rule the Jewish people until the coming of the Romans in 63 B.C.E.

6. The Jewish Diaspora

Since biblical times, the Jewish people had already been scattered beyond the boundaries of the Land of Israel. Yet the notion of Diaspora, a dispersion of Jews exiled from their homeland, did not become central until 722 B.C.E. when Sennacherib, King of Assyria, carried off many of the aristocrats of Northern Israel into exile in Assyria. This exile was followed soon after by the population movements of Jews under Babylonian domination, first in 597 B.C.E., when the upper strata of Judean society were exiled, and then in 586 B.C.E. when the First Temple was destroyed and many Judeans were led into captivity. These population movements led to the establishment of a stable Jewish population in Mesopotamia, one that would be destined, as we shall see, to lay the foundations for much of medieval Jewish life. At the

same time other Jews fled to Egypt, where some of their coreligionists had already relocated in the years leading up to the destruction of Judea and its Temple. The effect of these emigrations was the creation of a substantial and stable Jewish community outside the Land of Israel.

By the Second Temple period this Diaspora had spread throughout the Hellenistic world as well. Jews were to be found along the coast of the Mediterranean basin as well as in Mesopotamia, and many other lands of the East. These communities carried Judaism to the lands of their dispersion wherein each community developed a distinctive native style. We shall have to be concerned here mostly with two of these styles, that of the Babylonian Jewish community, and that of the Hellenistic Diaspora.

From the accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah it is certain that the bulk of the Jewish community of Mesopotamia remained there when the small minority returned to rebuild the Judea. The Murashu Tablets, the records of a prominent family of Babylonian bankers which mention numerous Jews, are usually taken as evidence of Jewish business activity in Nippur during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.E.) and Darius II (423-405/4 B.C.E.). That Jews attained position of prominence is indicated by the biblical account of Nehemiah and this state of affairs provides the backdrop for the books of Esther and Daniel. Nehemiah himself was a high official of the Persian king.

After Alexander's conquest of Babylon in 331 B.C.E., Mesopotamia came to be ruled by the Seleucids for some two centuries. They soon founded new cities, which, together with the garrisons they established, fostered the Hellenization of Babylonia. We have no evidence regarding the effects of this process on the Jewish communities. The privileges accorded to the Jews by the Persians were reconfirmed by the new rulers.

In the late third century B.C.E. some Jews went so far as to serve in the army and were excused from certain duties for religious reasons. One heritage of the Seleucid period in Babylonia was the use of the Seleucid era (taking 312 B.C.E. as the year 1) as a means of counting years, a pattern that some Jewish communities continued well into the Middle Ages.

By 129 B.C.E. the decline of the Seleucid Empire had allowed the westward expansion of the Parthian empire (Parthia is located east and north of the Caspian Sea), so that Babylonia now came under Parthian rule. The Parthians allowed the native populations to continue their indigenous traditions, leaving the Greek colonies intact and granting favorable treatment to the Jews. The Jews of the Land of Israel and Babylonia were now united by a common wish for the weakening of Seleucid power. Some contacts between the Parthians and the Hasmonean rulers must have occurred. We know that the Parthians in 41/40 B.C.E. deposed Herod and supported the Hasmonean Judah Antigonus only to be chased back across the Euphrates by the Romans in 38 B.C.E.

Little is known of the position of the Jews in the Parthian Empire during the Hellenistic period, yet evidence does point to the majority of the Jews as farmers and tradesmen with a small upper class of nobility. Attachment to the Land of Israel, especially to Jerusalem, and pilgrimage to the Temple are attested. From the story of the conversion to Judaism (ca. 40 C.E.) of the royal house of Adiabene, a Parthian vassal in the upper Tigris region, we can gather that Jews and Judaism were a regular part of the culture and life of Mesopotamia in this period. We even hear of a short-lived Jewish state established in Babylonia from about 20-35 C.E.

7. Jews in the Hellenistic World

Much more is known about the Jewish communities of the western Diaspora in this period. The first Jews must have immigrated to Egypt in the difficult years following the Babylonian conquest of Judea in the early sixth century B.C.E. Eventually, they spread throughout the country. Some Babylonian Jews must have followed the Persian conquerors to Egypt. During the Hellenistic period, the Diaspora experienced tremendous geographic and demographic expansion, so that the Western Diaspora would take center stage for some centuries, although the Eastern, Babylonian dispersion would eventually become central later on.

Large-scale Jewish emigration from the Land of Israel to Egypt is first attested in the time of Ptolemy I (323-283 B.C.E.), although accounts differ as to whether Jews came to Egypt voluntarily or as captives. In the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-246 B.C.E.), the Egyptian priest Manetho may be credited with the first literary expression of anti-Semitism. His writings show familiarity with the Exodus and indicate that there were a sufficient number of Jews in Egypt to make attacking them worthwhile.

At the same time, Ptolemy II is credited with arranging the freedom of many Jews still held captive from his father's day.

The days of Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-145 B.C.E.) begin the golden age of Egyptian Jewry. It was near the end of his reign that the Temple of Onias was built. Onias IV had left Jerusalem between 162 and 160 B.C.E. when he saw that Alcimus was appointed high priest. He had expected that as legitimate successor he would be appointed after the death of Menelaus the usurper. Onias and his relatives eventually constituted a military colony (*katoikia*) at Leontopolis. They established a Temple to

provide for orderly worship in their community, and, possibly, to advance their candidacy to assume the rule of Judea in the event of a Ptolemaic victory there.

Onias's role in the internal political and military affairs of Egypt shows the extent to which Jews were already penetrating support for Cleopatra II, widow of Ptolemy VI, Ptolemy VII Physcon (145-116 B.C.E., also called Euergetes II) unleashed a pogrom against the Jews, the first such event documented in history. Eventually, peace was restored when Ptolemy VII married Cleopatra. Good relations with the Jews must have been quickly restored, since a synagogue was eventually dedicated in his honor.

Onias's descendants continued to serve in the Ptolemaic military under Cleopatra III (116-102 B.C.E.). His sons Helkias and Hananiah were among her commanders. They are credited with convincing the queen to abandon her plan to conquer and annex the territory of the Hasmonean king, Alexander Janneus. Here we see the loyalty of Egyptian Jewry to their coreligionists in the Land of Israel and their support for the Hasmonean dynasty.

Accounts of the remainder of Jewish history in Hellenistic Egypt are scanty, but they reveal the continued role of Jews in Egyptian affairs up to the Roman period. The center of the Egyptian Jewish community was Alexandria, where Jews had settled already in the early third century B.C.E. Eventually, the Jewish community was concentrated in two Jewish quarters in the city, and synagogues were scattered throughout. Jews were also to be found throughout both Upper and Lower Egypt and constituted a substantial and recognizable group within the population. Many of their communities had originally been military colonies.

The earliest reliable evidence for the spread of the Jewish Diaspora to Asia Minor is the account of the transfer of Babylonian Jews by Antiochus III to the area now Turkey to serve as military colonies in about 210-205 B.C.E. By the time of Simon the Hasmonean, a circular letter published by the Roman consul regarding the rights of Jews was sent to nine different regions and cities on the mainland of Asia Minor and four Greek Isles. Numerous other locales in Asia Minor are mentioned as having Jewish communities in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. By the first century C.E. Jews were to be found throughout the length and breadth of Asia Minor.

Especially significant in light of its role in the history of the spread of Christianity was the Syrian Diaspora. Indeed, this dispersion grew to some extent because of its proximity to the Land of Israel. Already ca. 200 B.C.E. there is evidence for contact between Judea and Antioch, the largest Syrian city. It was at this time that the Jewish community of Antioch was established. Jews dwelled also in Apameia, and in the year 70 C.E. there was a pogrom against the Jews of Damascus. Tyre and Sidon (in present day Lebanon) were centers of Jewish population from Hasmonean times. By the turn of the era Jews were spread throughout the towns and cities of Syria.

In the time of Ptolemy I, they had already arrived in Cyrene, North Africa, from Egypt. The letter from the Roman consul also confirmed the rights of these Jews. Among the residents in the middle of the second century B.C.E. was Jason, author of a five-volume history which was excerpted in 2 Maccabees. In the first half of the first century B.C.E. the Jews were a distinct population group in Cyrene. In Roman times, the community would continue to grow, only to suffer destruction during the revolt of the Diaspora Jews against Trajan.

Jews also spread throughout Greece, Macedonia, Crete and Cyprus. It may be that Jewish captives were brought to Greece during the Maccabean revolt, sold as slaves, and later redeemed by their coreligionists. By the second century B.C.E. Greek authors would write that Jews were scattered throughout the world. Yet the vastly exaggerated population figures that have been put forward for the Jewish population of Greco-Roman times must be seen as vastly exaggerated in the absence of scientific demographic research.

The size of the Jewish community was no doubt swelled by many proselytes (converts) who joined the ancient Mosaic faith as belief in the traditional deities of the Greek world declined. We cannot be sure what processes of conversion were obligatory in order to join the Jewish communities of the Hellenistic world at this time, although there can be no question of the requirement of circumcision. At the same time there was a class of semi-proselytes who, without formally becoming part of the Jewish people, kept many Jewish customs such as frequenting the synagogues and abstaining from pork. This group must have appeared to the pagans to have converted to Judaism, although these "God-fearers", as they are known, did not consider themselves to have become full-fledged members of the Jewish people, nor were they considered by the Jewish people to have become Jews.

8. The Hasmonean Dynasty

By 152 B.C.E. Jonathan the Hasmonean had firmly established himself as ruler over Judea. The ensuing period, up to the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 B.C.E., is known as the Hasmonean era, that period in which the successors of Judah the Maccabee ruled over the Land of Israel. Jonathan took advantage of the instability in

the Seleucid Empire to expand his territory beyond Judea proper to include southern Samaria, and the southern coastal cities of Ekron and the environs, originally centers of Hellenistic culture. In 143 B.C.E. he was murdered by Tryphon, a pretender to the Seleucid throne.

Jonathan was succeeded by his brother, Simon. In 142 B.C.E. Simon gained recognition from the Seleucid King Demetrius II Nicator (145-39, and again in 129-125 B.C.E.). Demetrius's grant of tax exemption to the Hasmonean state, intended to secure its support for his own rule, was the final step in the process whereby Judea gained total independence. Like his brother Jonathan before him, Simon served as both temporal ruler and high priest. A public assembly in 140 B.C.E. gave formal legal standing to this arrangement and the hereditary succession of his sons to the same offices. He continued the policies of expansion begun by Jonathan, taking the harbor at Jaffa in order to ensure passage via sea. He also continued the extirpation of paganism from the land. His crowning achievement was dislodging the Seleucid garrison which had continued to occupy the Akra in Jerusalem. When Antiochus VII Sidetes (138-129 B.C.E.), the Seleucid king, attempted to secure the return of Simon's conquests, Simon defeated him squarely. Simon's reign came to an end when his son-in-law, apparently with the help of the Seleucids, conspired successfully to murder him and two of his sons in 134 B.C.E.

Simon's surviving son, John Hyrcanus (Yohanan in Hebrew), succeeded him in 134 B.C.E. In the first two years of his reign, John was occupied with continued fighting with the Seleucids. Because of the Seleucids' need for John's help in their campaign against the Parthians, the two sides came to terms, the Seleucids recognizing John's rule and the Hasmoneans indemnifying the Seleucids for territory they had conquered. After

the death of Antiochus VII in 129 B.C.E. the ensuing collapse of the Seleucid Empire allowed John to regain complete independence and to assert his authority over the entire the Land of Israel. His expansion to the south resulted in the forced conversion of the Idumeans to Judaism. It is from these converts that the Herodian family would stem. He captured territory in Transjordan, defeated the Hellenistic cities, and conquered the Samaritans. He died in 104 B.C.E.

His son, Aristobulus I succeeded him, but reigned only for one year, from 104-103 B.C.E. He continued the conquests of his father, subduing the Itureans in the north and converting them to Judaism, and gaining control over the Galilee. Yet he treated his mother with utmost cruelty, imprisoned three of his brothers, and had his other brother Antigonus killed. He is said to have died of remorse and a painful disease. He was the first of the Hasmoneans to style himself "king."

Alexander Janneus (Yannai), Aristobulus' brother, came to power in 103 B.C.E. when he married Aristobulus' widow, Salome Alexandra (Shelomzion). Under his rule the remaining foreign cities in the Land of Israel were taken. He and John Hyrcanus may be considered the rulers whose conquests truly exemplified the achievements of the Hasmoneans as they were responsible for expanding the borders of Judea to the entire the Land of Israel. Alexander Janneus died in 76 B.C.E.

Yet there was another side as well. The Maccabees had fought not only for the freedom of the Jews from foreign domination, not only for power and wealth. They had risen initially against elements in the Jewish population which sought to Hellenize themselves and their countrymen. Only later did they defend themselves and their nation against the Seleucid Empire which sought to aid these Hellenizers in their quest by

persecuting Jews and Judaism. Yet gradually, the descendants of the Maccabees, the Hasmonean rulers, themselves acquired the trappings of Hellenism. They began to conduct their courts in Hellenistic fashion and to grow estranged from Jewish observance. This transition went way beyond the need for any monarch at that time to make use of Hellenistic-style coinage, diplomacy and bureaucracy. The Hasmoneans employed foreign mercenaries to protect them from their own people.

Opposition to the Hasmonean House came from a variety of corners. First, they had never made peace with remnants of the old-line Hellenizers who continued to constitute part of the landed aristocracy. Second, the Pharisees opposed the concentration in Hasmonean hands of both temporal and religious power, demanding that the Hasmoneans relinquish the high priesthood, since they were not of the proper high priestly lineage. Third, some other groups, whose point of view is represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls, accepted the validity of the Hasmoneans as high priests, but chastised them for also holding political power.

All these factors had already led Alexander Janneus to prepare his wife Salome Alexandra for succession and to recommend to her that she compromise with the opponents of the Hasmonean dynasty. This she did effectively for some nine years until her death in 67 B.C.E. Yet she failed effectively to prepare for her succession, and her sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, fought one another for the crown. Both eventually appealed to the Romans. By this time Rome was already in Syria and positioned to swallow up Judea. Aristobulus was remembered by later sources as the great hero, a man possessed of the spirit of the Maccabees, seeking nothing less than freedom from foreign rule. Hyrcanus was pictured as weakling, desiring power for power's sake, at any cost to

himself and his nation. As the two fought with one another, each turned to the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C.E. who was by then in Syria. Pompey, after a series of negotiations, decided to capitalize on the situation by satisfying the longstanding Roman desire to dominate the Land of Israel, the great strategic land bridge between Africa and Asia. He played the brothers off against each other and then finally brought his army to Jerusalem, which he conquered, entering the inner sanctuary, and bringing the Land of Israel under Roman rule. Thus ended the Hasmonean dynasty.

The Romans awarded the high priesthood to Hyrcanus II while imprisoning his brother Aristobulus II. Aristobulus and his sons would for years show themselves to be true Maccabean descendants, repeatedly escaping Roman imprisonment to seek against all odds to wrest Judea back from the Romans. Yet the Hasmonean star had set.

9. Judea under Roman Rule

We have already traced the history of the Hasmonean dynasty through the days of Salome Alexandra to its end in recrimination and civil war in 63 B.C.E. The decline of this great dynasty resulted, as was noted, from the very same process of Hellenization which the Maccabees had risen against so valiantly. The last gasp of freedom was breathed as the two brothers Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II fought the fratricidal war which handed Judea over to the Romans.

Aristobulus had been led off in chains to Rome. Hyrcanus II was installed as high priest, entrusted with managing the internal affairs of this nation. For all intents and purposes, Judea was reduced to the status of a small tributary in the wider context of Roman Syria. The entire region was under a Roman procurator who managed the political, military and fiscal affairs of the province.

The governmental status of Judea was reorganized by Gabinius. Gabinius, who served as Roman governor of Syria in 57-55 B.C.E., divided the territory of Judea into five *synhedroi*, administrative districts. This division was clearly intended to eliminate the age-old system of toparchies (administrative districts grouped around central cities) which was originally that of Solomon, taken over in turn by the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians, then by the Ptolemies and Seleucids. The intent of this reorganization was to destabilize the nation and to make certain that popular resistance would be impossible. Julius Caesar restored certain territories to Judea and appointed Hyrcanus to the title ethnarch (Greek for "ruler of the nation").

Hyrcanus was a weak figure who on his own could neither administer the affairs of Judea nor collect its taxes. For this reason, it soon became possible for the Idumaeen, Antipater, whose father had been forcibly converted to Judaism in the time of John Hyrcanus, to insinuate himself into the halls of power. He soon took control of virtually all matters of state, combining the authority officially in the hands of the high priest Hyrcanus with that delegated to him by the Romans who clearly saw him as their agent. Antipater's decision to install his sons as governors, Herod over Galilee and Phasael over Jerusalem, sowed the seeds of the rise of the Herodian dynasty.

Herod, then a man of twenty-five, set to the task of ridding the Galilee of what his official court historian Nicolaus of Damascus called "robbers" who in reality may have been resisters of Roman rule. By 47 or 46 B.C.E., Herod's summary justice led him to a confrontation with the Sanhedrin. Only the intervention of his father Antipater prevented Herod from taking revenge for their having called him to account. Herod's difficulties with his brethren had no impact on his relations with the Romans who appointed him

“strategos” (governor and general) of Coele-Syria, a Greek designation for the area of the Land of Israel and Syria.

In 43 B.C.E. Antipater was poisoned, leaving the fate of the Land of Israel open. Herod and Phasael managed to retain power, even after the accession of Antony as ruler over the entirety of Asia in 42 B.C.E. Despite the complaints of their countrymen who dispatched embassies to Antony, Herod and Phasael were each granted the title of Tetrarch.

Yet their fate and that of the Land of Israel as well, changed markedly with the invasion of the Parthians in 40 B.C.E. The Parthians allied themselves with Antigonus II (Mattathias) the Hasmonean, the youngest son of Aristobulus II (and nephew of Hyrcanus II). This last of the Hasmonean princes had long been seeking to reassert Hasmonean rule over Judea. Unable to stem the invasion, Phasael and Hyrcanus II were lured into a trap by the Parthians. Hyrcanus was maimed in the ear in order to disqualify him from serving as high priest and Phasael took his own life. Only the wily Herod had foreseen the trap and escaped successfully.

Now once again Judea had a Hasmonean king. Herod determined that if he were to regain power, he had no other option but to seek Roman support. He set sail for Rome where he convinced the Senate to declare him king of Judea despite his lack of any real claim to the throne or of an army. He knew that the Roman desire to see the Parthians expelled from the province would lead the Senate to support his claims. In 39 B.C.E. he landed back in Judea and quickly gathered some northerners around his banner, alongside the Roman troops ordered by the Senate to assist him. His attack on Jerusalem was at first unsuccessful, with Antigonus still holding his own in the city. Yet the tide was

turning against the Parthians who had been expelled from most of Syria and were on the run in the Land of Israel as well.

By 37 B.C.E., Herod managed to subdue virtually all the country. By order of Antony, the Roman governor of Syria Sossius gave Herod aid which ultimately led to his victory in the siege of Jerusalem. Antigonus was captured by the Romans and was beheaded at the wish of Herod. Thus ended the last gasp of Hasmonean rule over an independent Jewish nation in the Land of Israel.

10. Herodian Rule

What follows is but a brief summary of the life and dynasty of Herod, the most famous and infamous of Judean kings. From the beginning of his rule, popular discontent, already faced by him when he was governor of the Galilee, reached high proportions, led by certain Pharisees and some of the nobility. Only with harsh and brutal measures did he succeed in bringing it under control. To shore up his rule, in 35 B.C.E. he installed as high priest the Hasmonean Aristobulus III, to whose sister, Mariamme, Herod was married. However, realizing the great popularity of this descendent of the Maccabees, Herod soon had Aristobulus III drowned. This was only the first of a chain of killings perpetrated by Herod, often against members of his own family regarding whom he harbored the darkest and most irrational of fears.

Having set to rest internal challenges to his control, Herod soon faced other problems from abroad. Called to defend himself for the death of Aristobulus before Antony in 34 B.C.E., Herod was acquitted. Yet Cleopatra persuaded Antony soon afterwards to give her possession of some of the best agricultural land in Herod's kingdom in the region of Jericho. Rather than resist and alienate this powerful woman,

Herod cleverly arranged to lease back his own land. In this way he retained his territory intact, while paying what amounted to a small tribute. Although his war with the Nabatean Arabs ended in victory in 31 B.C.E., he suffered great casualties. At the same time, the earthquake which shook the Land of Israel in 31 B.C.E. killed some 30,000 people and Herod undertook massive relief works in its aftermath. In that same year, when Antony was defeated at the battle of Actium, Herod quickly changed sides and allied himself with Octavian, now known as Augustus Caesar, who confirmed him in office in 30. In gratitude, Augustus returned to Herod the territories taken by Cleopatra.

Domestic, internecine jealousies led Herod to put his wife Mariamme to death in 29 B.C.E. The resulting psychological depression and recriminations led in turn to the execution of other family members and courtiers. Among them were more Maccabean descendents, killed for fear that they might reassert the claims of the Hasmonean house.

The consolidated power of Herod made possible a variety of massive building projects as befitted a Roman client king. Theaters and amphitheaters were constructed. He built a palace in the upper city of Jerusalem, as well as the fortress Antonia north of the Temple. In non-Jewish areas, both within his kingdom and outside, he built Temples to pagan gods and in honor of Caesar and funded athletic games. Although quite Hellenized, and born of a non-Jewish mother, hence not Jewish according to the predominant view, he often sought to avoid offending his Jewish subjects. At other times he completely violated Jewish laws and sensibilities. From 22-9 B.C.E. he built Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea coast, intended as a shipping point to foster his role in the international grain trade. Many fortresses were rebuilt, including Masada where he had hidden his family when he fled to the Roman Senate in 40 B.C.E.

His largest and most beautiful project was the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. He began in 20/19 B.C.E., yet work on the details was still proceeding long after his death when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. Despite his adherence to Pharisaic demands regarding many aspects of its construction, in other respects he ignored them. They continued to be hostile to him, and it is even doubtful if the Sanhedrin existed in his time. High priests were appointed and removed by him at will. The Sadducean elements, therefore, were also opposed to him, as were the heavily taxed common people. He was able to maintain control only because of his extremely close relations with Augustus and the Roman authorities and because of the repressive tactics he used to subjugate the populace.

The last years of his reign were dominated by family intrigues. (He had a total of ten wives.) Herod's son from his first marriage, Antipater, schemed successfully against the sons of Mariamme, Alexander and Aristobulus. Eventually, Herod accused them of treason before Augustus, had them tried before a court and executed, probably in 7 B.C.E. When Antipater sought to gain control of the kingdom for him, he was accused of plotting to kill Herod and was imprisoned. As his domestic situation deteriorated, so did Herod's health. In 4 B.C.E., he executed Antipater, and gave instructions that a large group of leaders of the country be put to death after he died, a plan never put into effect. Five days after his son's execution, he died. The entire country breathed a sigh of relief as the reign of this despot and murderer came to an end.

11. Judea under the Procurators

After his death, Herod's kingdom was divided into three sections. Judea, Samaria and Idumaeans were placed under the rule of his son Archelaus who was appointed to the title Ethnarch. (Antipas and Philip received territories in the north and were made Tetrarchs.) Immediately, revolt broke out against Archelaus in Judea. His subjects found his brutal and tyrannical rule intolerable. By 6 C.E. he was deposed by the Romans. The country was reorganized as a Roman province.

Thus began the period of the Roman governors. These officials were initially granted the title prefect. Only during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (41-54 C.E.) did the term procurator come into use to designate these officials. Yet it has remained customary for scholars to use the term procurator for the entire Roman period in Jewish history.

Only auxiliary troops were stationed in Judea to assist the procurator, and, therefore, he was dependent on the legions of the governor of Syria who accordingly functioned as the procurator's immediate superior. The Jews were granted substantial autonomy and were allowed to maintain their own courts and to arrange for the collection of taxes. In matters of religion and worship the procurators did not interfere with Jewish practice.

The early procurators seemed to govern wisely and peacefully. Only with the rise of Pontius Pilate (26-36 C.E.), the procurator who executed Jesus, did conflict and bloodshed begin. From that point on relations deteriorated for a number of reasons: Roman insensitivity to Jewish religious requirements, high taxes, stationing of troops in Jerusalem, and the rising messianic yearnings of the Jews. Problems escalated under the rule of the emperor Gaius Caligula (37-41 C.E.) who demanded that the Jews erect an

image of him in the Temple. Only the timely death of Caligula avoided a tragic and violent confrontation between Rome and the Jewish people.

With his accession as emperor in 41 B.C.E., Claudius (41-54 C.E.) soon appointed Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod and Mariamme, as king of the entire Land of Israel. From 41-44 Judea was no longer a province, but functioned again as a Roman client kingdom. Agrippa loved his people and their ancestral way of life, and sought, within the context of the Roman Empire, to renew the ancient glory of Israel. Agrippa enjoyed widespread support among the Jews who regarded him as they had looked upon the Hasmoneans. Yet the non-Jewish residents of the land were arrayed against him.

After Agrippa's sudden death, his son was judged too young to succeed him, and so Judea returned to procuratorial rule. From this point on, there was constant strife between the procurators and their Jewish subjects. The Roman officials displayed little sensitivity to Judaism and its dictates, on the one hand, and to the economic well-being of the country on the other hand. Economic decline proceeded quickly as did the activities of the growing rebellious factions. Anarchy was fast approaching, and soon the nation would be aflame with rebellion and then destruction.

12. Revolt and Restoration

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. was the culmination of some seven decades of Jewish unrest and anti-Roman agitation. Certain families had a continuous tradition of opposition to Roman rule which can be traced from the earliest years of the Herodian dynasty and throughout the period of the procurators. The

constant efforts of various groups seeking an end to Roman domination and persecution eventually led to the full-scale revolt of 66-73 C.E.

This opposition was fueled by a number of factors. First, many Palestinian Jews from the Maccabean revolt on had steadfastly defended their freedom from foreign domination, quite apart from the issue of religious liberty. That is, the issue was not simply whether foreign powers would allow the Jews freedom to follow the Torah as they understood it. For these Jews, predecessors of the later revolutionaries, the freedom of the Jewish people was a question of national pride and independence. Indeed an independent Jewish nation was the ideal of the prophets of old and the visionaries of the Second Temple period. Further, many of those who took part in the Great Revolt of 66-73 C.E. were motivated by messianic expectations, and some of the leaders of the various factions involved in the revolt had messianic aspirations.

Throughout the Second Temple period, the concept of messianic was central in many of the groups which left their writings in the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha and Dead Sea Scrolls. Based on the biblical hope for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and the destruction of the wicked on the Day of the Lord, numerous authors set out their ideas of messianic redemption. By the first century C.E. there was a consensus that at some future date the Jews could expect a renewal of the Davidic dynasty's rule over the Land of Israel, a purification of religious life, and freedom from foreign domination. While some groups expected this redemption to evolve naturally, others looked forward to great messianic battles and catastrophes out of which a new order would be born.

The two motivating forces, the heritage of the Maccabean uprising and messianism, were set in motion in an atmosphere of Roman rule which in the latter

years of the procurators was increasingly capricious and at worst cruel. The procurators paid little or no attention to the needs or sensitivities of the Jews of Judea during the years leading up to the revolt. The Romans would eventually reap the results of this approach.

13. The Great Revolt

The revolt, as was already observed, can be said to have been going on from the day Rome set foot in the Land of Israel. Previous chapters have traced the growing discontent and resistance of segments of the Jewish people in the Herodian period and in the years of the procurators that followed. Yet in a real sense the full scale revolt broke out in 66 C.E.

The proximate cause was a series of acts by the procurator Gessius Florus (64-66 C.E.) which displayed disrespect for the religious sensibilities of the Jews. Widespread strife broke out in Jerusalem, and, as a consequence, some of the priests, decided to suspend the offering on behalf of the emperor, an action tantamount to declaring open revolt. The efforts of King Agrippa II, the leading priests, and some of the Pharisees to stem the incipient revolt failed. Jerusalem was soon in the hands of the rebels. This led, in turn, to uprisings throughout the country where Jews battled their non-Jewish neighbors for the upper hand. The attempt of Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, to put down the revolt ended in his being routed by the Jews.

Commanders of the Jewish army were now assigned to the entire country, to prepare for the expected Roman attack. Among them was the future historian Josephus who commanded the Galilee. Judging from Josephus's experiences, these commanders had to contend with competition from a variety of popular, even semi-messianic, figures.

In fact, the rebels did not constitute a uniform group. A variety of forces entered the revolt. Among these groups were the Sicarii, known in the years before the war for having assassinated collaborators with the Romans with short daggers (Latin *sica*) which they kept hidden under their garments.

The followers of Simeon bar Giora regarded their leader as a messianic figure, and in his name seem to have committed violent acts not only against the Romans but against other groups of rebels as well. The Zealots may have had their origins in the groups that had continuously struggled against Rome since the beginnings of Roman rule in the Land of Israel, although according to many scholars this group was formed at the start of the revolt. The inability of these groups to work together may be seen as one of the major reasons why the revolt did not succeed. At the same time, it must be recognized that ultimately the Jews could not have stood up to the superior military forces of Rome and the unlimited resources which the Romans could commit to the battle.

The Roman emperor Nero (54-68 C.E.) now appointed the experienced general Vespasian to lead the attack on Judea. With the help of his son Titus, Vespasian assembled three legions and a variety of auxiliaries, totaling some 60,000 men. By the end of 67 C.E., Vespasian was able to take Galilee. Josephus himself surrendered to the Romans at Jotapata.

When the Galilee was lost, some of those groups of rebels led by popular, messianic figures migrated south to join those defending Jerusalem. They soon took a leading role as the aristocratic leaders whose policies had led to the loss of Galilee were displaced. Soon, however, civil strife broke out in Jerusalem among the various factions.

While all this went on, Vespasian busied himself with the subjugation of the rest of the country. In 68/69 there was a brief pause in the war as Vespasian awaited the outcome of the death of the emperor Nero and the struggle for succession which then took place. In 69 C.E., the Roman legions of the East decided to declare Vespasian emperor. Soon afterwards he was accepted at Rome as well. From this point, his son Titus was left to prosecute the war in the Land of Israel. All the while, those besieged within Jerusalem continued to undercut their own position through their inability to join together.

By Passover of 70 C.E. Titus had amassed a large force around Jerusalem while Jewish factions inside the city were killing one another. As Titus's battering rams began to strike, the factions finally came together. One by one the Romans took the walls of the city. Finally the Romans controlled the entire city except for the Temple area. By building siege ramparts, Titus was finally able to take the Temple Mount itself. According to Josephus, Titus planned to spare the Temple from destruction, but it was nonetheless engulfed in conflagration and could not be saved. The ensuing slaughter of men, women and children and the leveling of the city which followed dealt a lasting blow to Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

This was not the end of the war. It still remained for the Romans to defeat Jewish forces that had taken refuge in other areas of the city, and to take a variety of fortresses scattered throughout the land where rebel forces were still in control. While Temple treasures and the rebel leaders were paraded in Rome, the Roman armies continued to mop up in the Land of Israel. With the capture of Masada in 73 C.E., the

last resistance to Rome was crushed. As the Roman commemorative coins stated, "Judea had been captured."

14. Restoration of Autonomy: The Authority of the Rabbis

In the aftermath of the destruction in the Great Revolt of 66-73 C.E., a total realignment of Jewish political and religious groups took place. It must be remembered that the constellation of approaches known from Second Temple times was radically affected by the events of the Roman conquest.

The Sadducees, the aristocratic and priestly elements, lost their power base when the Temple was destroyed. Most probably, some of their traditions survived among non-rabbinic Jews and may have influenced the medieval Karaite movement. In any case, the Sadducees ceased to be a factor after the revolt. They may even have been perceived as in some way responsible for the debacle. Some of the high priests were close to the Romans, and other priests actually started the open revolt by refusing to offer the sacrifices provided by the emperor. Accordingly, they incurred the wrath of both pro- and anti-Roman forces. Further, the destruction of the Temple may have been taken by some Jews as indicative of divine impatience with the way in which the sacrificial worship was being conducted. In any event, the Sadducees exited the stage of history.

The Essenes and the various sects allied to or similar to them also disappeared. The Essenes themselves were leaders in the failed military revolt, according to Josephus, and they were decimated by the Romans. Qumran, the center of the Dead Sea sect, was attacked and destroyed in 68 C.E. as part of Roman operations in the Judean Desert.

The more extreme and messianically inspired revolutionaries were in the main decimated. Yet their traditions and approach reemerged in the Bar Kokhba Revolt less

than one hundred years later. From the political point of view, however, these groups were not a factor in Jewish life in the Land of Israel after the war. The victorious Romans saw little reason to make common cause with those whom they perceived to have been the enemy, especially an enemy that wreaked so much havoc on the Roman armies sent to destroy them. Accordingly, they had no interest in dealings with the remnants of the rebel groups.

The only serious factor left in Palestinian Judaism in the aftermath of the war was the Pharisaic, rabbinic group. This group had survived the war relatively intact. Some of the Pharisaic leaders, perhaps Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel (I), had taken an active part in the revolt. The Pharisees, already soon after the Maccabean revolt, represented a group of lay sages who were known to have been forerunners of the Talmudic rabbis. Yet, as would also be the case in the later Bar Kokhba Revolt, some rabbis opposed the revolt and advocated settling with the Romans. Indeed, this debate resulted from differing approaches to the question of whether Judaism demanded national independence or simply freedom of religion, a debate which may have lain at the basis of the disagreement between Judah Maccabee and the high priest Alcimus. In any case, the Romans saw at least some of the Rabbis, most notably Yohanan ben Zakkai, as creditable leaders with whom to deal.

Yet the decision on the part of the Romans to regard the Pharisaic, rabbinic leadership as representative of the Jews cannot be explained simply as a proclivity to deal with those whom they perceived to be more sympathetic. The Romans came to see the tannaim as the ideal leaders for the internal affairs of the country. A number of factors contributed to this decision on the part of the Romans, most notably the popularity of the

Pharisees and the fact that elements of this group had preached accommodation with the Romans. The Romans therefore decided to countenance the establishment of the patriarchate as the internal self-governing body for the Jews of the Land of Israel. In this way they hoped to solve the problems that had led to the large-scale revolt against procuratorial government.

Simultaneously, large segments of the Jewish people came to accept this determination, not only for "civil" matters, but for matters of religion as well. Yet the establishment of tannaitic, rabbinic authority did not take place immediately or without difficulty, even opposition. The earliest attempts to assert control seem have been in the immediate aftermath of the war, when the sages gathered together at Yavneh under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai. His claim to authority was only one of learning and respect. Soon, however, the Hillelite patriarchal house came back into power after Rabban Gamaliel II reasserted his power at Yavneh ca. 80 C.E. Rabban Gamliel traced his descent to Hillel, the prominent Pharisaic sage of the first century B.C.E. At Yavneh, under Rabban Gamliel's direction, the Rabbis engaged in standardization, recording and gathering of traditions. This process, and its extension to the entire Jewish community, would take centuries to complete. Moreover, Rabban Gamliel undertook, perhaps with specific Roman authority, to establish the patriarchate as the system of self-government for the Jews of the Land of Israel. He acted out of a sense that this measure was the only way to bring about the economic and political restoration of the Jewish people in their land and to unite effectively all the Jews of the nation under the authority of one Judaism, that of the early rabbis.

15. The Bar Kokhba Revolt

The debacle of the first revolt against Rome was followed by a period of relative calm. Yet during the years of rule by the autonomous Hillelite patriarchs, and the leadership of the tannaitic academies, problems were brewing, both inside and outside the Land of Israel. These developments took place despite the separation of Judea from the province of Syria and the appointment of higher level governors of Senatorial rank. The need to pay a capitation tax to the Temple of Jupiter must have made the Jews very unhappy.

It was not until the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (98-117 C.E.) that the problems came to the surface. In 115-117 C.E., while Trajan was occupied in Mesopotamia, Jews throughout the Diaspora rose up against their non-Jewish neighbors in violent confrontation. It is difficult to tell if this war was fueled by messianic ferment or by a decline in relations between Jews and their neighbors in the Hellenistic world. Before long pitched battles were being fought in Egypt. The Jews of Cyrenaica (in North Africa) were said to have massacred their neighbors. Similar disturbances followed in Cyprus and Mesopotamia. The Roman general Locus Quietus, ferocious in putting down the Mesopotamian revolt, was rewarded with the governorship of the Land of Israel. When Hadrian became emperor in 117 C.E. he had to spend his first year mopping up the last of the rebels. The Land of Israel seems to have been involved in these battles only to a limited extent.

What is especially significant in these disturbances is the evidence that they were fueled by the very same messianic yearnings that helped to fan the flames of the Great Revolt and which would in part lead to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. To be sure, other social,

economic and political causes were at work. Yet when these finally led to such widespread rebellion, it was the belief in a messianic future which made possible the leap of faith to the belief that this Diaspora revolt might succeed.

Early in the time of Hadrian there was an abortive attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, believed by some scholars to have had the support of Hadrian. The failure of this effort was another great disappointment for the Jewish community of the Land of Israel. Soon after, Hadrian founded a city of his own in Jerusalem called Aelia Capitolina, where he erected a temple to Zeus. It is also possible that circumcision was prohibited by Hadrian even before the Bar Kokhba Revolt, although some see the outlawing of circumcision as a measure enacted after the uprising had begun, much like the persecutions of Antiochus IV. It was in this context, as well as on the basis of the strong messianic yearnings we have observed already, that some elements in the Jewish population of the Land of Israel began preparing for revolt in the 120's.

Yet this revolt did not begin until it had found its leader. From the letters and documents found in the Judean desert we know the real name of the leader to have been Simeon bar Kosiba. The sobriquet Bar Kokhba, "Son of a Star," was given to him in reference to Num. 24:17 ("A star shall go forth from Jacob"), taken to refer to the messiah. Among the tannaim there was difference of opinion, some supporting his rebellion, others not. Those who supported him saw him as a messianic figure. Because of the messianic overtones of the revolt, Christians were unable to join in the uprising despite their dissatisfaction with Roman rule.

The war began as a guerilla struggle against Rome in 132 C.E. Within a short time it spread throughout the country, and the rebels took Jerusalem which was not

heavily fortified by the Romans. It is possible that sacrifices were reinstituted and that work was begun on rebuilding the sanctuary. From the coins Bar Kokhba struck we know of his high priest, Eleazar, who must have taken the lead in efforts to reestablish sacrificial worship. Here we see a reflection of the ancient concept of two messiahs, a lay and a priestly figure, prominent both in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and in certain Qumran scrolls.

We know from the documents that the country was organized into administrative districts, that taxes were collected, and that governmental operations were carried out by Bar Kokhba's supporters. Bar Kokhba observed Jewish law, and it may be stated that the documents confirm the close relationship between this "messiah" and early rabbinic Judaism. Parenthetically, the texts also show that Mishnaic Hebrew was very much a living language at this time, and that, along with Aramaic and Greek, it served a large segment the population.

Little is known of the actual course of the revolt and of Rome's successful attempt to regain control. Hadrian sent one of his finest generals, and he succeeded in turning the tide only by a series of sieges and by starving out the rebels in their strongholds and places of refuge. Jerusalem was retaken and future Jewish settlement there was prohibited by Hadrian. The last fortress to fall was Betar, not far to the southwest of Jerusalem, which was captured by the Romans during the summer of 135 C.E. By the end of the war many Jews had been massacred, the Land had been devastated again, and distinguished Rabbis had been martyred. Once again a Jewish attempt to defeat the Romans and to bring the messianic era had failed.

As if history really repeated itself, recovery and the reinstitution of Jewish self-government ensued once again. With the accession of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161 C.E.), virtually all Hadrian's decrees were reversed. The patriarchate and the high court were reconstituted at Usha, in the Galilee. Indeed, the two revolts contributed greatly to encouraging the Jewish population of the Land of Israel to move from Judea to the north, settling primarily in the Galilee. Under Rabban Simeon (II) ben Gamaliel (II, first half of the second century C.E.) and later under Rabbi Judah the Prince (latter half of the second and beginning of the third century C.E.), the editor of the Mishnah, the patriarchate and the other institutions of the Jewish community reached their height. Taxes poured into the patriarchal coffers even from the Diaspora, where the emissaries of the rabbis of the Land of Israel attempted to foster the spread of rabbinic Judaism. With the exception of two restrictions, the ban on proselytism and the ban on Jews living in Jerusalem, Jewish life in this period were virtually unfettered. The latter restriction seems to have been often compromised. Under the Severan dynasty (193-225 C.E.), Jewish fortunes again improved with the granting of a variety of legal privileges culminating in full citizenship for Jews in the Roman Empire. The enjoyment of these privileges and the peace which Jewry enjoyed in the Roman Empire were interrupted only by the invasions of the barbarians and the instability and economic decline they caused throughout the Empire, and by the Parthian incursions against Roman positions.

16. Under Byzantine Christianity

Henceforth, until the Arab conquest of the Near East (634 C.E.), the centers of Jewish creativity were limited to those of rabbinic tradition, the Land of Israel, now called Palestine by the Romans, and Babylonia. After the suppression of the Bar Kokhba

revolt against Rome in 132-135 C.E., the recovery of the Jewish community of the Land of Israel had been quick. Institutions of self rule, the patriarchate and the Sanhedrin, as well as local courts and other officials, had soon been reorganized with the toleration and eventually the support of the Romans. Indeed, the period from the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt to the end of the patriarchate of Rabbi Judah the Prince, ca. 220 C.E., was one of prosperity, peace, and development in the sphere of rabbinic intellectual endeavor. It had culminated in the redaction of the Mishnah, the earliest rabbinic law compilation, completed shortly before the death of Rabbi Judah the Prince. With this achievement the tannaitic (early rabbinic) era came to a close, as the amoraim, "interpreters," (the later Talmudic rabbis) struggled to interpret, expound, and even modify this document in the ensuing three centuries in the Land of Israel and Babylonia.

The history of the Jews in the Land of Israel in the amoraic period, then, began on a good note, as the golden age of Judah the Prince and his friendship with the Roman termed in rabbinic literature "Antoninus" (either Marcus Aurelius or some local official) carried over into the days of Judah's immediate successors. The renewed prosperity which the Jews of the Land of Israel for the most part enjoyed resulted also from the continuation of the administrative status of the Land of Israel within the Roman administrative system which had been instituted after the Great Revolt of 66-73 C.E. At that time, Judea had been detached from Syria and had become an official province. After the Bar Kokhba War, the Land of Israel continued to be ruled by Romans of high rank who were better able to understand the Jews and the unique problems involved in the governance of the Land of Israel. Judaism and its practices again became legal in the Roman Empire, and from 212 C.E. Jews were considered full citizens of the Empire. The

patriarchate and the Sanhedrin were officially recognized. Evidence points to Jewish control of the municipalities in the Galilee which were primarily Jewish. Jews still had to pay a special capitation tax to the Empire, were forbidden officially from entering Jerusalem, and were enjoined from circumcision of gentiles, i.e. from converting others to the Jewish faith. With this legislative basis, a modus vivendi between the once rebellious Jews and the implacable Roman Empire had finally been achieved. Jewish agriculture and a limited spectrum of industry and commerce flourished.

In the second half of the third century, in response to deepening economic crisis in the Roman Empire, inflation, devaluation of currency (especially between 230 and 260 C.E.), and increased taxation plagued the Land of Israel. Many farmers moved into the cities. With time, deep class divisions again appeared among the Jewish people, a development which resulted in widespread disaffection with the patriarchate and its leaders. The patriarchs increasingly allied themselves with the rich while the rabbinic sages were allied more and more with the poorer classes.

Judah the Prince was succeeded by Gamaliel II (died ca. 230). He in turn was succeeded by Judah Nesiah (the Prince) II who died ca. 270. From 260-273 C.E. the Land of Israel was under the rule of the Roman clients of Tadmor (Palmyra, an oasis in central Syria), and this change was seen by the Jews at first as a hopeful sign, yet it quickly turned out to be meaningless. The Land of Israel and its Jews could not escape the general decline of the Roman Empire which had set in. While the Christianization of the Empire would give it a new lease on life, this new force would soon present new and even greater challenges to the Jews of the Land of Israel and of the rest of the Empire.

Gamaliel IV served as patriarch from ca. 270 until his death ca. 290. Judah III succeeded him and died in 320. The patriarch Hillel II reigned from 320-365. Up to his time, the Jewish calendar had been based on the actual observation of the phases of the moon. He is said to have released the mathematical rules for the calculation of the Jewish calendar due to his fear that because of the deterioration of the Palestinian Jewish community it could no longer coordinate the calendar for world Jewry. In 324 C.E. Constantine took control of the entire Roman Empire. Now for the first time, in both the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, the Jews faced a Christian emperor. All the progress in legal status which the Jews had experienced in the third century soon evaporated.

Jews found themselves ruled by those who believed they had supplanted the old Israel, and who blamed the Jews for deicide. Further, the Roman Empire now considered the Land of Israel as holy. Soon the Jews of the Land of Israel, already a minority in their own land, faced the process of its Christianization. But during the reign of Constantine this process was only beginning, and its full ramifications were yet to be clear.

By 350 C.E. his son, Constantine II, managed to assert control of the entirety of his father's realm, with the help (from 351) of Gallus, who administered the East. It was in this period that anti-Jewish legislation was first enacted. Jews were to be isolated from Christians, and penalties for converting gentiles were strengthened. For the first time, the results of the Church councils of Elvira (306) and Laodice (431) became the law of the land. Jews were to be maintained in a low position in keeping with their having rejected the messiahship of Jesus. Their lowly position, according to Christian teaching, was to bear witness to their replacement as the people of God by the Christian Church.

In the third and fourth centuries, Palestinian Jews now found themselves intermittently persecuted in their own land. As Christian intellectual life flourished in the Holy Land, Jews were increasingly compelled to enter into disputations and arguments with Christians. At the same time, life became harder and harder as the oppressive anti-Semitic measures combined with excessive taxation. It was not long before these pressures led some Jews, as had happened twice before, to rebel against their Roman overlords.

From 350-351 C.E. the Romans faced a variety of rebellions in the West, as well as continued pressure from Shapur II, the Sassanian king, who ruled Babylonia and Persia. In 351 many Jews flocked to an open revolt against Gallus, the vice-emperor who ruled the East under his uncle, the emperor Constantius II (337-61 C.E.). These Jews, like their brethren in the earlier revolts, must have been in contact with the Jews of Babylonia whose political and financial help they expected and perhaps expected help from Shapur II as well. Although the revolt spread through the main cities of the Galilee, and, as excavations now show, into the large Jewish population of the Golan Heights as well, many rabbinic leaders and certain of the upper classes do not seem to have participated. The Romans quickly put the revolt down, destroying many villages along the way. Surprisingly, the Romans did not exact vengeance on the population or carry out deportations as they had after the previous revolts. Now there was a military government under the general Ursicinus who ruled the Land of Israel for some ten years. In 354 Gallus he was executed. Perhaps the lenient treatment of the Jews after their revolt resulted from an imperial decision that they had been mistreated and that their uprising was not so difficult to understand. After the dust settled, the local Jewish

authorities soon made peace with the new Roman administration and succeeded in reestablishing themselves. At the same time, the economic decline of the Jewish population and the shift from rural to urban character was further accelerated by the abortive rebellion.

Between 355 and 360 C.E. Julian (Gallus's brother), known as the Apostate, gradually asserted power over the Empire, succeeding in 361 at taking total control. Unlike his Christian predecessors, he wanted to reverse the Christianization of the Empire. He encouraged the rebuilding of pagan Temples and the revival of Hellenistic culture and religion. Accordingly, he sought as allies all the non-Christian elements of the Empire. In addition, he also sought to attack the Persians and saw the Jews as necessary allies in this plan. Jews throughout the Empire benefited from his proclamation of religious freedom as the anti-Semitic measures of his predecessors were thereby rescinded. He even corresponded with the patriarch, Hillel II.

Most notable was Julian's intention, announced in 362 C.E., to restore Jerusalem to the Jews and to rebuild the Jewish Temple and reinstitute its sacrificial worship. This plan was intended to strengthen his ties with the Jews and to disprove the Christian claims that the Jews were living testimony to the folly of rejecting Jesus. Although this project must have excited many Jews both in the Land of Israel and outside, the patriarchal house was hesitant, mindful of the dangers inherent in Julian's proposal. After all, Christians still remained very powerful in the Empire.

In 363 C.E. Julian campaigned against the Persians, and work was already proceeding on the Temple. Materials were being gathered, and the area was being prepared for building. Then a sudden fire swept through the building injuring workmen,

and the project was stopped. The Christians took this as a sign of divine intervention, although many historians have suspected Christians of actually setting the fire. In any case, the patriarchate was proven correct when in 363 Julian was killed on the eastern front and replaced by a Christian emperor. Although the anti-Semitic restrictions were now once again in force, and would remain so throughout our period, the greater tragedy of large-scale persecution that might have befallen the Jews of the Land of Israel at this time was averted by the cautious approach of its leaders.

Although for a time it appeared that the Jews might benefit from the internal struggles in the Christian Church and Roman Empire, it soon became clear that they would again be crushed from all sides. In 363-4 C.E. the Jews in the Land of Israel fell victim to Christian attacks designed to eliminate Jewish settlement from the south of the country. Indeed, although these attacks soon abated, the growth of Christianity in the Land of Israel left the Jews under constant anti-Semitic pressure. In 365, with the death of Hillel II, Gamaliel V became patriarch, serving until 385. Theodotius I (reigned from 379 C.E.) and his successors were fervent Christians who intensified anti-Jewish legislation as the government fell more and more under the influence of the Church. By this time Judah IV was patriarch, serving from 385-400. He was succeeded by Gamaliel VI who served until the abolition of the patriarchate in 425. The separation of the eastern empire from the western in 395 C.E. hastened the process of Christianization since the Byzantine church speedily secured the increased support of the eastern empire. All the while the Jews and the Hellenistic pagans were in the same boat. By the fifth century, Hellenistic paganism had virtually disappeared, leaving the Jews the sole target of the Byzantine Christian Empire.

A series of anti-Semitic laws were promulgated in 383, 392 and 404 C.E. prohibiting Jews from converting gentiles and from holding public office. In 415 a law required Jews and Christians to use only the imperial courts for cases between them. Synagogues were destroyed with clerical encouragement, and laws were passed forbidding the construction of new synagogues or the repair of old ones. The process of the Christianization of the Land of Israel was manifest in the building of churches and monasteries, the presence of large numbers of monks, and the coming of many Christian pilgrims. It was in the fifth century that Christians first became the majority of the population of the Land of Israel.

It was not long before the general decline in the status of the Jews in the third and fourth centuries C.E. caught up with the patriarchate as well. Between 399 and 404, because of internal dissension between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire, the patriarchate was forbidden to collect money in the Western Empire. Yet this new rule was only a minor setback. In 415 the patriarch Gamaliel VI was accused of building synagogues, circumcising Christian slaves, and rendering judgment in cases between Christians. These were violations of the anti-Semitic measures enacted earlier, yet, no doubt, the patriarch claimed that they were ancestral rights granted in the Roman Empire and still legally valid. Nonetheless, the Emperor deprived the patriarch of his title of honorary praetor which had been traditionally associated with his office since Roman times. He ordered that Jews free Christian slaves and that the synagogues which had been built be demolished. This set off a process which led by 425 C.E. (or perhaps 429) to the elimination of the institution of the patriarchate completely. With the death of the

patriarch Gamaliel VI, the Empire did not confirm a new patriarch. Jewish self-government in the Land of Israel had finally come to its official end.

451-527 C.E. saw the Christians engaged in internal struggles over religious matters and their political repercussions (or vice versa, political struggles expressed through religious conflicts). Consequently, during this period, the Jews in the Land of Israel suffered much less interference in their affairs. The economy improved, and many of synagogues with beautiful mosaics were built in the Galilee in this period. Many synagogues and houses of study were constructed in the Golan as well. The laws against the building of synagogues and serving of Jews in public office were largely ignored. Jews even returned to Jerusalem. They constituted some ten percent of the population of the Land of Israel. New institutions revolving around the rabbinic academies replaced the defunct patriarchate.

With the accession of Justinian in 527 C.E., things took a turn for the worse for the Jews. Under the influence of the Church, Judaism was again persecuted. Laws were passed denying Judaism official sanction; Jews were forbidden to hold office, including local councils in predominantly Jewish areas; Jews were forbidden to hold Christian slaves; Jews were not accepted as witnesses against Christians, and various other prescriptions were enacted. These regulations were the result of the Christian doctrine according to which the Jews should be kept in a lowly position as witnesses to the truth of Christianity. Under Justinian, persecution of Jews was now legal. Indeed, this may have led Jews to join in the Samaritan revolt of 529 C.E. From the sixth and early seventh centuries we begin to hear in the Diaspora and even in Jerusalem of Jews being

forcibly converted to Christianity at the threat of death. In its anti-Semitism, the Byzantine Empire foreshadowed medieval Christian anti-Semitism.

It is not difficult to see why the Jews hoped for deliverance at the hands of the Persians or why they joined in the Persian campaign for the Land of Israel in 601-614 C.E. Yet the Jews were quickly disappointed when, after permitting the Jews to rule Jerusalem for a short time, the conquerors turned against them and allowed them to be slaughtered at the hands of the Christians. Finally, the Byzantine Empire, in campaigns between 622 and 629 C.E. retook the Land of Israel from the Persians. This time, the Byzantine Christians slaughtered Jews throughout the Land of Israel in revenge for their having sided with the Persians. When the Arabs conquered the Land of Israel in 638 C.E., they found only a small Jewish community and massacred many Jews in rural areas especially. So it would remain until the expulsion from Spain in 1492 which would set off the increase in the Jewish population of the Land of Israel culminating in the rise of the independent Jewish State of Israel in modern times.

17. By the Rivers of Babylon

When the Achaemenid Persians under Cyrus the Great completed their conquest of Mesopotamia in 539 B.C.E. (Assyria had fallen already in 612, and Babylon fell in 538) and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, only a small percentage took advantage of the invitation, thus allowing the Babylonian Jewish community to continue its growth. In 331 B.C.E. Babylonia was conquered by Alexander the Great at whose death in 323 it passed to the Seleucids. Jews were granted a renewal of the privileges and freedoms proclaimed by Cyrus and even served in the Seleucid armies. Yet Jews must have been affected by the policy of Hellenization pursued by the Seleucids in an effort to

strengthen their hold on the land. Jews were certainly affected financially by the shift of the commercial center from the city of Babylon to the newly founded Seleucia on the Tigris River. Their fortunes must have declined further during the Maccabean uprising of 168-4 B.C.E. and the ensuing period of tensions during which Hasmonean rule was being established.

From 171 B.C.E., the Parthians, an Iranian people, under the Arsacid dynasty, began to pressure the Seleucids in Mesopotamia, establishing their rule under Mithradates II by 120 B.C.E. The Jews were treated well under the Parthians, who also maintained good relations with the Hasmoneans. The Parthians attempted to assert control over the Land of Israel by putting in place Antigonus, the Hasmonean, in 40-39 B.C.E., but Herod soon regained control.

During the Great Revolt of 66-73 C.E. and the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-5 C.E., some Jews in Babylonia gave financial support to the revolts and a few even fought the Romans. When Trajan invaded the Parthian Empire in 114-117 C.E., the Jews joined in the resistance against him at the very same time that their brethren in the Greco-Roman dispersion were engaged in the Diaspora Revolt.

Pre-70 C.E. Pharisaism had little impact, if any, in Babylonia, and only two Pharisaic sages are known to have lived there, at Nisibis and Nehardea. Only after the Bar Kokhba Revolt did some Pharisaic, rabbinic sages flee to Babylonia and establish centers which trained Babylonian rabbis. Some mechanism for centralized rule over Babylonian Jewry had certainly come into being by the mid-second century C.E., yet the title *Resh Galuta* (exilarch) appears first only for Huna I (170-210 C.E.). In Parthian times, the sons of the exilarchs were sent to study in the Land of Israel. At

the same time, the exilarchs sought to staff their courts with scholars trained in the Land of Israel who would not be dependent on local Jewish noblemen for their power.

The Arsacid dynasty of the Parthians fell in 226 C.E. to the Sassanians. This dynasty sought to rule more directly, through an extensive bureaucracy, and, originating as a priestly family, was extremely dedicated to the propagation of the cult of Ohrmazd, Anahita and other divinities. Their governmental policies were intended to advance the Mazdian religion, a form of Zoroastrianism. Thus the rule of Ardashir (224-41 C.E.) was a difficult period for all other religious groups, including the Jews. The status of Jewish self-government was compromised and had to be clarified. There are also some reports of anti-Semitic decrees. All this changed with the ascent of Shapur I in 242 C.E.

He wanted to bring unity to the Empire by granting tolerance and freedom to all religious groups. He sought to pacify his own citizens in order to strengthen his empire for war in the west. In any case, he was hailed enthusiastically by the Jewish community of Babylonia.

In 262-3 C.E. the Palmyran king invaded Babylonia, destroying some Jewish settlements, but Shapur I quickly restored order. It is probable that during his reign, arrangements regarding the institutions of the exilarchate and Jewish self-government were renegotiated and that a *modus vivendi* between Jewish needs and the administrative system of the Sassanian Empire was reached.

A series of short-term monarchs ruled from 272-92 C.E. This was a period of religious persecution for all non-Mazdeans. Yet Jews appear to have been treated better than Manichaeans and Christians. These persecutions came to an end under the rule of Narseh (293-301 C.E.). Some minor persecutions may have taken place early in the reign

of Shapur II (309-79 C.E.) while he was still a child. Thereafter we hear of no such disturbances for the remainder of his reign. Yet this was a period in which Christians were persecuted. When Julian the Apostate invaded Babylonia in 363, a number of Jewish communities were attacked by his armies. Some Jews who supported Julian's call to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem were massacred by the Persians.

Little is heard of the reigns of Yezdegerd I (397-417) and Bahram V (420-38). Yezdegerd II (438-57) renewed the persecution of the Jews. He was followed by his son Firuz (459-86) who further intensified the persecutions. In his reign Jews are reported to have been massacred and their children given to Mazdeans. The exilarch Huna Mari was killed by the king. From 468-474 synagogues were destroyed, and Torah study was prohibited. Jews were again persecuted in the reign of Kovad I (488-531 C.E.) because he adopted the doctrines of Mazdak (founder of the Zoroastrian offshoot Mazdakism, end of the fifth century) regarding community of property and women which, of course, were rejected by the Jews.

In 520 the exilarch Mar Zutra II was killed after defending his community for seven years at Mahoza. Much less is known of the period leading up to the Arab conquest. Jews fared well under Chosroes (531-78) but were persecuted again under Hormizd IV (579-80). Calm again prevailed under Chosroes Parwez (590-628). When the Arabs conquered Mesopotamia in 634 C.E. they were well received by the Jews and a completely new chapter in Jewish history was opened.