

# The World of the Early Church

## Introduction

### The Cultural Context.

- Why begin a study of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth with a brief overview of Hellenistic and Jewish history and culture? That's a good question, for which there are two good reasons.
- First, we cannot learn history in isolation.
  - All of history is interconnected, and all of history has a wider context.
  - In the case of Jesus, the cultural context in which he lived directly affected his teachings and his approach to ministry.
    - **Justo Gonzalez:** "Christianity was not born in a vacuum – it arose in the midst of a world in which it took its form, and apart from which it is impossible to understand it." [*A History of Christian Thought*, p. 59.]
    - **Ernest Loosley:** "The literature [of the early Church] arose out of [a particular] situation. As the church developed, men wrote to speak to [specific] needs.... Neither the gospels nor the epistles can be really understood apart from the actual circumstances of the church's development. Simply to sit in one's study and compare and analyze and dissect the documents is a very [inadequate] method of understanding the New Testament... The church, and its literature, are the product of a great surging spiritual movement. It must be understood in relation to that movement." [*When the Church Was Young*, p. 32]
- Second, we cannot fully understand the life and ministry of Jesus without a broader understanding of the social, economic, and political milieu of his time
  - Like all successful religious leaders, Jesus adapted his message and ministry so as to make it relevant to the people of his time.
  - British novelist **L. P. Hartley:** "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there."
    - To truly understand the past, we must attempt to immerse ourselves in the mindset of the past.
    - In other words: We must try to transcend **presentism** – interpreting the past according to our present-day sensibilities.
  - The dominant culture in which Jesus lived and ministered – and in which Christianity was born and spread – was **Greco/Roman (Hellenistic)** culture.
    - Hellenistic culture was a fusion of Greek culture (religion, philosophy, education, science, arts, etc.) and Roman imperial government.
    - It also included a mix of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Persian influences.
    - **[NOTE: In addition, Jesus also lived and ministered specifically within the context of Jewish culture]**
  - In fact, unless we're familiar with the cultural context in which Jesus lived and worked, we miss much of the rich allusions and nuances of his ministry
  - A corollary to this principle: When we study a segment of history outside its wider context, we risk getting a skewed view of it.
    - This is why a comprehensive and systematic study of history is so advantageous: it helps us connect the dots in our knowledge by

building a network of links and cause-and-effect relationships that both broaden and deepen our understanding.

- History is exceedingly complex, which is one reason why it's so fascinating.

# Part I

## Jewish History and Culture

### “By the Rivers of Babylon...”

- After the Assyrian conquest of Israel, Judah retained its independence as a vassal state of Assyria and Babylonia.
- Finally, Judah’s luck ran out when Babylonian armies under **Nebuchadnezzar** invaded the country and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC
- About 15,000 Jews (about 10% of population) were forced to relocate in Babylon.
  - According to **Jeremiah**, about 4,600 Jews were deported to Babylon in 3 waves:
    - (1) In 597 BC: 3,023 were deported, including **King Jehoiachin**
    - (2) In 586 BC (following the destruction of Jerusalem): another 832 people; and
    - (3) In 582 BC: 745 more people. [Ref. Jeremiah 52:28-30. These figures might include only adult men.]
  - However: In **II Kings**, the number of deportees is considerably higher:
    - In 597 BC, some 10,000 Jews were deported under Jehoiachin (including 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 artisans and craftsmen). [Ref. II Kings 24:14, 16]
    - **[NOTE: The account in II Chronicles mentions only one deportation, at the time of the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC, and doesn’t include the number of exiles. (Ref. II Chron. 36:20-21).]**
- Unlike the Assyrians, who scattered their captives among the local population, the Babylonians placed the Jews in settlements of their own.
  - Undoubtedly, this was a major factor in the Jews preserving their ethnic and national identity along with their traditional religious beliefs.
- The status of the exiles:
  - Apparently, the Jews were not treated as slaves or prisoners, but neither were they free.
  - Most of them might have been settled on royal estates where they worked as land- tenants.
    - Their status might have been somewhat similar to medieval serfs
  - Some sources indicate that they could build their own houses, engage in their chosen occupations, and maintain some semblance of community life.
- A century-and-a-half earlier, the Assyrians had settled thousands of Israelite exiles in Mesopotamia and Media – some of whom might have retained their traditional culture and devotion to YHWH. [Ref. II. Kings 15:29; 16:6; I Chron. 5:26.]
  - **James D. Purvis:** “The preaching of Ezekiel shows that not all of these [Israelite] communities had been assimilated by pagan cultures; much of this biblical book is concerned with the reunification of the Judahite and Israelite branches of the nation after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.” [Hershel Shanks, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. Revised and Expanded (Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 204.]
- Although the Jews were not overtly oppressed, this was a period of intense sorrow and homesickness.
  - *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs;*

*Our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
 They said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"  
 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign  
 land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget  
 its skill.  
 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,  
 If I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. – Psalm 137*

## A Crisis of Faith

- The destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity must have precipitated a crisis of faith
  - Many Judahites had rested in the belief that God had established the Davidic dynasty to reign forever
  - Just as God had frustrated Sennacherib during the siege of Samaria, many believed that Nebuchadnezzar would never conquer the holy city of Jerusalem
  - **John Bright:** "With [the fall of Judah], the very status of Israel's God was thrown into question...."Wholesale loss of faith threatened. This was aggravated as Jews, torn from their homeland, came into firsthand contact... with the great centers of world culture. Jerusalem, which in their parochial minds was the very center of Yahweh's universe, must have seemed by comparison poor and backward indeed. With evidences of undreamed of wealth and power around them, with the magnificent temples of pagan gods on every hand, it must have occurred to many of them to wonder whether Yahweh, patron God of a petty state which he seemed powerless to protect, was really the supreme and only God after all." [A History of Israel, p. 348]
- In fact, prophets such as **Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, and Isaiah** had already provided an apologetic for Judah's downfall.
  - According to them, the Babylonian Captivity was divine punishment for the nation's sins:
    - (1) Idolatry;
    - (2) Sexual sins; and
    - (3) Social injustice – allowing the rich and powerful to exploit the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants.
  - Judah had broken its covenant with YHWH, and God would use the pagan Babylonians – just as he had the Assyrians – to chastise his people and turn their hearts back to him.
  - The Jews must learn from their past failures and present sufferings, and repent. [NOTE: The prophetic interpretation stood in stark contrast to the conventional wisdom of the day – i.e., that the Babylonian god Marduk was stronger than the Hebrew's god, YHWH.]
  - Therefore, the exile was a just punishment and a purge, preparing the people for a new future.
- Early in the Captivity, a letter arrived from the prophet **Jeremiah**, who had remained behind in Jerusalem.
  - Along with rebuking the people for their sins, Jeremiah issued words of hope: "This is what the Lord says: 'When **seventy years** are completed fore Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord,'and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations

and places where I have banished you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'" – Jeremiah 29:10-14.

### Three Significant Developments.

- Babylonian Captivity resulted in 3 significant developments in the history of the Jews:
  - **The Torah, along with other holy scriptures, were systematically collected, edited, and preserved;**
    - According to Jewish tradition, **Jehozadak**, the chief priest, was primarily responsible for this effort, but we know nothing as to exactly how this was done.
  - **Deprived of a Temple, the exiled Jewish community kept their religion and traditions alive by assembling regularly for prayer, scripture reading, and public worship.**
    - Although we know nothing specific about this, the Jews could not have maintained their religious identity without some form of public worship.
    - This might have been the origin of the **synagogue**, organized under the leadership of “elders” – older men who were the acknowledged leaders among the Jews.
    - **[NOTE: Some scholars date the origins of the synagogue to the post-Exile era. We know that synagogues existed in Egypt in the latter part of the 3rd century BC.]**
  - **Never again would the Jews abandon YHWH** to worship foreign gods.
    - In the crucible of captivity and cut off from their homeland, the Jews preserved not only their unique religion but their very identity.
    - **John Bright:** “When one considers the magnitude of the calamity that overtook her, one marvels that [the Jews] were not sucked down into the vortex of history along with the other little nations of western Asia, to lose forever their identity as a people.” [*A History of Israel*, p. 347]

### Repatriation and Resettlement in Israel

#### Cyrus the Great (r. 539-29 BC).

- In 539 BC, an alliance of Medes and Persians under Cyrus the Great invaded Babylonia.
- In short order, they sacked Babylon and overthrew the Babylonian Empire.
- In keeping with his reputation, Cyrus did not slaughter the Babylonians or destroy their city.
- In 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to their homeland.
- How long did the Babylonian Exile last?
  - **Jeremiah** had prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years. [Ref. Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10).
  - **II Chronicles 36:21** declares that the exile was 70 years – symbolic of a tenfold sabbath rest (seven years times ten).
  - Likewise, the prophet **Zechariah** proclaimed that God’s righteous anger lasted 70 years. [Ref. Zech. 1:12; 7:3,5]
  - In fact, the exile seems to have lasted closer to 50 years – so the 70 year figure might simply be symbolic.

### Phase I: The Early Struggles

#### The First Immigrants.

- The Jews who returned to Judea considered themselves the purified remnant of Israel, whom YHWH had delivered from bondage.

- According to the biblical sources, there were several waves of Jewish repatriation.
- The first wave of immigrants was led by **Sheshbazzar**, “a prince of Judah” – i.e., a member of the royal family. (This is probably the Shenazzar mentioned in I Chron. 3:18 who was a son of the former king, Jehoiachin.)
  - Cyrus allowed him to return with the gold and silver treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had captured from Solomon’s Temple, and he laid the foundation for the rebuilt Temple. [Ezra 1:7-8; 5:14-16]
- Later, a large contingent of several thousand emigrants returned with **Zerubbabel** and **Joshua**.
  - Zerubbabel was a grandson of Jehoiachin, and Joshua was a son of the former high priest Jehozadak.
    - In Zechariah 4:14, they are called “the two anointed who stand by the Lord.”
  - Returning to Jerusalem, they established an altar on the Temple Mount and began to construct a new Temple.
  - Construction of the Temple began in the second year of the reign of King Darius (520 BC) and was completed 4 years later (516 BC).
- How many Jews returned to their homeland?
  - According to the censuses in the books of **Ezra and Nehemiah**, about **50,000** Jews returned to their homeland (including 7,337 servants and 200 singers). [Ref. Ezra 2:1-67; Neh. 7:6-73]

## **Adversity.**

- Despite the initial outburst of enthusiasm, the early years of the resettlement were disappointing.
- Canaan was a long, dangerous, 4-month journey from Mesopotamia, and many Jews had become well established and comfortable in Babylon.
- Many Jews were willing to help finance the repatriation, but with nothing left in Israel to return to, most preferred to stay behind; never again would the majority of Jews live in their homeland
- Those who returned faced many years of hardship, privation, and insecurity.
- Among the returnees, internecine conflict was present from the beginning, probably exacerbated by competing land claims.
- Furthermore: Once Cyrus issued the decree, he apparently failed to follow up with additional aid and support.
  - The returning Jews were left totally on their own, with few resources.

## **The Samaritans.**

- Also, the restoration effort met resistance from the **Samaritans** in the area.
- During the 50 years of exile, officials in Samaria had assumed control over Judah and considered it part of their territory.
- Samaritans were the descendants of Israelites remaining in the northern kingdom after the Assyrian conquest who had intermarried with Gentiles who had been brought in by the Assyrians to hold the land
- Initially, the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Temple, but Zerubbabel rebuffed their overtures.
- Later, under **Ezra**, Jews were strictly prohibited from marrying Samaritans, who were considered Gentiles (Ref. Neh. 13:23-27).

- Samaritans were half-breeds – not pure Jews – and they didn’t practice traditional Judaism.
  - Although they worshiped YHWH, the Samaritan scriptures included only the Pentateuch.
  - In the **Samaritan Pentateuch** (or SP), when the Israelites entered the Promised Land they were commanded to build an altar on **Mt. Gerizim** – not on **Mt. Ebal**, opposite Mt. Gerizim (Deut. 27:4).
  - In the SP, the Israelites’ Tabernacle was set up on Mt. Gerizim, not in **Shiloh** (Josh. 18:1).
  - Most importantly: In the SP, the Israelites are commanded to worship God on Mt. Gerizim – not in “the place YHWH will choose” (envisioning Jerusalem).
  - Later Jews contended that **Mt. Moriah** in Jerusalem was the site where Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac (II Chron. 3:1), while Samaritans argued that this happened on Mt. Gerizim. [Ref. Yitzhak Magen, “Bells, Pendants, Snakes and Stones: A Samaritan Temple to the Lord on Mt. Gerizim.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Nov/Dec, 2010), pp. 28, 35.]
- Thereafter, the Samaritans, under their governor (or **Sanballat**), did everything possible to obstruct the rebuilding of the Temple. (“Sanballat” was a generic name for any Samaritan governor.)
- For the rest of history there was tension and conflict between the Jews and Samaritans.
  - **[NOTE: According to Josephus, Sanballat vowed to build a temple on Mt. Gerizim, the Samaritan’s holy mountain, in imitation of the Jerusalem temple. (Mt. Gerizim rises more than 2900 feet above sea level, just south of the ancient city of Shechem – today Nablus.) According to archaeological evidence, the temple was built in the mid-5th century – around the time of Nehemiah. [Ibid., p. 30.] The Samaritan temple stood for more than 300 years before it was destroyed circa 110 BC by John Hyrcanus, the hyper-nationalistic Jewish Hasmonean monarch and successor to Simon Maccabeus. The temple was never rebuilt, and Hyrcanus’s heavy-handed imperialism poisoned relations between Samaritans and Jews for the rest of history. (Today there are about 700 self-identified Samaritans who live in Israel in two communities – around Mt. Gerizim and in Holon, a suburb southeast of Tel Aviv.)]**

## The Second Temple.

- Despite all the indifference and opposition, and after repeated exhortations by the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah**, construction of the Temple began in the second year of the reign of King Darius (520 BC) and was completed 4 years later (516 BC).
- Temple sacrifices were reinstated, and there was great celebration.
- Nonetheless, those who were old enough to remember Solomon’s Temple wept when they saw this new, scaled-down shrine to Israel’s God.)

## Separation of Religion and State.

- Politically, some of the returning Jews favored the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, but Persian policy required dual leadership under a governor and a high priest.
- **[NOTE: Interestingly, Zerubbabel is the last-recorded claimant to the Davidic throne, but after the completion of the Temple, there is no further mention of him; perhaps the Persians removed him from power to prevent the Jews from trying to reinstate the Davidic monarchy.]**

## Phase II: The Reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.

### Ezra.

- After completion of the Temple in 515 BC, the resettlement and restoration effort stagnated.
- Beset by all kinds of economic, political, social, and religious problems, the Jews in Judah were preoccupied with mere survival.
- According to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews faced two serious problems:
  - A spiritual and moral malaise that threatened to unravel the restoration movement; and
  - A lack of national security, which threatened the resettlement effort.
    - Jerusalem's walls had never been rebuilt; hence, the city was vulnerable and Jewish civilization was precarious.
- The first issue was addressed when the scribe **Ezra** arrived in **458 BC** to provide some much-needed spiritual and moral leadership.
  - Ezra was commissioned by **Artaxerxes I** to appoint magistrates and judges and implement justice according to the law code of the Torah.
  - He had prepared well for his mission in life, having “devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.” [Ezra 7:10]
- Ezra is often depicted as a kind of “second Moses” and “the father of Judaism” – i.e., the father of Judaism as a religious system based on the Torah.
  - This probably gives him too much credit, although he was a gifted organizer and systematizer of the religion.
- At this point, there still remained the problem of Jewish national security.
  - Ninety years after Cyrus' repatriation edict, the city walls still had not been rebuilt.

### Nehemiah.

- In **445 BC**, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem as governor (or *satrap*) and immediately assessed the situation.
- Nehemiah encountered opposition from Samaritans and other hostile neighbors who tried to thwart his efforts, and from Jewish elements inside Jerusalem who resented his authority.
- Amazingly, he was able to rebuild the walls in a mere 52 days.
  - According to portions of the wall that have excavated, the wall was built very poorly – but at least it afforded protection.
- Having secured the city, Nehemiah conducted a census and organized a lottery whereby 10% of the Jewish families in the area were chosen to reside within the city.
  - **[NOTE: According to lists recorded in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, the total number of Jews living in Judah at the time – including returned exiles, their descendants, and those who never left – numbered about 50,000.]**
- Perhaps working in tandem with Ezra, Nehemiah implemented a series of political, fiscal, and religious reforms. [Neh. 8:1-9]
  - He appointed honest tax collectors and public administrators;
  - He assured that people paid their tithes to the Temple treasury;
  - He closed all business activities on the Sabbath;
  - He cracked down on interracial marriage and insisted that all children be taught to speak Hebrew.



- Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Torah was established as the basis for Israel's national law.
- Furthermore, the Levitical priesthood was restored and the office of high priest set aside for a member of the **Zadokite** line.
  - According to I Chron. 6:3-8 and 24:3, **Zadok** was a descendant of Aaron's son, Eleazar.

## The End of Bible History.

- With the work of Nehemiah and Ezra, Old Testament Bible history ends.
- For the next 100 years – until the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BC – we know virtually nothing about the Jews in Judah.

## Persian Rule (539-332 BC)

### A Vassal State.

- For over 400 years – from 586-142 BC – the Jews fell under the control of each succeeding major world empire.
  - First the **Babylonians**, then the **Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Syrians**.
- For 200 years (539-332 BC), Judea was a province (or *satrapy*) in the Persian Empire.
- Under **Cyrus the Great** (r. 559-529 BC), Persian rule was mild.
  - Cyrus and other early Persian emperors considered themselves leaders in human civilization, and adopted a benign “One World” policy.
  - They placed few demands on local peoples other than pay taxes and obey the laws.
  - Persian government allowed considerable local autonomy and interfered very little in customs, religion, or other matters.
  - Originally, there was no slavery in the Persian Empire.
- Eventually, however, Persian rule became more authoritarian and oppressive.
  - Following the reign of **Darius I** (r. 522-486 BC), the empire gradually stagnated.
  - **Xerxes I** (r. 486-465) attempted to conquer Greece, but the campaign ended in disaster.
  - Unable to conquer new lands, Persian rulers resorted to raising taxes and imposed stricter laws upon their subjects.
  - Provincial unrest increased, and later Persian emperors were generally corrupt tyrants.
- However, until the rise of a united Greece under **Alexander the Great** in the 330s BC, there was no unified military threat to Persian control of the Middle East.

## Some General Developments.

- In the century between Ezra and Nehemiah and Alexander's conquest of Palestine (circa 420s-332 BC), we know little about Jewish history.
- Apparently, the Jews lived in relative peace and security as a semi-autonomous nation.
- Like other ethnic and nationality groups in Persian-controlled western Asia, the Jews in Judea adopted **Aramaic** as their everyday language.
  - Hebrew was still spoken in the homes of devout Jews, and it also remained the language of religious discourse.
- This period also marked the final, irrevocable split between Jews and Samaritans.

- Samaritans developed a syncretistic religion that integrated the worship of YHWH with other gods.
- They accepted the Pentateuch but rejected most of the other “Holy Writ” of Israel.
- Excluded by the Jews from worshiping in Jerusalem, the Samaritans built their own temple on **Mount Gerizim** sometime in the mid-4th century.

## **Hellenistic Province (332 - 167 BC)**

### **Alexander’s “Liberation.”**

- In his war against the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great took Judea in 332 BC.
- According to Josephus, as Alexander’s army approached Jerusalem, the priests and people formed a procession to greet the Macedonians outside the city.
  - Alexander prostrated himself before the high priest, explaining to his aides, “When I was in Macedonia, considering how I could become master of Asia, I saw this very person in my sleep, dressed as he is now. He urged me not to delay, but to cross over confidently and take dominion over the Persians.”
- Alexander was escorted into the city, where he sacrificed in the Temple.
  - Reportedly, the priests showed him in **Daniel’s prophecy** where a Greek would conquer the Persian Empire.
  - Alexander was duly impressed – he was sure the prophecy referred to him.
- Alexander favored the Jews – he allowed them a measure of self-government under their own laws, and he exempted them from tribute every seventh year.

### **Ptolemaic Rule.**

- Following Alexander’s death in 323 BC, his generals fought for control of his empire.
- The four generals who survived these civil wars carved out kingdoms within the vast domain of Alexander’s empire.
- Control of Judea changed hands 5 times over the next 10 years until **Ptolemy**, the governor of Egypt, finally secured it.
  - Ptolemy entered Jerusalem on a Sabbath day under the guise of offering a sacrifice, then seized the city.
- To reduce opposition, Ptolemy deported many Jewish leaders back to Egypt.
  - **[NOTE: This was the second major scattering of Jews – or “Diaspora.” (The original scattering had resulted from the Babylonian conquest and captivity.) From this point on, there was a large Jewish community in Egypt.]**
- For the next century Judea was a vassal state under the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt.
- The Ptolemies were generally mild rulers.
- Under the Ptolemaic pharaohs, the Jews were governed by a succession of their own high priests, subject to approval by Egyptian officials.
- According to the sources, it was during the 3rd century BC that a priestly aristocracy evolved.

### **Hellenizing Influences.**

- For the most part during the Ptolemaic period, the Jews carried on their traditional religion and cultural practices without much interference.

- Nonetheless, Hellenistic influences began to affect Jewish life and culture, and would eventually become so pervasive that even the most devout of Jews would view the world in at least partly-Hellenistic terms
- In the past, Judea had remained on the fringes of world empires.
  - Its geographical location assured that it was insulated from a lot of outside cultural influences.
- But now, located between Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Syria, Judea was often a battleground for rival powers.
  - During the 3rd century BC, Egypt and Syria fought 5 major wars
  - Thousands of soldiers, government officials, merchants, and others foreigners came and went, exposing the Jews to the full range of Hellenistic influences.

## **Seleucid Tyranny (198-142 BC)**

### **New Overlords.**

- In 198 BC, King **Antiochus III** (the Great, r. 223-187 BC) of Syria drove the Egyptians out of western Asia and incorporated Judea into the Seleucid kingdom.
- The Jews supported Antiochus, he treated them benevolently.
  - He even exempted Jerusalem from taxation for 3 years to help the city economically.
- Nonetheless, under the Seleucids, the Jews felt increased pressure to “**hellenize**” and adopt Greek customs.
  - Since the time of Alexander, the Greek language and culture had permeated western Asia, and the Jews were not immune to these influences.
  - The Seleucids insisted that Jewish officials – religious and political – adopt the Greek language, and Jerusalem became a more cosmopolitan city.

## **Antiochus IV “Epiphanes” (r. 175-165 BC).**

- In 175 BC, Antiochus IV succeeded to the Seleucid throne, and relations between Damascus and the Jews quickly deteriorated.
- Desperate to solidify his power in the face of Roman expansion into Asia Minor, Antiochus insisted upon the total loyalty of his subjects and sought more sources of income to bolster his military forces.
- He drastically raised taxes on the Jews:
  - They were forced to pay taxes of 1/3 on grain harvests and 50% on fruits.
  - In addition, they were forced to pay a variety of crown and Temple taxes.
- In Jerusalem, a dispute broke out between two brothers for the high priesthood.
  - One of the claimants, **Jason**, offered Antiochus a generous bribe in return for the king’s recognition of him as the official high priest.
- Once in power, Jason initiated an ambitious program of Hellenization in Jerusalem.
  - He actively promoted Greek culture and dress.
  - He raised funds to build a Greek-style gymnasium with an adjoining race track.
- Many of the city’s prominent families, including many of the priests, supported the Hellenization program. They attended the races and other sporting events, which were dedicated to various Greek gods.
- Jewish traditionalists were outraged by these pagan influences.
- Three years after Jason had bought the high priesthood, Antiochus auctioned off the position to another apostate priest, **Menelaus**, who offered more money.

- When Menelaus realized he didn't have the funds to pay the king, he stole sacred vessels from the Temple and sold them. [2 Macc. 4:27-32]
- In 169 BC, following a victorious military strike against Egypt, Antiochus stopped off in Jerusalem and plundered the Temple to help pay for the campaign.
  - He confiscated the sacred furniture and vessels and even stripped the gold leaf from the Temple facade. [1 Macc. 1:17-24; 2 Macc. 5:15-21]
- The following year, Antiochus invaded Egypt again.
  - As his army advanced on Alexandria, the Roman senate issued a proclamation ordering him to return to Syria.
  - Afraid to defy the Romans, he abandoned the Egyptian campaign.
- At this point, according to Josephus, Antiochus turned on the Jews "in a spirit of wild vindictiveness."
  - Many Jews opposed his taxation and Hellenization policies, and Antiochus resolved to punish them.
- Antiochus dispatched one of his generals, **Apollonius**, to Jerusalem to carry out the policy.
  - Gaining entrance into the city under peaceful pretexts, Apollonius unleashed his troops on the unsuspecting populace.
  - Many residents were massacred, others were enslaved, and the city was looted and partially burned.
- At this point, Antiochus set out to exterminate Jewish religion.
  - He outlawed Sabbath observances.
  - He suspended the daily Temple sacrifices and cancelled the traditional feasts.
  - He prohibited the circumcision of children.
  - He ordered the Jews to eat ham and other forbidden (non-Kosher) foods (ref. seven brothers in 4 Macc.)
  - He ordered the destruction of all copies of the Jewish scriptures.
  - He ordered the erection of pagan altars in towns and cities throughout Judea.
- His greatest affront came in December, 167 BC when he erected an altar to Zeus in the Temple and sacrificed a pig on it – a horror to Jewish ritual purity.
  - Josephus: The Temple sanctuary was smeared with blood, and soldiers "committed the grossest indecencies" in the sacred Temple courts.
  - **[NOTE: Many Jewish scribes interpreted this act to be the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy concerning the "Abomination of Desolation."]**
  - **[NOTE: Antiochus called himself "Epiphanes" – "the Exalted one" – but many of his subjects, including most Jews, referred to him as "Epimanes" – "the Insane." In the book of Daniel, he is portrayed as an archetype of the anti-Christ.**

## **Maccabean Revolt (167-142 B.C.)**

### **Prelude.**

- Jewish traditionalists called the **Hasidim** (or **Hasideans** – the "pious") protested against Hellenistic culture and values, but they feared the wrath of Antiochus IV.
- Initially, many Hasidim suffered under Antiochus without retaliation.
  - On one occasion, a group of Hasidim even allowed themselves to be slaughtered by the Syrians rather than break the Sabbath by defending themselves.
- Soon, however, a more militant spirit arose.
  - In a town outside of Jerusalem, local Jews killed a Syrian official and some soldiers who were trying to force them to sacrifice to a pagan god.

## Phase I: Guerilla War.

- The insurrection began in the town of Modein in the Judean countryside.
  - When a Syrian officer arrived and tried to force local Jews to sacrifice to pagan gods, **Mattathias**, an old priest of the Hasmonean family, killed him.
- Mattathias took to the caves in the Judean wilderness along with his 5 sons – **Judas, Simon, Johanan, Eleazar, and Jonathan**.
- Eventually, they were joined by hundreds of militant Hasidim
- From their wilderness base, they carried on sporadic raids into the surrounding villages.
  - In the process, they destroyed pagan altars and punished apostate Jews.
  - At times, they forcibly circumcised children.
- For several months Mattathias endured the rigors of life as an outlaw on the run before he died.
- Upon the death of Mattathias, his son **Judas the Maccabean** (“the Hammerer”) intensified the struggle against foreign oppression.
- Shrewdly, Judas avoided pitched battles and harassed the Syrians with persistent guerilla warfare.
  - The insurgents conducted hit-and-run raids on villages, towns and cities throughout Judea.
  - To Jewish nationalists and traditionalists, they were patriots.
  - Less pious Jews regarded them as terrorists.
- Early in 165 a large military force under Lysias moved into Israel to quell the revolt.
  - The insurgents ambushed the Syrians on several occasions, scoring quick victories and seizing more weapons and provisions with each attack.
- Later that year, **Antiochus IV** died in a campaign against the Parthians.
- Lysias, eager to return to Syria, cut a deal with the Maccabeans.
  - The Jews could purify the Temple and practice their religion unimpeded.
- In December, 164 BC, the Maccabeans took control of the Temple area in Jerusalem.
  - The Temple was cleansed and rededicated.
  - **[NOTE: The feast of Hanukkah is celebrated by Jews to commemorate this event.]**

## Phase II: A War for Jewish Nationalism.

- Next, the Maccabeans set out to liberate their land from foreign control and gain national independence.
- In 160 BC Judas was killed in battle, and leadership fell to his younger brother, **Jonathan**.
  - Jonathan, who was also high priest, now commanded the Maccabean forces.
  - **[NOTE: It was Jonathan who tried to strengthen the position of the Jews by negotiating treaties with the Spartans and the Romans.]**
- The conflict see-sawed back and forth over the next 18 years, with neither side winning decisively.
- In 143 BC, Jonathan was assassinated by a Syrian general, and **Simon Maccabaeus** succeeded him.
  - Simon was the last remaining son of Mattathias.
- Simon continued the campaign against Syria, and the Jews finally achieved political independence later in 142 BC – 25 years after their insurrection began.

## **An Assessment.**

- How did the Jews win? Several factors were involved.
  - Certainly, the courage and leadership of the Jewish insurrectionists.
  - Also, Antiochus IV couldn't commit his full resources to suppressing the revolt.
    - Much of his military resources was deployed against the Parthians.

## **Hasmonean Dynasty (142 - 63 B.C.)**

### **National Unity.**

- As a great national hero, **Simon Maccabeus** (r. 142-134) proclaimed himself the political and religious leader of the nation.
  - Under Simon, the Jewish state expanded northwest toward Joppa, which became the primary seaport for the Hasmonean (Haz-mo-NEE-un) state.
- For the next 80 years, the descendants of Simon – the Hasmonean Dynasty – ruled over Israel.
- Normally, the same person ruled as king and high priest.
  - **[NOTE: This was contrary to Hebrew tradition, which mandated a separation of religion and government. Also, the Hasmoneans were not members of the Zadokite family, so Jewish traditionalists challenged their right to hold the high priesthood.]**

### **Hasmonean Expansion.**

- Simon Maccabeus and two of his sons were assassinated, after which authority passed on to his sole surviving son, **John Hyrcanus** (r. 134-104 BC).
- John enjoyed a long and prosperous reign, and expanded Jewish rule over a larger area.
- He subjugated **Ammon** (the region east of the Jordan River), and forced the **Edomites** (whom the Romans called **Idumeans** – south of Judea) to adopt Judaism.
- He took **Samaria** and destroyed the Samaritan temple on **Mt. Gerizim**.
  - According to **Josephus**, the Samaritan temple had been built to imitate the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.
  - Following Hyrcanus's destruction of the temple, it was never rebuilt.
  - **[NOTE: The temple was thoroughly destroyed, and centuries later the Byzantine emperor **Zeno** ordered the construction of the **Church of Mary Theotokos** on the site in 484 A.D. that obliterated all remains of the previous Samaritan temple.]**
- Hyrcanus also conquered most of **Galilee** to the north of Samaria.
- Hyrcanus's son and successor, **Aristobulus** (r. 104-103 BC), was a cruel tyrant who killed his mother and brother.
  - Unlike his father, Aristobulus took the title of king while retaining the high priesthood.
  - Determined to further expand his kingdom, he conquered northern **Galilee**, forcing the inhabitants to convert to Judaism; Jewish "colonies", such as Nazareth, were also planted there.
- **Alexander Jannaeus** (r. 103-76 BC), brother of Aristobulus, was a gifted military leader.
  - Like his father, Jannaeus ruled as both king and high priest.

- Under his leadership, the Hasmonean kingdom expanded northwest to **Strato's Tower** (later Caesarea), southwest to **Philistia** (Gaza), and northeast into the **Golan Heights**.
- **[NOTE: By the end of Jannaeus' reign, the Hasmonean kingdom incorporated most of modern-day Israel.]**
- There was a strong religious component to the Jewish state.
  - The Hasmoneans were ardent theocrats who insisted that conquered peoples convert to Judaism.
- Jewish religious imperialism was not without consequences:
  - It engendered bitterness throughout the region.
  - **Hershel Shanks**: "Some of the earliest evidence of pagan anti-Semitism... was in large part a reaction to Hasmonean anti-pagan drives. By the first century BC various anti-Jewish accusations were circulating widely." [*Ancient Israel*, p. 245]
- Despite their militant Judaism, the Hasmoneans were not anti-Hellenistic.
  - They readily accepted and integrated many Hellenistic influences.
  - EX: The Hasmonean winter palace near Jericho included some of the finest amenities of Hellenistic culture – a large swimming pool, heated baths, a grand pavilion, frescoed walls, Doric columns and friezes. But between the pool and the palace were Jewish ritual baths.

## **Hasmonean Degeneration.**

- At the outset, the Hasmonean dynasty seemed to be the dawn of a golden age.
- However, as with all hereditary monarchies, the Hasmoneans grew increasingly greedy, corrupt, and tyrannical.
  - The dynasty was plagued by the usual political intrigues and power struggles.
- Alexander Jannaeus, the last strong king of the Hasmonean line, died in 76 BC.
- Jannaeus was succeeded by his widow, **Salome Alexandra** (r. 76-67 BC).
  - During her rule she appointed her older son, **Hyrchanus II**, as high priest.
  - Like his mother, Hyrchanus II was partial to the Pharisee sect.
- When Salome died in 67 BC, her designated successor was Hyrchanus II (r. 66-63 BC).
- The younger son, **Aristobulus II**, contested his brother's ascent to the throne, and a civil war broke out between the two.
  - Like his father, Aristobulus II supported the Sadducees over the Pharisees.
- In a major blunder that would have enormous consequences, Hyrchanus and Aristobulus appealed to the Roman governor of Syria for recognition as the legitimate ruler of Judea.
  - Other Jews appealed to the governor to reject both brothers.
- This gave the Romans the pretext of legitimacy to intervene in the conflict.

## **Roman Conquest of Israel (63 B.C.)**

### **Early Jewish/Roman Relations.**

- During the Maccabean Revolt, the Romans were allies of the Jews.
- In the aftermath of the Second Punic War, the Romans considered the Seleucids unfriendly for providing sanctuary to Hannibal.
- Playing off these international tensions, The Maccabeans cultivated friendly relations with the Romans in hopes of neutralizing the Seleucids.

- In **I Maccabees**, the author is effusive in his praise of the Romans:
  - “Now Judas [Maccabeus] heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were very strong and were well-disposed toward all who made an alliance with them, that they pledged friendship to those who came to them...” [The author goes on to relate the Roman conquest of Greece, and then comments on the Roman political system:] “They have built for themselves a senate chamber, and every day 320 senators constantly deliberate concerning the people, to govern them well. They trust one man each year to rule over them [NOTE: Actually, *two* consuls exercised executive authority]... they all heed this one man, and there is no envy or jealousy among them.” [I Mac. 8:1-2; 15-16]

## Pompey’s Glory.

- In 63 BC, a power struggle between rival factions and the two Hasmonean brothers, **Hyrchanus II** and **Aristobulus II**, allowed the Romans to intervene in Jewish internal affairs.
- The famed Roman general, **Gnaeus Pompey**, led his legions into Israel – ostensibly as peacekeepers to quell the violence.
  - Pompey was a great Roman hero who had routed Mediterranean pirates and crushed **Spartacus**’ slave revolt a few years earlier.
- Pompey threw his support behind Hyrchanus, and as the Romans marched on Jerusalem, Aristobulus surrendered to their superior force.
- However, many of Aristobulus’ supporters refused to surrender and barricaded themselves inside the city and Temple compound.
- Pompey besieged the resistors for 3 months, during which some 12,000 Jews were killed.
  - **Marc Antony** led the Roman charge to scale the last barriers and overwhelm the last Temple defenders.
  - In the process of the siege, the Romans destroyed much of the city and Temple.
- Finally, having overcome all resistance, Pompey entered the sacred Temple.
  - Curious as to what treasures the Temple held, he parted the veil and entered the Holy of Holies.
  - To his amazement, he found no treasure at all – not even a single statue (note: no mention of the Ark of the Covenant).
  - Pious Jews were outraged that a Gentile had profaned their most holy site which was off-limits even to their priests.

## A Roman Province.

- So almost exactly a hundred years after the triumphs of Judas Maccabaeus, Judea once more fell under foreign control.
- For the next 700 years, the region was part of the Roman (and later Byzantine) Empire.
  - It was absorbed into the Roman province of Syria and was divided into two regions – **Judea** in the south and **Galilee** in the north.
- Pompey allowed Hyrchanus II to continue as high priest, but he downgraded his political status to that of ethnarch over Judea.
  - Meanwhile, Aristobulus II was banished to Rome.
- A few years later, when the civil war broke out between Pompey and **Julius Caesar**, Hyrchanus II sided with Caesar.
- Once victorious, Caesar granted the Jews special status within the Roman Empire.



- They were allowed to worship YHWH exclusively and were exempt from forced military service.

## The Herodian Dynasty

### Roman Provincial Governance.

- Generally, the Romans preferred to rule the more provincial, non-Hellenized parts of their empire (such as Israel) through vassal kings and indigenous aristocrats.
- This policy mitigated many of the cultural problems inherent in ruling over foreign peoples.

### Antipater II (r. 47-43 BC).

- In 47 BC Julius Caesar appointed Antipater, an Idumean (or Edomite), chief minister of Judea. (Idumea was the region of ancient Edom, southeast of Judea.)
- Antipater was a gifted general and had been a chief advisor to Hyrcanus II.
- In order to gain social acceptance, Antipater “converted” to Judaism.
- In 43 BC Antipater was poisoned by a Hasmonean rival, and 3 years later the Parthians invaded Judea.

### Herod the Great (r. 37-1 BC).

- Under his father, Antipater II, Herod was appointed governor over Galilee.
- Following his father’s assassination, Herod sought sanctuary in Rome and, with the support of Octavian Caesar and Mark Antony, was designated “King of the Jews” by the Roman senate.
- Soon afterward, Herod traveled to Rome, and with the support of **Mark Antony** and **Octavian Caesar**, the Senate declared him “**King of the Jews.**”
  - In gratitude, Herod led a procession to the Temple of Jove in Rome where he sacrificed to the pagan gods.
- Returning to Judea, Herod fought for the next three years for control of his kingdom.
  - Jerusalem was held by **Antigonus**, a descendant of the Hasmoneans, who refused to surrender the city.
  - Aided by a Roman general, **Sossius**, Herod besieged the city for 6-months before it finally surrendered to him.
- From 37-31 BC, while Mark Antony ruled the Roman east from Egypt, Herod was his staunch friend and ally even while **Cleopatra** persuaded her husband to carve out portions of Herod’s kingdom for her.
- In **31 BC**, following the **Battle of Actium** and the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra by the forces of Octavian, Herod proved himself to be a shrewd and savvy politician.
  - Traveling to Rhodes, he presented himself before Octavian and swore allegiance to him.
  - Rather than minimize his previous allegiance to Antony, he emphasized his loyalty and promised to serve Octavian just as he had served Antony.
  - Octavian was duly impressed, and retain him as King of Judea.
  - Over the next decades, Herod proved to be a loyal and dutiful subject of Octavian, even while he was a tyrant at home.
  - Octavian added new territories to Herod’s domain, and by the end of his reign, his kingdom was nearly as large as David and Solomon’s during Israel’s “Golden Age.”

- Although Herod had been raised a Jew, he was not a pure ethnic Jew.
  - His mother was an Arab, and his father was an Idumean.
  - Therefore, many Jews regarded him as an “**Idumean usurper.**”
  - In an attempt to bolster his legitimacy and acceptance among the Jews, he married **Mariamme**, the daughter of the last Hasmonean ruler, Hyrcanus II.
  - Officially, he may have been the ruler over Judea, but he was never accepted by devout Jews as their king.
- Once firmly in control, Herod actively promoted Hellenistic culture in Judea and earned the title, “**the Great,**” based on his massive building exploits.
- The northern coast of Judea lacked a deepwater port, so in **22 BC** Herod ordered the construction of a new port city – **Caesarea Maritima.**
  - When completed in 10 BC, Caesarea was one of the great Roman cities of its time.
  - Its harbor was the first manmade harbor in history.
  - The massive breakwater wall was constructed of concrete.
  - In addition to its remarkable manmade harbor, the city featured an impressive palace complex, an amphitheater, elaborate statuary, and a state-of-the-art aqueduct (that still survives today).
  - On a hill overlooking the port, Herod constructed a temple to Caesar Augustus.
  - **[NOTE: The harbor was built on sandy soil, and over time it gradually sank into the sea. Today, the ancient breakwater wall is 20-25 feet below the surface.]**
- Herod constructed new Roman-style cities at **Tiberius** and **Sepphoris** in Galilee.
  - Sepphoris was only a few miles from Nazareth.
- He antagonized many devout Jews by building a Roman-style **amphitheater** in Jerusalem, where he staged gladiatorial games and other forms of pagan entertainment.
- To curry favor with the Jews, he rebuilt and enlarged the **Temple** complex in Jerusalem – a monumental building project that employed thousands of workers.
  - Herod’s motive might have been to eclipse the great Solomon by building a Temple complex even more grandiose than the original one.
  - When Jewish leaders informed him that only Jewish priests were allowed in the sacred precincts of the Temple compound, Herod recruited and trained priests to do the work.
  - The Temple complex was 81 years under construction – from 18 BC to 63 AD.
  - Some of the foundation stones for the edifice were enormous – measuring 40 feet long and weighing 600 tons.
  - When finally finished, Herod’s Temple was nearly twice as large as Solomon’s.
  - **[NOTE: We know what the Temple looked like from detailed descriptions of its architecture that have survived. The only thing left of the Temple is the **Western Wall** (or “**Wailing Wall**”).]**
- As a refuge in a worst-case scenario, Herod also ordered the construction of two impregnable mountaintop citadels at **Masada** and **Herodium**
- **Masada** was located about 35 S/SE of Jerusalem on the west bank of the Dead Sea.
  - It included a majestic 3-tiered palace complex along with a fortress and underground cisterns to collect water.
- **Herodium** was located about 8 miles south of Jerusalem on the edge of the Judean desert.
  - A palace and fortress were carved into a 300-foot-high hill with steep slopes.

- The top of the hill was leveled, and the walled compound included a massive 5-story tower.
- At the base of Herodium, the villa complex included an opulent palace, terraced gardens, and an enormous swimming pool nearly as large as a football field. (Some scholars believe Herod's villa at Herodium was the largest such complex in the Roman world.)
- Despite his building exploits, Herod was an oppressive and ruthless tyrant who demanded total political and religious control.
  - He appointed whomever he pleased to the high priesthood, essentially turning the position into one of political patronage.
  - To finance his grandiose building projects, he imposed high taxes on the populace.
  - He razed towns that failed to pay their taxes and sold their inhabitants into slavery.
  - He married 10 wives and sired more than a dozen legitimate children.
- He was a brutal despot whose reign was marked by violence and bloodshed.
  - At the outset of his reign, he ordered the execution of Mariamne's teenage brother, who served as the high priest.
    - Fearing the young man's popularity and regarding him as a potential rival, Herod had him drowned in the swimming pool of his palace in Jericho.
  - He killed 2 of his 10 wives, including **Mariamne**.
  - Likewise, he killed at least 3 sons, including his two sons by Mariamne, **Alexander** and **Aristobulus**, on charges of treason – thereby eliminating the last descendants of the Hasmonean family.
  - Numerous subjects were arrested and imprisoned at Hyrcania, one of his fortresses, never to be seen again.
  - Also, Herod was the king who, at the time of the birth of Christ, ordered the executions of all male babies in the vicinity of Bethlehem.
  - Paradoxically, Herod was observant Jew who refrained from eating pork. (Augustus reportedly quipped that it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son!)
- Late in life, Herod's health seriously deteriorated.
  - Josephus: Herod suffered from internal pains, swelling of the feet, convulsions, an ulcerated colon, putrefied and worm-eaten genitals, and repugnant halitosis.
- With his death immanent, Herod took measures to assure that there would be no celebrations when he died.
  - His officials compiled a list of several hundred prominent Jews.
  - He ordered that, upon his death, the Jews be arrested, shut up inside an arena in Jericho, and executed.
  - Therefore, although there would be no mourning *for* his death, there would be widespread mourning *at* his death.
  - Fortunately, when he died, officials failed to carry out his wishes, and the prisoners were released.
- Herod died at Jericho circa **1 AD** (this date is disputed), and his corpse was escorted by a large contingent of soldiers and servants to his burial site at Herodium.
  - **[NOTE: In 2007 the Israeli archaeologist Ehud Netzer discovered the mausoleum of Herod on the upper slopes of Herodium. Included in the ruins were fragments of a stone ossuary that Netzer believes was the sarcophagus of Herod. Apparently, Herod did not rest in peace. About 70 years after his death,**

his burial box was smashed to pieces – probably by Jewish rebels who occupied Herodium during the Zealot Revolt.]

## **Herodian Dynasty.**

- When Herod died, his kingdom was divided among 3 of his sons: Archelaus, Philip, and Antipas.
- Caesar Augustus approved the arrangement.

### **Archelaus (Herod the Ethnarch, r. 1 BC - 6 AD).**

- Archelaus ruled as **ethnarch** over Judea, Samaria and Idumea.
- From the outset, his reign was marked by controversy and conflict.
- Archelaus removed the High Priest and installed one who was subservient to him.
- When civil disturbances broke out during Passover, 4 BC, his troops massacred and crucified some 3,000 people.
- Following the Passover massacre, Archelaus departed for Rome.
  - A few weeks later, during the Feast of Pentecost, the Roman official who was left in charge plundered the Temple treasury.
- After Archelaus returned, revolts continued to erupt in Judea for the next several years.
- Finally, a delegation of Jews and Samaritans traveled to Rome to petition Caesar Augustus to remove Archelaus.
- Surprisingly, the Emperor agreed, and Archelaus was deposed and exiled.
- At this point, the Roman Senate appointed a governor (a **prefect** or a **procurator**) to rule directly over Judea, Samaria and Idumea.
  - The governor was headquartered in Caesarea and usually traveled to Jerusalem only on special occasions such as feast days.

### **Philip (r. 1 BC - 34 AD).**

- Philip ruled as **tetrarch** over territories north and northeast of the Sea of Galilee until his death in 34 AD.
- According to Josephus, Philip was “a moderate ruler who dispensed justice.”
- Unlike his half-brothers, his rule was relatively peaceful and uneventful.

### **Antipas (Herod the Tetrarch, r. 1 BC - 39 AD).**

- Antipas ruled Galilee during the time of Christ and is the “Herod” mentioned in the Gospels.
- Like his half-brother Archelaus, he was cruel and tyrannical.
- On one occasion, while visiting his half-brother, Philip, he was taken by Philip’s wife, **Herodias**. (Herodias was the daughter of another half-brother, Aristobulus, and granddaughter of Herod the Great.)
- At the instigation of his wife, Herodias, Herod Antipas persecuted **John the Baptist**.
- He interrogated **Jesus** before his crucifixion.
- In 39 AD, Herod Antipas traveled to Rome to petition the Emperor Caligula to upgrade him to the rank of king.
- Instead, Caligula dethroned him and banished him to exile in Lyons in Gaul.

## **Agrippa I (r. 34-44 AD).**

- A grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobulus IV, the emperor Tiberius granted him the territories ruled over by Philip in 34 AD.
- Caligula added Galilee to his kingdom after the deposition of Antipas in 39 AD, and Claudius added Judea, Samaria and Idumea in 41 AD.
- Therefore, Agrippa I succeeded in reuniting the kingdom of his grandfather, Herod the Great.
- In the Acts of the Apostles, Agrippa ordered the execution of the apostle James and had Peter arrested and put in jail.

## **Agrippa II (r. 44-92 AD).**

- The son and successor of Agrippa I, he ruled over the northern parts of his father's kingdom until his death in 92 AD. (Following the death of Agrippa I, Judea was governed by Roman procurators.)
- Circa 60 AD, Agrippa II was asked by Porcius Festus, the Roman Procurator of Judea, to assist in the trial of the apostle Paul

## **Jewish Sectarianism Divided Nation.**

- Jews in the 1st century AD were bitterly divided over religious, cultural and political issues.
- Israel was a land seething with discontent and fratricidal hostility among various factions.
- Perhaps the most contentious issue was Hellenistic culture and its secularizing influences:
  - Some groups welcomed Hellenistic influences and cultivated friendly relations with the Romans, while others abhorred these outside influences.
- In addition to political and cultural issues, there were intense theological disputes regarding the nature of Judaism itself.
- The various sects in 1st century Judaism represented political as well as theological differences.
- **[NOTE: Most Jews did not belong to any of these sects.]**

## **Herodians.**

- Herodians were the pro-Roman party who embraced Hellenistic culture.
- They tended to be the social climbers of their day.
- Typically, these were cultural liberals who had little regard for traditional beliefs and practices.

## **Hasidim.**

- Historically, the Hasidim (or Hasideans – “the pious ones”) was a generic term for Jewish traditionalists.
  - They opposed Hellenistic culture and Roman rule and despised the half-breed Samaritans.
- In the 2nd century BC many Hasidim had joined the Maccabean Revolt, but others were pacifist.

- By the time of Christ, the Hasidim had divided into 3 sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

## Pharisees.

- Pharisees (“the separated ones”) were the religious fundamentalists of their time.
- In their minds, they were the true keepers of the flame and the defenders of the faith against the corrupting influences of paganism.
  - They fastidiously observed strict rules of ritual purity, tithing, and fasting; they saw all Jews as priests, so extended the purity requirements for priests to all Jews.
  - **Philo of Alexandria** called them “full of zeal for the law, strict guardians of the ancestral traditions,” and “merciless toward those who subvert the laws.”
- Although most Pharisees held much in common, there were two main rabbinical schools during the time of Christ.
- **Shammaites** were the radical fundamentalists.
  - Shammaites were followers of **Shammai Ha-zaken** (fl. 15 BC - 15 AD), a Jerusalem rabbi who advocated strict adherence to the Torah and the “**Traditions of the Elders.**”
  - Shammaites were noted for their harsh, legalistic approach to religion and the law.
  - Shammaites believed that the Torah demanded that Israel be free of foreign rule and influences, even if it meant violence (and terrorism).
  - In the time of Jesus, Shammaites were probably the dominant Pharisaical school.
- Another popular sage was **Hillel** (fl. 15 BC - 15 AD).
  - Hillel was renowned as a liberal and tolerant man.
  - His grandson was the great rabbi, **Gamaliel** – the apostle Paul’s mentor.
  - **[NOTE: A famous anecdote from the Babylonian Talmud is often cited to illustrate the difference in these two rabbinical orientations. A prospective proselyte went to Shammai and asked him to summarize the whole law while the inquirer stood on one leg. Shammai had no tolerance for such nonsense, and he flew into a rage and ordered the young man to leave. When the young man repeated his request to the kinder and gentler Hillel, the sage answered without hesitation: “What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole law. Everything else is a commentary on that. Go and learn it.”]**
- Contrary to popular conceptions, the Pharisees were the most pious and conscientious Jews.
  - They attempted to give meaning to religion – to make it an intimate and applicable part of daily life rather than just a set of traditions and rituals, in order to bring about God’s full restoration of Israel through national purity. They were so concerned that they might violate the law and ritual purity that they created very strict regulations to keep them from even the possibility of unknowingly becoming defiled; the additional rules were portrayed as the “oral law”, and was mainly what Jesus opposed
  - **Justo Gonzalez:** “We must pause to do justice to the Pharisees, so badly misunderstood in later times. The fact is that the New Testament attacks them, not because they were worse than other Jews, but because they were the best... Seeing them attacked in the New Testament, we tend to consider them simply a group of the worst kind of hypocrites, but here we err in our interpretation . . . “Contrary to what we often imagine, the Pharisees emphasized the importance

of personal religion... At a time when the vitality of Temple worship was on the wane, the Pharisees strove to interpret the Law in such a way that it might serve as a daily guide for the religion of the people. Naturally, this led them into the legalism that has made them objects of so much criticism..." [Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, pp. 30-31.]

- Theological distinctives:
  - Pharisees accepted the authority of the Hebrew scriptures *and* the “**Traditions of the Elders**” – the accumulated commentaries and pronouncements of Jewish scribes down through the centuries.
  - [NOTE: In this regard, they held a similar theory in terms of religious authority – the **twin tradition of Scripture and tradition** – as would later characterize the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches in Christian history.]
  - They believed in “foreordination” – i.e., God controls the events of life. (Conversely, they also believed in human free will.)
  - They believed in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.
  - They believed in divine judgment – individuals are awarded Paradise or condemned to Hell based on how they have lived their lives.
  - They believed in a hierarchy of angels and demons in the spirit world.
- Their complex oral laws and traditions attempted to apply the written Law to the practical situations of daily life.
  - Ex: Observance of the Sabbath was a central part of Judaism, and it was around the Sabbath that the most extensive body of rules evolved.
  - In order to give structure to the commandment, “*Six days shalt thou work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God,*” Pharisees compiled a list of 39 activities that they considered “work” and must be avoided on the Sabbath.
  - Do not walk more than 3/5 mile on the Sabbath;
  - Do not start a fire;
  - Do not tear a thread hanging from your clothes;
  - Women were forbidden to look into a mirror lest they see a grey hair and be tempted to pluck it out;
  - One could walk through a wheat field if the grain was ankle high, but not if it were knee-high.
- In reducing their faith to a mind-numbing litany of legalistic rules, the Pharisees were guilty of doing all the right things for the wrong reasons.
- Realizing the impossibility of keeping all the commandments unfailingly, some rabbis emphasized the need for regular repentance.
  - Rabbi Eliezer: “Repent one day before your death... Repent today lest you die tomorrow; repent tomorrow lest you die the next day; and thus all your days will be spent in repentance.”
- Although all Pharisees resented Roman rule and Hellenistic cultural influences, they were divided when it came to the appropriate response.
  - More liberal Pharisees, such as Hillel and Gamaliel, regarded Roman rule as punishment for their national sins.
    - This interpretation is reflected in the ***Psalms of Solomon*** (c. 50 BC), which looks to a national liberator to deliver Israel from foreign oppression.
  - Others, such as the militant Shammaites, opposed the Romans as ruthless and pagan oppressors.
    - Apocalyptic writings such as the ***Assumption of Moses*** (a.k.a. *The Testament of Moses*, c. 20-30 AD), which purports to give Moses’s

farewell speech to Joshua , prophesied divine judgement against Israel's enemies – i.e., the Romans.

- Books such as the *Assumption of Moses* helped inflame revolutionary sentiment against the Romans prior to the Zealot Revolt.
  - Some Shammaites secretly aided terrorist groups such as the Zealots.
- Pharisees were a decentralized religious sect.
  - In hundreds of local synagogues scattered throughout Israel and abroad, Pharisaical **rabbis** instructed students in the Torah and its interpretations.
  - Therefore, Pharisaism survived the catastrophic wars with the Romans and became the dominant form of Judaism for the next 2000 years.
- Jesus often criticized the Pharisees as legalistic, self-righteous hypocrites.
  - Interestingly, he did not dispute their orthodoxy, but the arrogant and unloving way they practiced it.

## Sadducees.

- Sadducees were more worldly and secularistic than the Pharisees.
- Generally, Sadducees were the wealthy, aristocratic elite in Jewish society.
  - They dominated the priesthood and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court.
  - They had little influence with the common masses.
- Many Sadducees accepted Hellenistic culture and collaborated with the Romans.
- Theological distinctives:
  - Sadducees (maybe) accepted only the Pentateuch as their religious authority, not the subsequent writings and traditions (the “Traditions of the Elders”).
  - Sadducees were Jewish Deists – they believed in a remote god who was generally uninvolved in human affairs.
  - They argued for free will, as opposed to the Pharisees’ belief in foreordination.
  - They rejected the angelology and demonology of Judaism.
  - They denied the resurrection of the dead and the afterlife.
- Unlike Pharisaism, the Sadducee sect centered around the Temple and its rites rather than the synagogue and its teachings.
- Apparently, the Sadducee sect did not survive the Zealot Revolt of 70 AD.
  - Many Sadducees were murdered by the Zealots for their pro-Roman attitudes.
  - The Sadducees disappeared soon after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- Relatively little is known of the Sadducees.
  - In all likelihood, the Pharisees destroyed any writings the Sadducees produced.

## Scribes.

- Scribes were not a party or sect, but the intelligentsia – the scholarly and legal elite.
- According to Jewish tradition, the great scholar **Ezra** was the founder of the scribes.
- Scribes, most of whom were Pharisees, were the foremost systematizers, interpreters, and teachers (rabbis) of the Law.
- Some popular scribes had a coterie of disciples that followed them around.
- Counting the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic Law, and the accumulated body of oral traditions, scribes catalogued some **613** laws and regulations.
  - These “Traditions of the Elders” included everything from moral laws to religious rites and daily rituals associated with eating, drinking, and bathing. 248 of these commandments were positive and 365 were negative.



## Zealots

- Zealots were a motley assortment of militant anti-Roman parties dedicated to undermining and overthrowing Roman rule.
- Reportedly, the group was founded by **Judas the Galilean**, who organized a rebellion against the Romans in AD 6, though they might not have been formally organized until much later.
  - His hero was **Judas Maccabaeus**, the guerrilla leader who retook the Temple from the Syrians in the 2nd century BC.
- Some Zealots were religious fanatics while others had a secularistic orientation.
  - Some looked for a Messiah who would be a great political and military revolutionary and overthrow Roman authority.
- Zealots avoided paying taxes and harassed those who cooperated with the Romans.
  - They would not so much as touch a coin that bore the emperor's image.
- Some Zealots lived in caves in the Judean desert, and they recruited followers mainly from the oppressed rural peasants.
  - From their desert hide-outs, they staged hit-and-run raids on the Romans and Roman sympathizers.
  - Occasionally, the Romans retaliated by terrorizing local Jewish settlements.
- A secret terrorist wing, the **sicarii**, carried out political assassinations against Roman officials and Jewish collaborators.
- Some Pharisees (mainly Shammaites) secretly supported the Zealots.

## Essenes.

- Essenes were a diverse group of exclusivist communities that lived in the desolate Judean desert in settlements on the west bank of the Dead Sea.
- Although only about 20 miles east of Jerusalem, the Dead Sea area was another world:
  - Average summertime temperatures hovered around 100 degrees, and the area received less than 2 inches of rainfall per year.
  - As masters of survival in a parched and arid land, the Essenes built aqueducts that channeled fresh water from the surrounding Judean hills into pools and cisterns.
- Essenes abhorred the Jewish religious establishment – particularly “the wicked priests” (the Sadducees) in Jerusalem.
- Essenes were an apocalyptic sect with a dualistic cosmology:
  - They called themselves the **Yahad** (the “community”) of the elect, the people of the New Covenant, the only true Jews.
  - They believed they were the fulfillment of prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures.
  - They were the “**Sons of Light**,” and all others were “**Sons of Darkness**.”
  - In practice, they loved one another dearly and despised everyone else intensely.
- As the true people of God, they retreated into the desert “to prepare a way for the Lord” and separate themselves from mainstream society; they believed that, on “the Day of the Lord”, they would be the new priests in a restored Israel.
  - To symbolize their purified state, they dressed in white robes.
- An ascetic movement, the Essenes practiced strict disciplines.
  - **[NOTE: Much of what we know about the Essenes comes from their “Manual of Discipline.”]**
  - Prospective members underwent a 3-year probationary period.

- Upon being accepted into the community, members sold all their possessions and deposited the proceeds into the common treasury.
- Members held all goods in common.
- Essenes maintained a spartan lifestyle and ate a strict diet.
- They emphasized laws of ceremonial purity, including daily ritualistic baths.
- They observed ritualistic prayers at sunrise and communal worship.
- They practiced sexual abstinence and discouraged their members from marrying – although marriage was not absolutely prohibited.
- Their sacred compounds were off-limits to anyone who was blind, deaf, or lame.
- Anyone caught spitting, talking out of turn, or laughing loudly had his food allotment cut.
- Those who violated the communal rules were judged by a tribunal of 100, who could impose the death sentence.
- Essenes had a strong eschatological orientation.
  - They believed they were living in the last days and eagerly awaited a great “Day of the Lord” in which Israel would be spiritually revived around a New Jerusalem.
  - One of their prophetic writings, “**The War Scroll**” (or “**The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness**”), predicted a great battle in which the Messiah would kill the Roman emperor.
  - [NOTE: Some Essenes were pacifists, but most prepared to fight in the great war that would soon come against the Romans.]
- In their eschatology, 4 important figures would contribute to the restoration of Israel:
  - The **Teacher of Righteousness**: The founder of the Essene community who had taught his followers a special esoteric way to interpret the Scriptures.
    - According to the texts, he was persecuted by a “wicked priest” – ca. 165 BC.
  - The **Messiah of Israel**: A kingly figure of Davidic lineage – a political savior who would wage war against the forces of evil and usher in a new age.
  - The **Messiah of Aaron**: A priestly figure who would purify the religious life of the nation.
  - The long-awaited **prophet** predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18.
    - “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.... I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”
- At most, the Essene communities probably numbered about 4,000.
  - One of their centers was at **Qumran**, where the **Dead Sea Scrolls** were discovered (there is some debate on this)

## Diaspora Judaism

### Diverse Communities.

- For centuries before Christ, Jews had been scattered throughout the Middle East and the greater Mediterranean region.
- Some Jews had never returned to Israel from exile in Babylon in the 6th century B.C.
  - Hence, there were numerous communities of Jews scattered throughout Mesopotamia and Persia.
- Many Jews migrated throughout the Hellenistic world in the wake of Alexander’s conquests.
  - These included merchants, traders, farmers, and a few government officials.

- Others were conscripted into the armies of the Ptolemies of Egypt, and eventually settled outside of Israel.
- In the wake of Pompey's conquest of Israel, thousands were enslaved and deported to Rome and various other cities and towns throughout the Roman world.
- **At the time of Christ, there were probably less than 1-1/2 million Jews in Judea and Galilee, and an estimated 4-5 million others living outside Palestine.**
  - An estimated 30 - 50,000 Jews lived in Rome. (There were at least a dozen synagogues in Rome at the time of Christ.)
  - There might have been as many as 750,000 living in Egypt – primarily Alexandria.
- These scattered Jewish communities were exceedingly diverse.
  - Some Jews abandoned the traditional religion, intermarried with Gentiles, and assimilated into mainstream Hellenistic culture.
  - Others took their Judaism more seriously, clung devoutly to the ancient traditions, and maintained their ethnic and religious distinctives.
    - These devout Jews worshiped every Sabbath in local synagogues and continued the tradition of circumcising their male children.
- Socially and economically, some Jews prospered as traders, artisans, and even civil magistrates, while others were consigned to slavery.
  - Some became highly-educated, and some earned Roman citizenship.
- Mainstream Romans and other Gentiles had mixed feelings about Jews.
  - Some considered them quaint, self-righteous separatists, and resented their unique lifestyle, strict dietary rules, and religious exclusivity.
  - Jews circumcised their male children, which most people regarded as barbaric.
  - Furthermore, Jews strictly observed the Sabbath and steadfastly refused to work on that day.
  - Other, more tolerant Gentiles admired their religious and moral values, devotion to marriage and family, sexual discipline, benevolence and charitable ministries, and emphasis on education.
  - **Thomas Cahill:** “In the cities of the diaspora (especially Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus and Rome), Jews were widely admired by their Gentile neighbors. For one thing, they had a *real* religion, not a clutter of gods and goddesses and *pro forma* rituals that almost nobody took seriously anymore. They actually *believed* in their one God; and they even set aside one day a week to pray to him and reflect on their lives. They possessed a dignified library of sacred books that they studied reverently as part of this weekly reflection and which pointed toward a consistent worldview . . . “[Furthermore, Jewish men] were faithful spouses who maintained strong families in which even grown children remained affectively attached and respectful to their parents . . . “Despite their growing economic success, they tended to be more scrupulous in business than non-Jews. And they were downright finicky when it came to taking human life, seeming to value even a slave's or a plebeian's life as much as anyone else's. “Perhaps in nothing did the Gentiles find the Jews so admirable as in their acts of charity. Communities of urban Jews, in addition to opening synagogues, built welfare centers for aiding the poor, the miserable, the sick, the imprisoned, and those such as widows and orphans who had no family to care for them.” [Thomas Cahill, *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, p. 174]
- In many cities and towns with Jewish communities, significant numbers of Gentiles converted to the faith.

- Some of these Gentiles were **proselytes** – men and women who had undergone a formal conversion to Judaism.
  - They were baptized, circumcised (if male), observed all the laws and traditions of the Jewish faith, and became members of local synagogues.
- More common were the “**God-fearers**” – Gentiles who had a more casual identification with Judaism.
  - They accepted Jewish beliefs, practiced Jewish morality, abstained from idolatry, ate a kosher diet, refrained from working on the Sabbath, and often contributed financially to local synagogues.
  - **[NOTE: Since circumcision was the most demanding rite of passage, more women than men understandably became proselytes.]**
- **Thomas Cahill:** “The diaspora cities of the first century saw a marked increase in Gentile initiates to Judaism. Many of these were wellborn women who presided over substantial households and who had likely tried out some of the Eastern mystery cults before settling on Judaism. These Gentiles did not, generally speaking, go all the way – they tended to draw the line at circumcision.” Jews referred to these people as “God-fearers” – Gentiles who kept the Sabbath, observed Jewish dietary laws, and put their faith in the God of the Jews.” [Ibid.]

## The Septuagint.

- The most important contribution by diaspora Jews to the Jewish religion was the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek – the **Septuagint**.
- The legend of the Septuagint comes from the **Letter of Aristeas** (a.k.a. the Letter to Philocrates), as passed on by **Josephus** and **Philo of Alexandria**.
  - According to the story, Aristeas was the courtier of **Ptolemy II Philadelphus** (r. 283-246 BC) – but modern scholars date the letter to the 2nd century BC due to anachronisms in the text.
- According to the Letter of Aristeas, the Septuagint was produced in the 3rd century BC when Ptolemy II Philadelphus commissioned 72 Jewish scholars from Jerusalem to come to Alexandria and produce a Greek version of the **Pentateuch**.
  - The team of 72 scholars included six representatives of each of the twelve tribes, chosen by the high priest in Jerusalem.
  - Working independently, the 72 scholars produced identical versions of the texts.
  - In another version of the legend, the whole project was finished in 72 days.
  - Letter of Aristeas: “King Ptolemy once gathered 72 Elders. He placed them in 72 chambers, each of them in a separate one, without revealing to them why they were summoned. He entered each one’s room and said: ‘Write for me the Torah of Moshe, your teacher.’ God put it in the heart of each one to translate identically as all the others did.”
- Later Jews believed the process had been divinely-inspired.
- The translation of the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures took place over the next couple of centuries.
  - Wikipedia: “Further books were translated over the next two to three centuries. It is not altogether clear which was translated when, or where; some may even have been translated twice, into different versions, and then revised. The quality and style of the different translators also varied considerably from book to book, from the literal to paraphrasing to interpretative.” [“The Septuagint”]
- Inclusions:

- The order of books in the Septuagint became the model for the earliest Christian Bibles.
- The books of Samuel and Kings are one book in four parts called “Of Reigns,” and the books of Chronicles supplement Reigns.
- Some ancient texts are included in the Septuagint that are not in the Hebrew canon, including **Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, additions to Daniel** (“The Prayer of Azarias,” the “Song of the Three Children,” “Sosanna” and “Bel and the Dragon”), **additions to Esther, I, II, and III Maccabees, I Esdras, Odes** (including the “Prayer of Manasseh”), the **Psalms of Solomon**, and **Psalm 151**. (Later, these together would become known as the Apocrypha)
- In fact, there was no standardized text of the Septuagint – we know this from the variations in quotations in the Gospels and the early Church Fathers.
- **[NOTE: It wasn’t until the time of Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) that the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures came to be called by the Latin term *septuaginta* (meaning 70 rather than 72). In his *City of God*, while repeating the story of Aristeas, Augustine adds, “It is their translation that it has now become traditional to call the Septuagint.”]**

## Major Jewish Institutions

### The Sanhedrin.

- The Sanhedrin, or Jewish Supreme Court, was composed of 71 men:
  - **The High Priest.**
  - **The Chief Priests** – a religious chamber of 23 priests.
  - **The Scribes** – a law chamber of 23 scribes.
    - Legal experts, including both Pharisees and Sadducees.
  - **The Elders** – a popular chamber of 23 elders.
    - Representatives of the most prominent families.
- Qualifications:
  - Judges had to be at least 40 years old.
  - Each had to have experienced in at least three prior offices.
  - Each had to be a person of unassailable integrity.
- The High Priest presided over the council.
  - During the reigns of Herod the Great and his son, Archelaus, the high priests were installed by the Herodian monarchs.
  - After the Romans ruled directly over Judea, the Senate approved the high priest.
  - In the 1st century AD, the high priesthood was dominated by a single family.
    - According to Josephus, the Romans elevated **Annas b. Sethi** from obscurity to the position because:
      - he was of the priestly line;
      - he was wealthy; and
      - he would be compliant.
    - For 60 years, Annas and his sons monopolized the high priesthood.
    - Annas was high priest from AD 6 - 15.
    - All of his sons held the position in subsequent years, along with his son-in-law, the infamous **Caiaphas**.
- Under Roman governors, the Sanhedrin was the chief governing body in Judea.

- It regulated religious matters and most civil issues.
- When deciding criminal cases, the decision of acquittal required a simple majority, whereas a sentence of condemnation required a 2/3 majority.
- It commanded its own security force – the Temple police.
- The authority of the Sanhedrin was not absolute:
  - The Roman governor held the power of capital punishment.
- The Sanhedrin was abolished following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

## The Temple.

- **Herod's Temple** was built over a period of 80 years – c. 17 BC - 64 AD.
  - Herod's temple complex incorporated about 26 acres – twice as large as the former temple.
  - It was destroyed in 70 AD – only about 6 years after its completion.
- Herod's Temple was one of the most magnificent building complexes in the world:
  - The complex included courts and cloisters for priests.
  - The 26-acre "**Court of the Gentiles**" was lined with magnificent marble colonnades.
  - Within the outer courtyard was the "**Court of the Jews**," enclosed by a stone balustrade (a rail and the row of posts that support it).
  - Within the Court of the Jews was the temple itself, built upon the highest ground.
- The temple was built of large blocks of white stone.
  - The building was the same dimensions as Solomon's Temple, but 60 feet high.
  - The altar of burnt-offering, made of unhewn stone, stood before the temple entrance.
  - To the north of the altar was the place where the sacrificial victims were slaughtered.
  - Within the temple the furniture included the altar of incense, the 7-branched golden lampstand, and the table for the bread of the Presence.
- Every day, priests officiated over the burnt offerings that were sacrificed every morning at 9:00 a.m. and every afternoon at 3:00 p.m.

## The Synagogue.

- Unlike other formal religions that were highly-centralized, the dominant form of Judaism at the time of Christ was based on the cellular model.
  - This was critical to the survival of Judaism, because most Jews lived outside Israel.
- While Jews from all over the world flocked to the Temple for special holidays, most worship and study of the faith took place in local synagogues.
- The term "synagogue" (Hebrew: **qahal**) comes from the Septuagint.
- The meaning of "synagogue" is ambiguous – it could refer to:
  - An assembly of believers in YHWH; or
  - A place – some kind of building or meeting house (either a large private home or a community center).
- By the 1st century AD, the word "synagogue" seems to have meant a place.
- Most towns and villages had a synagogue, and some large cities had several.
  - Synagogues could be formed anywhere that at least 10 men qualified to be elders.

- Structurally, synagogues had no standardized size or shape
  - Archaeological evidence indicates that most had two rows of columns that divided the interior into a central nave and two side aisles.
  - Ideally, synagogues would be built on the highest point of the town with the front doors facing toward Jerusalem.
- The synagogue was integral to maintaining the vitality of Jewish religion and culture.
  - Synagogues functioned as worship centers, schools, community centers, and courtrooms.
  - Many synagogues had hostels next door where travelers could spend the night.
- The synagogue was the primary source of education – both religious and general.
  - Most Jewish children were taught basic literacy in the home.
  - At age 6, most children began attending school at the local synagogue.
  - The rabbi was the main teacher, and the main curriculum centered around the Tanakh.
  - According to Josephus, most Jewish children were literate.
- Origins of the synagogue are obscure:
  - It may have begun during the Babylonian Captivity as small groups of Jews gathered to hear the Torah; or
  - It may have started later to supplement the worship in the Temple.
- Synagogue meetings were simple and devoid of elaborate ritual.
  - The main synagogue meeting took place on the Sabbath, but the building was open every day at 3 times for those who wanted to pray (corresponding to the times sacrifices were being offered in the temple).
  - Typically, benches and chairs lined the room on three sides, with the seats of greater honor progressively elevated.
  - In front of the auditorium was a raised platform on which speakers addressed the assembly.
  - A chest (the “ark”) contained the sacred scrolls of the Hebrew scriptures.
  - Meetings began with the people standing, facing toward Jerusalem, and reciting prayers beginning with the ***Shema***: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one....” [Deut. 6:4]
    - **[NOTE: Jews prayed standing up, arms outstretched (“the lifting up of hands”), looking upward.]**
  - Worship centered around the reading of Scripture and an expository teaching of the Torah. (Evidently, worshipers did not sing, and the Psalms appears to have had no place in the service.)
  - At the conclusion, congregants recited 18 benedictions.
  - As members left the synagogue, they gave alms for the poor.
- Congregants celebrated special holidays by eating a common meal together.
- In most synagogues, a portion of the members’ tithes were set aside for the temple in Jerusalem.
- Governance:
  - Synagogues had no priest or hierarchy.
  - Synagogues were governed by a council of elders, one of whom functioned as the spokesman and presided over the meetings.
  - In many synagogues, a **rabbi**, a gifted scholar/teacher who was knowledgeable in the Tanakh and the Traditions of the Elders, did much of the religious teaching; other times, one of the elders would read from the Law or the Prophets.
  - Elders of the synagogue also formed a local **sanhedrin**, or court.

- Qualifications for elders: Married men, 30 years of age or older, well-versed in the Scriptures, and having a godly reputation.
- **[NOTE: Qualifications for synagogue elders probably provided the example for Christian elders – ref. I Timothy 3:1-7.]**
- The importance of the synagogue was particularly evident after the destruction of the Temple.
  - Judaism did not die out, despite the destruction of its most sacred site and institution.

## **Jewish Messianism.**

- In the midst of political oppression and economic suffering, political factionalism and religious fanaticism were rampant in Israel.
- There was a spirit of apocalypticism in the air, and many Jews looked to the prophets of old and the predictions of a coming Messiah.
- Self-proclaimed messiahs – both spiritual and political – sprang up throughout the land. **[NOTE: The New Testament mentions three of these: Theudas, Judas the Galilean, and an unnamed Egyptian Jew. [Acts 5:35-37; 21:38]]**
- Around 15 BC, **Theudas** claimed to be the Messiah and attracted hundreds of disciples.
- In 4 BC, **Judas the Galilean** led a revolt against the Hasmoneans and Romans.
  - Herod the Great had killed his father for revolutionary activities.
  - Judas threatened Jews who submitted to the Romans.
  - In retaliation, the Romans burned Judas' hometown in Galilee and sold the residents into slavery.
  - Over the next several years, before the revolt was finally quelled, Roman forces killed thousands of rebels.
  - Eventually, Judas was killed, 2,000 of his followers were crucified, and the rest scattered.
- After the death of Herod the Great (4 BC), **Simon of Perea** tried to seize the throne.
  - A former slave of Herod, he crowned himself king and plundered and burned the royal palace in Jericho.
  - He was quickly apprehended and decapitated.
- About the same time, **Athronges**, a Judean shepherd, tried to install himself as king.
  - Josephus: He was “remarkable for his great size and strength,” and along with his “burley brothers,” he waged a guerilla campaign against the Romans.
  - He ruled over parts of Judea for 2 years before being deposed.
- A few years after Jesus, a charismatic **Egyptian Jew**, “who declared that he was a prophet,” persuaded many to join him atop the Mount of Olives.
  - He vowed to make the walls of Jerusalem collapse, as Joshua had done at Jericho, after which he and his followers would take possession of the holy city.
  - The Romans attacked, and although 400 Jews were killed and 200 captured, the Egyptian pseudo-prophet escaped. **[NOTE: Years later, when Paul's appearance in Jerusalem sparked a riot, a Roman commander asked him, “Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4000 terrorists out into the desert some time ago?” [Acts 21:38]]**
- In the late 40s AD, another (?) **Theudas** came along, claiming to be a great prophet.
  - A gifted magician, he persuaded many people to follow him to the Jordan River, where he promised to part the waters as a sign that he was a great prophet.



- **Fadus**, the Roman procurator (r. 46-48 AD), dispatched the cavalry, which cut down Theudas and many his followers.
- Theudas' head was brought back to Jerusalem on a pole and displayed near one of the city gates.
- Around 50 AD, **Tiberius Alexander**, Fadus' successor, caught and crucified two sons of Judas the Galilean, **James** and **Simon**
  - [NOTE: Another of Judas' sons, **Menahem**, played a key role in the Zealot Revolt of AD 66. At the same time, Menahem's cousin, **Eleazar**, was the leader of the radical zealots who held out atop Masada.]
- Simply claiming to be the Messiah was not seen as blasphemous or dangerous to the Jewish authorities; the Jewish leaders' opposition to Jesus was based on his views on keeping the Law and his divine claims

## **Jewish and Gentile Tensions: The Alexandria Riots (41 AD).**

- Ever since the time of the Hasmonean monarch **John Hyrcanus** (r. 134-104 BC), there had been tensions and conflicts between Jews and Gentiles.
- The Hasmoneans were ardent theocrats, and as they conquered Samaria, Galilee, Idumea, and other areas, they forced subject peoples to convert to Judaism.
- As a result, Hasmonean imperialism spawned a bitter legacy:
  - **Hershel Shanks**: "Some of the earliest evidence of pagan anti-Semitism... was in large part a reaction to Hasmonean anti-pagan drives. By the first century BC various anti-Jewish accusations were circulating widely." [*Ancient Israel*, p. 245]
- Another cause for anti-Semitic sentiment was the special status the Jews enjoyed under **Julius Caesar** and **Augustus Caesar**.
  - Due to the uniqueness of Jewish religion, Julius Caesar had exempted the Jews from military service, participation in pagan religious ceremonies, and working on the Sabbath.
  - Jewish priests in Jerusalem were allowed to offer sacrifices *on behalf of* the emperor *rather than to* him.
- Undoubtedly, some Jews flaunted their special status as "God's chosen people," much to the irritation of their Gentile neighbors.
- Outside of Judea, the largest concentration of Jews was in Egypt.
  - According to the Jewish scholar, **Philo of Alexandria**, perhaps a million Jews lived in Egypt, including perhaps 200-300,000 in the city of Alexandria.
- In AD 41, the mad emperor **Caligula** (r. 37-41) revoked the special rights and privileges of the Jews.
- In Alexandria the Roman governor **Flaccus** called for placing busts of the emperor in the city's synagogues.
- When the Jews resisted this sacrilege, violence erupted.
  - Encouraged by the governor's hostility toward the Jews, the populace turned on them.
  - Mobs of people rampaged through Jewish neighborhoods, destroying their synagogues, plundering their homes, and driving them into one of the city's five districts.
  - According to Philo of Alexandria, thousands of Jews were harassed, beaten, murdered, and even crucified by hostile mobs.
- Philo led a delegation of distinguished Jews to Rome to plead their case before the emperor.

- While in Rome, Philo learned that Caligula had ordered the erection of a **statue of Zeus** inside the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem
- **Publius Petronius**, the Roman governor of Syria, realized that Caligula's order would cause a major riot – maybe even a revolt.
  - On one occasion, a huge throng of Jews gathered before him and declared that he would have to kill them all before they allowed the Temple to be desecrated.
- The Jews' act of civil disobedience led Petronius to protest Caligula's order.
- About the same time, the Jewish king **Herod Agrippa I** (r. 41-44), who was a friend of Caligula, convinced the emperor to rescind the order. (Nonetheless, Caligula ordered Petronius to commit suicide for insubordination, but fortunately for the governor, he learned of Caligula's assassination before he received the emperor's death order.)
- Major bloodshed was averted, but the incident and the Alexandrian riots signaled the extent of anti-Semitism and the precarious situation of Jews within the Roman Empire

## Honor and Shame

- The ancient world was collectivist, not individualistic; a person got his identity and sense of worth from his family, community, tribe, and nation; as such, they were very attuned to the approval or disapproval of others
- People in collectivist cultures usually lack an internalized sense of right and wrong, what we would call a conscience; rather than thinking in terms of right and wrong, they think in terms of honor and shame, which are community-determined; an action taken on behalf of the community was proper and good, even if that same action taken in other circumstances would be shaming (this is why Paul could persecute Christians and still see himself as “faultless”, as his actions were approved of by his community)
- Most non-Western societies are still founded on an honor/shame model
- **David deSilva:** “. . . Aristotle lists two motives that people might have for choosing some course of action: honor and pleasure . . . while honor with pleasure was a great good, pleasure without honor was the worst evil . . . those who put pleasure ahead of honor were considered to be less than human, ruled by their passions and desires.” [David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*]
- In Jewish wisdom literature, such as the Wisdom of Ben Sirach, also use promises of honor and the threat of dishonor as goads for behavior
- Honor, essentially, was the respect from the community for being the kind of person and doing the kind of things the group valued; shame, on the other hand, is being seen as less than valuable because one has behaved in ways that run contrary to the values of the group; the driving force in the life of an inhabitant of an honor/shame culture is not to bring shame on himself, his family, or his group
- While “being shamed” was a very negative thing, it was a virtue to have a “sense of shame”, which was a sensitivity to the opinion of the group and a desire to avoid those actions that would bring disgrace
- Words like “glory”, “reputation”, “honor”, and “praise” can clue in modern Western readers that the New Testament authors are making an appeal to honor; “dishonor”, “reproach”, “scorn”, “slander” and the like are markers of shame
- There were several ways to gain honor:
  - Being born or adopted into an honorable family and/or race (“A person's honor comes from his father”, Ben Sira 3:11); hence, insults are

often an attack on a person's parentage – “You are of your father, the devil”, “You brood of vipers”

- Building a reputation as “virtuous” – embodying virtues prized by the group
- Winning an honor challenge, known as the “challenge-reposte”, by publically posing a challenge that the opponent cannot answer to the satisfaction of the crowd; a public question to a teacher or leader was an honor challenge, as genuine inquiries were made privately; whoever one the challenge gained honor at the expense of the other – ex. Jesus and the Pharisees and Saducees
- Honor was seen as a zero-sum game; if you gained honor, it was at the expense of another; the main problem of the Jewish leaders with Jesus was that he invariably took their honor when challenged and they could only get it back by defeating him; eventually, the only way they could regain their honor was to kill him in the most humiliating way possible, thereby taking back all the honor they had lost; they saw nothing wrong with this as it was gaining them honor, and they saw the world in terms of honor and shame instead of right and wrong
- The treatment of the body was often a symbol of honor or shame – an honored guest would have his head anointed and be put in a place of honor, while a disgraced criminal was slapped or beaten
- A person's “name” is a symbol of their honor; to praise someone's name or make their name known was to give them honor; to speak ill of someone's name is an attempt to disgrace them and steal their honor; when we do good works “in the name of Jesus”, we are increasing Jesus' honor; the saints are given a “new name” in Revelation as a way of symbolizing that their honor is now spotless and cannot be disgraced
- A man or woman could also be shamed by stepping outside of their proper roles; women, especially, could bring shame on her whole family by dishonorable behavior, such as leaving the house unveiled or speaking to a non-familial male in public; women did not have their own honor, but rather contributed to the honor or shame of her husband and family; Ben Sira and other Jewish wisdom writers saw daughters as potential liabilities and as such had very low opinions of women in general (Sir. 42:9-14); the freedom of women in the early church (due partially to the perception of the church as a family) and the value they had there presented the problem of potentially bringing shame to the name of Christ, so the early Christians had to walk a very narrow line
- When the member of a community engaged in conduct that could endanger the integrity of that community – such as abandoning traditional religion for an upstart Jewish cult – the members of the community would take several measures to shame the transgressor, such as insult, reproach, physical abuse, confiscation of property, or even execution; this would hopefully shame the transgressor into returning to the values of the community, as well as keep other members of the community from making the same mistake; to counter this, Paul and the other apostles emphasized the new community converts had in the form of the church and their honor with God, who outranked the human members of the worldly community
- The early church saw sin as closely tied to their honor as a community and to the honor of God; therefore, sin was not an individual thing but affected the community as a whole, and had to be dealt with as a body
- It was not only early Christians who experienced the clash of honor between the surrounding community and their own subculture; diaspora Jews faced

many of the same issues (Sir. 10:19-24), and many succumbed to community pressure to abandon Judaism and participate in Greco-Roman religion and culture

## A Collectivist Culture

- The collectivist nature of ancient society was reflected in more than just honor and shame; it affected every aspect of their lives in ways that a member of a more individualist culture would never imagine.
- Privacy is an unknown concept in a collectivist culture; an individual would always be surrounded by other people for all but the most private of activities (by their definition, not ours), and they would see this as a good thing, not an imposition; everybody knows everyone else's business, and can respond with honor or shame accordingly
- The closest comparison to this mindset in individualistic Western society is team sports ("There is no I in team") and the military
- The assumption of individualism warps how we read Biblical texts
  - Mary and Joseph would have been part of a large family group on the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and would have been taken in by Joseph's family no matter how shamed Mary might have been from her pregnancy (to refuse to take in even a shamed family member would have brought enormous dishonor on the family, and as part of the family of David, they had a lot of honor to lose); there was no room for them in the guest room (*katyluma*) but they were still housed in a lowered part of the main room used for holding animals overnight
  - They would also have travelled as a large group every year to Passover, which is how they could have gone an entire day before they realized the 12-year-old Jesus was missing
- Letter-writing was also a group activity; a person composing a letter would sit in the open-air portion of the house (the *atrium*) and dictate to a scribe; being centrally-located, people would constantly be passing by and they would often stop and listen, and even offer suggestions of their own; Paul specifically names his co-writers in several of his letters, and those co-writers would not have been passive participants, but active collaborators (and there were probably also other more casual contributors as well); Paul's ministry was a team effort, and to do otherwise would have been alarming
- The collectivist mindset also affected how people viewed conversion; conversion was rarely an individual decision, but was something undertaken by entire households; this does not mean that the individual members of a family only blindly followed the leader without belief of their own, but that they embraced the wise judgement of the head of their household

## Jewish/Christian Relations in the First Century

### Jews and the Jesus Movement

- Most establishment religious leaders opposed the new movement.
  - **Pharisees** were Jewish fundamentalists, the self-appointed guardians of the faith.
    - They considered the Nazarenes to be deluded fanatics and apostates.
  - **Sadducees** were the cultured, cosmopolitan elite.
    - They resented a movement that worshiped the one whom they had recently condemned to death.
  - **Scribes** (most of whom were Pharisees) were the scholarly and academic elite.

- They were not impressed by a new cult that venerated a marginally educated, itinerant teacher who had been condemned to death for heresy and blasphemy.
  - Some scribes and Pharisees believed they were living under foreign occupation because their ancestors had strayed into apostasy.
    - Therefore, to tolerate this new sect might bring the wrath of God on them all.
- Early on, the Sanhedrin arrested **Peter** and **John** for preaching in public. [Acts 4:1-22]
  - Since the apostles had committed no criminal act, and due to their popularity among the people of Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders dared not punish them.
  - They warned them not to teach in the name of Jesus.
- Some time later, **Stephen**, a gifted young church leader, was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin.
  - He was charged with blasphemy against Moses and God.
  - When Stephen boldly confronted his accusers, they dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death.
- Immediately, intense persecution broke out against the church.
  - All except the apostles were scattered throughout the region.
- A few years later, in 42 AD, **King Herod Agrippa I** (r. 41-44 AD) inaugurated a second wave of persecution against the Nazarenes in Jerusalem.
  - According to Josephus, Herod was eager to please the Romans and the Jewish religious establishment:
    - “[Herod] was especially desirous of impressing [his subjects] with his careful observance of the Mosaic law and his zeal for the national religion.... Having gone to Jerusalem to keep the first Passover after his accession, he resolved to give a signal mark of his fervor as a defender of the faith, by the summary execution of **James**, the son of Zebedee.... But finding his action had pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest **Peter** also....” [Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.6]
  - James, one of Jesus’ original disciples, was beheaded, and Peter was imprisoned.

## The Spread of Christianity.

- Persecution only worked to spread the gospel.
  - Everywhere the persecuted Nazarenes fled, they carried the gospel with them.
- As a result, instead of one mega-church in Jerusalem, there were hundreds of local churches scattered throughout the region.
- With the conversion of the brilliant Pharisee, **Saul** (or **Paul**), the gospel was carried beyond the Levant into Cyprus, Asia Minor, and eventually into Europe.
- Throughout his 12-year career as a missionary, the apostle Paul encountered opposition from Jews.
  - Typically, when he entered a new city, he preached the gospel in local synagogues.
  - Using the OT scriptures and the facts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, Paul would argue that Jesus was the Messiah and the spiritual Savior of humanity.
  - On numerous occasions, local Jews stirred up opposition, and several times Paul and his associates were nearly killed in riots.
- Although thousands of Jews converted to Christianity in the first 3 decades of the movement, the vast majority stubbornly resisted.
- Relations between Christians and Jews were typically tense throughout this period.

- Even within Christian churches, there were ongoing conflicts between converted Jews, who still retained many of the dietary and cultural traditions of Judaism, and more liberal “Gentile” Christians.

## The Jerusalem Church.

- Although there is little mention of the Jerusalem Church in the historical records after 49 AD, we know that a church continued to meet until the Zealot Revolt of AD 66-70.
- Throughout its short history, the Jerusalem church struggled.
  - From the outset, Christians in Jerusalem were harassed, ostracized, even persecuted at times.
  - Perhaps the church had a disproportionate number of poor Christians.
  - Economic problems might have stemmed from the church’s early communistic practices, as wealthy members sold their possessions to support those who were needy.

## Martyrdom of James “the Just” (c. 61 AD).

- James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the acknowledged leader in the Jerusalem Church.
- A devout Jew, he reportedly won many of his fellow-Jews to the Christian faith by his manner of life and testimony to Jesus.
- In 61 AD, the Roman procurator **Festus** died, and before his successor could take office the Jewish high priest, **Hanan** (or **Ananus**), seized the opportunity to persecute James.
- **Josephus** noted the circumstances surrounding the murder of James:
  - “When [Nero] Caesar heard of the death of Festus, he sent **Albinus** to Judea as governor. But the younger Ananus, who had received the high priesthood, was headstrong in temperament and reckless. He followed the sect of the Sadducees, who are the most cruel among the Jews when they sit in judgment... Having such a character, Ananus thought that with Festus dead and Albinus still on the way he would have the proper opportunity. Convening the judges of the Sanhedrin, he brought before them James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned. But those of the city residents who were the most fair-minded and who were strict in observing the Law were offended by this. They secretly contacted the king [Agrippa II], urging him to order Ananus to desist from any more such actions, for he had not been justified in what he had already done. Some of them even went to meet Albinus, who was on his way from Alexandria, and informed him that Ananus had no authority to convene the Sanhedrin without his consent. Convinced by these words, Albinus wrote in anger to Ananus, threatening him with punishment. And King Agrippa, because of this, deposed him from the high priesthood, in which he had ruled for three months....” [Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.197-203]
- According to **Clement of Rome** (c. 95 AD), James was thrown down from the parapet of the temple and clubbed to death.
- **Hegesippus** (early 2nd century) provides an extended account of James’ martyrdom:
  - James was a bold and effective witness for Christ, having convinced many of the people, including some of the leaders, that Jesus was the Messiah. Now “there was an uproar among the Jews, scribes and Pharisees saying that the whole populace was in danger of expecting Jesus as the Christ. So they assembled and said to James, ‘We call on you to restrain the people, since they have gone astray

after Jesus, believing him to be the Christ. We call on you to persuade all who come for the Passover concerning Jesus, since all of us trust you. We and the entire populace can vouch for the fact that you are righteous and [discerning]. So do persuade the crowd not to err regarding Jesus, since we and all the people respect you. So stand on the parapet of the temple, where you can be clearly seen from that height and your words be heard by all the people... gathered for the Passover. So the scribes and Pharisees made James stand on the temple parapet, and they shouted to him, 'O righteous one, whom we all ought to believe, since the people are going astray after Jesus who was crucified, tell us, what does 'the door of Jesus' mean? [James] replied with a loud voice, 'Why do you ask me about the Son of Man? He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and he will come in the clouds of heaven.' Many were convinced and rejoiced at James' testimony... Then the scribes and Pharisees said to each other, 'We made a bad mistake in providing such testimony to Jesus, but let us go up and throw him down so that they will be afraid and not believe him.' And they cried out, 'Oh, oh, even the just one has gone astray!' So they went up and threw down the righteous one. Then they said to one another, 'Let us stone James the Just,' and they began to stone him, since the fall had not killed him. But he turned and knelt down, saying, 'I implore you, O Lord, God and Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.' While they were pelting him with stones, one of the priests cried out, 'Stop! What are you doing? The righteous one is praying for you.' Then one of them, a laundryman, took the club that he used to beat out clothes, and hit James the Just on the head. Such was his martyrdom. They buried him on the spot by the temple, and his gravestone is still there by the temple." [Hegesippus, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23]

- Eusebius notes that immediately after the martyrdom of James, the Jewish Revolt erupted and Roman legions destroyed the city.
  - He quotes Josephus: "These things happened to the Jews as retribution for James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus who was called Christ, for the Jews killed him despite his great righteousness."
  - [NOTE: This statement is not found in the extant texts of Josephus, but is cited by Origen. It is probably an insertion in the text by a Christian scribe prior to Origen and Eusebius.]

## Post-Script on James.

- In 2002, *Biblical Archaeology Review* announced that a limestone ossuary had been discovered in the Jerusalem area bearing the inscription, "**James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus**" ("Ya'akov bar Josef akhui diYeshua").
  - While ossuary inscriptions with the deceased father's name were somewhat common, a brother's name was rarely listed unless he was particularly notable.
- According to the magazine, scientific tests confirmed that the box dated to the first century.
  - Furthermore, the surface patina on the box matched the age of the patina in the grooves of the etched inscription.
  - [NOTE: Between 20 BC and 70 AD, Jews practiced a two-burial procedure: First, the corpse was laid out in a burial cave for about a year. After the flesh decayed, the bones were gathered and placed in an ossuary to await the resurrection of the dead.]

# Part II

## Greco-Roman Culture

### **Roman Civilization** (fl. 390 B.C. - 476 A.D.)

#### **The Grandeur That Was Rome.**

- About the time Alexander the Great was conquering the Persian Empire, the Italian city-state of Rome was fighting to expand its control over the Italian peninsula.
- For 300 years, Rome was almost constantly at war.
- By the 1st century AD, Rome had forced its rule over most of the Hellenistic world and throughout much of Europe.
  - Geographically, the Roman Empire encompassed nearly the entire Mediterranean area.
  - The empire stretched from Spain in the west to the Euphrates River in the east; from Scotland in the north to the Sahara Desert in the south.
  - At the time of Christ the Roman Empire included about 45 million people – about 15-20% of the total world population.
  - **[NOTE: Total world population in the 1st century was probably less than 300 million – or about the population of the United States circa 1990.]**
- As Rome expanded, it absorbed and assimilated much of the rich Hellenistic culture.
  - Although Romans sometimes referred to Greeks as “Greeklings,” Greek values and culture permeated Roman civilization.
  - The Roman Empire was essentially Hellenistic civilization dominated by the Roman imperial state.
  - The civilization, culture, literature, art, and even religion of Rome came almost entirely from the Greeks, over several centuries of acculturation.
  - As a later historian would note, “Greece has conquered her rude conqueror.”
- Roman contributions to civilization included:
  - Building and engineering technology.
    - EX: Concrete, the arch, the dome.
  - Roman civil law – the model for subsequent codes in Western civilization.

#### **Roman Society.**

- Like most all ancient civilizations, Roman society was highly stratified and was composed of 3 classes:
  - The **nobiles**, who held the prestigious positions in the government and military.
    - Rich **patrician/senators**, who constituted the social and governing elite.
    - The aristocracy (the **knight** or **equestrian** class), many of whom forged successful careers in the government and military.
      - Others became rich as businessmen, merchants, moneylenders, and government contractors.
    - Wealthy commoners – well-connected men who also profited as businessmen, merchants, government tax collectors, government contractors, etc.
  - The common masses – **plebeians**.



- Farmers, common laborers, artisans, craftsmen, shopkeepers, soldiers, sailors, and the urban masses (the *proletariat*).
  - Plebeian class also included large numbers of freedmen – emancipated slaves.
- **Slaves** constituted about 15-20% of the population in Rome, and was even higher in the empire as a whole.
  - Slavery was not race-based; one could become a slave due to military conquest, being convicted of a crime, by birth to a slave, or by defaulting on debts Aristotle defined a slave as a “living tool”, and argued that there were people who were slaves “by nature”, and that it was only good and right for those people to be enslaved by others
  - Slaves performed most of the hard manual labor on the farms and in the mines, and served as household servants.
  - For the rich elite, owning slaves was prestigious and essential for maintaining their privileged lifestyle.
    - Most patricians owned dozens of slaves, and most *nobiles* had at least 2 or 3.
  - A master’s control over his slaves was total, and cruelty was not uncommon.
    - Masters could consign slaves to death: If the master decided to punish the slave with death, he could hire the municipal executioner to do the job and pay only the cost of the materials needed to burn the victim's body.
  - In public courts slaves could be tortured to force them to testify to crimes by their masters.
  - **Paul Veyne**: “Slaves had neither wives nor children [at least, not officially]. Their lovemaking and childbearing were like the breeding of livestock.”
    - “Breeding” was only to happen at the consent of the master, and children born to a male slave were the property of that slave’s master
  - In addition to the biblical writers, several Greco-Roman and Jewish writers sought to alleviate the harsh conditions of slaves and to encourage benevolence on the part of masters; ideally, slaves served their masters and masters took care of their slaves
  - The condition of slaves varied, depending upon the good graces of their master.
    - Some slaves were prominent socially and economically, and better off than most citizens; Imperial slaves – the “household of Caesar” – were found as bureaucrats and civil servants at every level throughout the empire
    - Some masters emancipated their slaves in their wills, and it was possible for slaves to purchase their freedom; emancipated slaves were expected to remain loyal to the master’s house.
  - Social mobility was actually better for many freedmen than for most poor citizens.
- The whole Roman social system was based on classism, elitism and exploitation:
  - The legal codes and tax system were skewed in favor of the rich.
  - **Edward Gibbon**: “Under the Roman empire, the labour of an industrious and ingenious people was... incessantly, exploited in the service of the rich. In their

dress, their dining, their houses, and their furniture, the elite utilized every refinement of convenience, of elegance, and of splendour, whatever could soothe their pride, or gratify their sensuality.” [*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*]

- This oppression and exploitation of the poor was a major focus of the Epistle of James
- In large cities such as Rome, the *proletariat* was a constant threat to social order.
  - Ignorant, uneducated, impoverished, and perpetually unemployed, many were disgruntled and disorderly.
  - To keep the urban masses pacified, Roman authorities provided welfare and entertainment – “**Bread and Circuses.**”
- Roman citizenship was highly prized.
  - Citizens were guaranteed (at least in theory) equal justice under the law, and had the right of appeal to Rome against the judicial decisions of local officials.
  - Citizens were exempt from the most degrading forms of punishment such as flogging – and crucifixion.

## Imperial Government.

- Beginning with **Caesar Augustus**, the old Roman Republic was transformed into an empire.
  - Augustus inaugurated the era of the *Pax Romana* – the “Peace of Rome.”
- The **emperor** was an initially hereditary monarch with near-absolute power.
  - The Roman imperial system essentially functioned as a huge military dictatorship.
  - Officially, the emperor was confirmed by the Senate.
  - He made high-level political appointments and presided over the bureaucracy.
  - He also functioned as a one-man supreme court; any Roman citizen could plead a case to the emperor, as Paul did.
- The **Senate** served as an advisory body.
  - As Rome’s most prestigious body, it included the wealthiest and most powerful men in the empire.
  - Ambitious senators vied for positions of power and prestige, and many served as the emperor’s unofficial cabinet and senior administrators.
- Governors ruled over the outlying provinces.
  - **Proconsuls** governed the older senatorial provinces in which there was little threat to peace – e.g., Greece, Egypt, North Africa, etc.
    - Hence, proconsuls usually had no standing army at their disposal.
  - **Legates** served as both military governor and chief magistrate over large frontier provinces in which there was danger of insurrections or invasions – e.g., Syria, Gaul, etc.
  - **Prefects** (later, **procurators**) administered smaller frontier provinces and commanded military forces in the area – e.g., **Judea**.
  - Most Roman governors were corrupt with little regard for justice.
- Roman Empire was actually a federation of semi-autonomous city-states, or **civitates**.
  - Most cities had their own senatorial elite and were governed by a municipal council of 100 aristocrats.
  - Wealthy and influential citizens were often eager to join the ranks of the governing aristocracy (the **curialis**) because of the prestige, the power and the perks involved.

- Although most *civitates* were essentially self-governing, ultimately they came under Roman law and paid taxes into the Roman treasury.
- Most officials in the Roman state were arrogant, ambitious, greedy and corrupt.
  - Most used their positions to enrich themselves, reward their friends, and punish their enemies.
  - Corruption in government was nearly universal.
  - **Paul Veyne**: “In Rome every superior stole from his subordinates.... Every public function was a racket; those in charge ‘put the squeeze’ on their subordinates, and all together exploited the populace.... Even the least important public positions were sold by their incumbents to aspiring candidates, because every position carried with it a guaranteed income in the form of bribes. Public officials paid themselves. The troops that patrolled the countryside and were responsible for rural administration forced the towns and villages under their jurisdiction to vote them gratuities. Every official had his palm greased before taking the slightest action.... Eventually, an official schedule of bribes was established and posted in every office, an act tantamount to legalized bribery... Supplicants were careful to bring money whenever they visited [an official].... “Demanding payment of illegal taxes was big business among provincial governors.... The central government [in Rome] allowed these abuses to continue, content to receive its due.... Imperial authorities refrained from exhibiting too much curiosity about the way in which taxes were extorted from the peasantry.” [*A History of Private Life From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*]
  - Many civic building projects were money pits in which corrupt contractors and conniving governors greedily exploited the system.
  - **Paul Veyne**: “The cardinal virtue of the [public] official was *tact*, not honesty.” [*Ibid.*]

## The Military.

- Rome maintained law and order through over-powering military and naval forces.
- In the time of Christ, the Roman army consisted of 28 legions – nearly 300,000 men.
  - These consisted of at least 100,000 legionary forces – professional troops – and more than 150,000 auxiliary troops drawn from the provinces.
  - Most troops were stationed in the provinces to guard against revolts or foreign invasions.
- The **Praetorian Guard**, an elite cohort of 5,000 soldiers stationed in Rome, served as the emperor’s personal bodyguard.
- Augustus continued Julius Caesar’s policy of granting land to army veterans.
  - Retired soldiers bolstered local defenses throughout the provinces.
  - In addition, service in the army was rewarded with Roman citizenship.

## Roman Culture.

- Under Roman rule, the entire Mediterranean world shared a **common Hellenistic culture**.
  - **Latin** was the official language of the empire.
  - **Greek** was the universal language of trade, education and religion – most all educated people were conversant in Greek; it is possible that Jesus did some or most of his teaching in Greek
- Greco/Roman civilization was an **urban-based, cosmopolitan culture**.

- Although the vast majority of people lived in the countryside, political power was concentrated in the cities.
- Throughout the empire, hundreds of provincial cities reproduced Roman civilization.
- Many cities were adorned with temples dedicated to Roman gods, government buildings, public baths, archways and monuments, stone aqueducts, amphitheaters for public games, and schools where Latin literature was taught.
- **Cities were the nerve centers of the empire**, linked together by an elaborate network of waterways and over a quarter of a million miles of roads.
  - In the 1st century BC, the Roman navy had suppressed much of the piracy along the major shipping lanes and in the Mediterranean.
  - Likewise, travel on land was safer than ever as Roman officials and military forces suppressed common thieves and bandits.
  - To stimulate trade, Rome eliminated tolls and artificial trade barriers within the empire.
  - **Ivor Davidson**: “Travel and trade were more efficient in the Roman world than at any time prior to the 19th century.”
- **Rome** was the largest city and the capital of the civilized world.
  - At the time of Christ, it had a population of perhaps 800,000 residents.
  - **The Great Sewer** serviced the homes of the rich as well as public baths and latrines. (The Great Sewer is the city’s oldest extant engineering monument and is still in use today after 2500 years.)
  - Eleven aqueducts channeled fresh water into the city from nearby hills and provided 50 gallons per day per resident. (Of course, some got more than their share – the water and sewer systems by- passed the poor sections of the city.)
- Other prominent cities at the time of Christ included:
  - **Alexandria**, Egypt, with a population about half that of Rome (350-400,000).
  - **Ephesus**, with a population about half that of Alexandria (200,000).
  - **Antioch** in Syria, with a population of about 150,000.
  - Cities such as **Corinth** and **Carthage** had populations between 100-120,000.
- Many upwardly-mobile people thrived in this environment.
  - They could transcend local traditions and live as citizens of the world.
  - The elite enjoyed many luxuries:
    - Their houses were often spacious and well-built, and included courtyards, protective walls with bars on the windows, gardens and fountains, indoor plumbing and bathrooms, and decorative artwork.
    - Some houses even featured central heat.
- Conversely, there was tremendous disparity between the lifestyles of the wealthy and the poor.
  - As in all pre-modern cities, the living conditions for most urbanites were cramped, squalid, unsanitary, and dangerous.
  - Most commoners lived in 5- or 6-story tenement houses made of concrete and brick, with wooden floors.
    - These buildings were firetraps, as all heating and cooking was done on small stoves or braziers.
  - There were no sanitation systems: people used chamber pots for relief, then dumped the contents either into vats on staircase landings or just emptied them into city streets.
- For rich and poor, city life was dangerous.

- There were no streetlights and no police force, and cities were dangerous at night.
- Wealthy residents traveled through the city at night only with an armed escort.
- Urbanites depended upon the surrounding countryside for food, and during times of famine, war, or natural disasters, the delicate food distribution network often failed, resulting in massive starvation in the cities.
- In many regions, traditionalists feared the effects of homogenized Hellenistic culture:
  - It disrupted historic customs and beliefs and left many feeling alienated and rootless.
    - EX: Many pious Jews, both before and during the time of Christ, resented the Hellenizing influences of Greco/Roman civilization.

## The Family

- A person's family was the starting point for his identity and status in society, shaping his self-perception and other's perception of him, in both Roman and Jewish society
  - The importance of family in the ancient world can be seen in the abundance of genealogies in both the Bible and other ancient works; genealogies were used to indicate important information about the person, such as a claim to status, honor, or power (note the two different genealogies of Jesus – Matthew shows Jesus' place in the overall family of Abraham and his claim to Davidic descent, while Luke going all the way back to Adam illustrates the universality of Jesus)
- Behavior was very different towards members of one's family than it was towards outsiders, and treating a family member like an outsider was highly dishonorable
- The world outside the family was competitive
  - Non-family members were viewed with suspicion, as rivals or antagonists to one's pursuit of honor;
  - Family members, on the other hand, were to be taken care of through solidarity and cooperation, seeking to increase their honor along with your own, and older and/or more capable family members were not to lord their position over others
  - Members of one's family were trusted in a way almost never seen outside the family (the patron/client relationship – discussed later – was an exception to this rule); even if you found a relative you had been unaware of before, trust was expected to be extended as a matter of course (Tobit 5:8-14)
- Family members were expected to share values and viewpoints
  - Harmony, concord, and unity were key ideas; this included the ideal that a family should all share the same religion
- Family members were expected to hold all things in common
  - Siblings were not to allow money or inheritance to come between them, and family members were expected to provide for any kin who was in need
- Family was also expected to cover up the shame of any other members (Joseph with Mary, for example); forgiveness and reconciliation were seen as essential among kin to preserve family unity
- The household was an important unity of family, though "family" went far beyond it

- A household consisted of the father/master, wife, children, as well as any slaves held by them, as well as often extended family members; guests, while they were there, were also considered members of the household
- Marriage among Jews was endogamous – they tended to marry close kin (while not violating laws against incest) – and at the least they would be expected to marry another Jew
  - This was weakened among Hellenistic Jews, who often sought to integrate into the broader culture
- Jewish marriage was preceded by a lengthy betrothal that could only be broken by divorce, along with lengthy and detailed marriage contracts, and the couple tended to live in or near the groom's father's house
- Roman marriage was usually exogamous – outside the kinship group – and was often intended to create strategic alliances between families
- Legally, all Roman women had to be under the guardianship of a male
  - Marriage *cum manu* meant that the woman was under the authority of her husband
  - Marriage *sine manu* meant that the woman remained under the ultimate authority of her father
- Legally, only Roman citizens could be married in the eyes of the state
- The purpose of marriage was to provide both progeny and inheritance
  - To the Romans, the purpose of marriage was **not** to provide a wife for a satisfying sexual relationship
  - Wives were for the production of heirs, while sexual satisfaction was to be sought elsewhere, such as with mistresses, prostitutes, or young boys; by some
  - It was actually seen as more honorable for the wives if their husbands used another woman for gratification, leaving them pure for childbearing
- In the very common case of divorce, the woman returned to her father's family, along with her dowry
  - In Greco-Roman culture, either the husband or wife could initiate divorce, while for the Jews, only the husband could
  - Women could be divorced if they were barren or even just disobedient (Sir. 25:26)
- The father – the *pater familias* – was the unquestioned leader of the household, with ultimate authority over even life and death
  - Ideally, with this power came great responsibility, as the father was seen as the font of rational authority
  - Ideally, while the father's power was absolute over children and slaves, it was more in concert with his wife; the husband and wife were partners, but the husband was definitely the senior partner
- Because women married so young, the husband was expected to train the wife in the management of the household; after that, however, the household was under the wife's rule, entrusted with enforcing the decrees and agenda of her husband
  - In a large household, this could result in considerable authority even outside the walls; nonetheless, the woman was to be silent around outsiders and only speak to and through her husband
- Daughters' names were feminine forms of their father's name: Julia, Cornelia, Claudia, etc.

- Females were granted adult status at age 14, and many marriages were arranged by fathers.
  - Marriage required no legal contract.
  - Some marriages were formal arrangements, while others were more like common-law co-habitation.
  - Unlike Jewish culture, Hellenistic culture did not regard marriage as a holy union.
- Traditionally, Greek society was extraordinarily sexist.
  - Even in the Classical Age in Athens, women had few civil liberties.
    - They could neither vote nor hold property.
    - They took no part in civic affairs or public entertainment such as sporting events and theaters.
  - Most marriages were arranged by parents (typically, girls would be in their early teens while husbands might be 25-30 years old.)
  - A wife's main functions were to bear children and manage the household.
  - For the most part, Greek women led a secluded life and were confined to the home – when a husband entertained guests, his wife remained in the kitchen in the back of the house except when serving food and drinks.
  - Most philosophers and statesmen agreed that women are inferior and should be subordinate.
    - **Socrates** considered women inferior to be “the weaker sex” – to be born a woman was tantamount to a divine curse.
    - **Plato** considered that women were generally inferior to men, and gave thanks that he was not a woman or a barbarian.
    - According to **Xenophon**, the ideal woman was one who saw as little as possible, heard as little as possible, and asked as few questions as possible.
    - **Pericles** stated that it was the duty of an Athenian mother to live so retired a life that her name would never be mentioned among men, either for praise or for shame.
    - **Aristotle** taught that a husband and wife function like a body, with the husband as the head.
    - The statesman **Demosthenes** summed up the Greek attitude toward women: “We have courtesans for our pleasure, prostitutes [i.e., young female slaves] for daily physical use, and wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters.”
- In general, Roman society was not nearly so sexist as Classical Greek society had been
  - Women could attend public functions and walk the streets unattended.
  - Also, they could inherit property and even initiate divorce.
  - However, they had no legal role in politics – they could not vote.
  - Nor were they entitled to the free distribution of bread which politicians periodically used to win favor with the masses or suppress unrest.
- Roman men tended to share the Greek idea that women exist to:
  - Provide sexual pleasure for men, or
  - Keep house and raise legitimate children.
- In Greco/Roman pagan religion, women fared no better:

- They were excluded from most public celebrations and were prohibited from worshipping in temples with men.
- Some were used as temple prostitutes.
- Jewish writers also saw the wife as subservient
  - **Josephus:** “The woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed, for the authority has been given by God to the man.” (*Against Apion*; 2.199)
- Jewish women appear to have had greater dealings with the public, but less actual legal freedom; their ideal was silence, seclusion, and modesty, having no friends or religion of her own, but sharing her husbands
- While women were treated as chattel in several ways – they were given in marriage and could even be sold as slaves by their fathers, and had to live under the guardianship of a male – they do not appear to have been seen as property in the same way as slaves
- Children were ruled over by their father like the subjects of an absolute monarch
  - As they were given life by their parents, they were obligated to honor and obey them; they had a debt to their parents they could never repay (in many ways, the parent/child relationship was very similar to the patron/client relationship)
  - Roman fathers had authority over even their married sons until death
- Children were seen as reflecting their parents, possessing a “wondrous likeness both of mind and of form” (4 Macc. 15:4); because of this, the behavior of children reflected on their parents – honorable behavior would increase the parents’ honor, and dishonorable behavior their dishonor (look at how Jesus addressed the Pharisees, as sons of the devil)
- Families could and did exert tremendous pressure on those kin who left the religion and values of the family, up to disowning or divorcing the offender, in order to preserve the honor of the family as a whole in the community
  - This is reflected in Jesus’ words about leaving “brothers or sisters or fathers or mothers or children” (Mt. 19:29) and the picture of the church as the believer’s new family (“fictive kinship”) with God as Father

## Education

- Most children were educated in the home, and usually given some grasp of writing, reading, and counting (though not full literacy)
- All children, at first, were educated by their mother
  - After the sons were around five or six, they were educated by their father
  - Girls would continue to be taught by their mother solely what they needed to be married
- Education – among both Jews and Romans – included religious education
- The children of Roman citizens could go to public schools for more advanced education
  - In order to produce the next generation of statesmen; they would be trained in rhetoric, composition, and classical philosophy, as well as exercising the voice and body
  - Upper-class Jewish children attended advanced Torah schools, where they learned argumentation and communication



- In the 1st century, the literacy rate in the empire was probably in the 10-15% range.
  - [NOTE: Among Jews, the literacy rate was probably much higher. Jewish boys (and girls) needed to know how to read the scriptures in order to help preserve their religious traditions and other distinctive cultural traits.]

## Greek and Roman Houses

- Both Greek and Roman houses were arranged around a partially-covered inner courtyard (the *atrium*), with the separate rooms of the house opening into it
- Several rooms were reserved for private use, but much of the house was intended for entertainment and production; much of the house was intended for public use, not private
- Roman households did not only consume, they produced
  - The members of the household worked together in a trade or craft to provide income, with one room of the house open to the street as a shop
  - For more upper-class households, the home was a space for networking, with country estates providing goods that created income
- The dining room in Greek homes (the *andron* – “place of men”) often had a raised floor along the sides for dining couches where people would recline (the Roman equivalent was the *triclinium*, which had three dining couches)
  - A Greek house would also have a large living room spanning one side of the house for receiving guests

## Patrons and Clients

- At the heart of the Roman social and business world was the patron/client relationship, which would look to us like nepotism
  - “it’s all about who you know”
  - This relationship is the primary way in which a Christian’s relationship with God is pictured in the New Testament
- As property, wealth, and goods were concentrated in the hands of a few, if a member of the lower classes needed things like financial help in starting a business or a safety net after business failure, protection, debt relief, political favors or positions, or similar things, that person would approach a member of the upper class and petition for a “favor”
  - If the petition was granted, it would begin a long-term relationship between the one who granted the favor – the “patron” – and the one receiving the favor – the “client”
  - **David deSilva:** “This relationship would be marked by the mutual exchange of desired goods and services, the patron being available for assistance in the future, the client doing everything in his or her power to enhance to fame and honor of the patron (publicizing the benefit and showing the patron respect), remaining loyal to the patron and providing services whenever the opportunity arose.” (deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, & Purity*)
- This interaction was not one of a formal contract or rules, but of relationship
  - The patron would essentially treat the client as part of his family, taking responsibility for his well-being
  - The client would make himself available to serve the patron in whatever way presented itself out of “gratitude” to the patron
  - The contribution from the patron was seen as an unmerited favor that the client could never truly repay

- The Greek word for this was “*charis*”, which is translated in the New Testament as “mercy”
  - In return the client would serve the patron in whatever way he needed as an expression of eternal gratitude
    - This was referred to as the client expressing “*pistis*”, or “faithfulness”, to the patron; this was also seen as a form of grace, “repay grace with grace”
- Sometimes the grace extended by the patron was the introduction of the client to another, even higher-ranking benefactor, who would be able to meet the request of the client
  - The go-between was referred to as a mediator, and the higher-ranking patron would take on the client based on his own relationship with the mediator
  - This would increase the honor of both the patron and the mediator
- This kind of mutually-beneficial relationship could also exist between people of equal social status; in this case, the two were referred to as “friends”
  - A patron would also refer to his clients as his “friends” as a means of saving face and politely ignoring the lower status of the clients, but the client would never refer to the patron as a “friend”, as it would have been highly presumptuous to do so
- Theoretically, the favor of the patron was extended purely out of benevolence, with no expectation of return, as it was known that the client could never really pay it back
  - It was absolutely expected of the client to repay this grace with faithfulness, and there was nothing more dishonorable for a client to break faith with his client
  - A client was expected to be always looking for a way to repay the grace of the patron and give him honor
- All gifts in the ancient world came with strings; to accept a gift from another was to make yourself his client, with all the associated expectations
  - This is why Paul was so insistent that gifts to him were actually gifts to God (Phil. 4:10-18) and why he earned his own living whenever possible
- **Richards and O’Brien:** “Imagine a young baker named Marcus in the town of Philippi. Marcus learned to bake bread from his father. The family business stretched back to the founding of Philippi five generations back. Marcus’s family was, consequently, one of the founding members of the bakers’ guild. A hundred years ago, his ancestor had retired from the Roman army— he had baked bread for the army of Octavius Augustus during the glorious victory over Anthony. As a reward, his family, which had originated in the province of Lydia in Asia Minor, had been given Roman citizenship and land in Philippi. He had a true tripartite Roman name: Marcus Augustus Lydia.

“When his father was young, Vesta (the goddess of fire and the protector of bakers) became angry and a fire destroyed the family bakery. Marcus’s father went to a wealthy widow, a cloth merchant who was also from the province of Lydia, to seek help. Julia Lydia loaned his father the money to rebuild the bakery. Thus began an enduring relationship. Today, Marcus sells all his bread to Lydia, including all the members of her extended household, which covers an entire city block of Philippi, plus all her other “friends” (the various merchants with whom Lydia does business). These customers give Marcus all the business he and his young sons can handle. He sells his bread at a reasonable price and his family makes a good (though modest) living. Lydia ensures that no one takes advantage of anyone else.

“Three years ago, the barley sellers raised their prices. All the bakers panicked. Naturally, Marcus asked his patroness to help. She invited the patron of the barley merchants to dinner. During a civilized meal, Lydia mentioned her friend “Marcus” and his difficult situation. The two patrons discussed how they could best help their friends, arriving at a fair price for barley flour. This trade negotiation disguised as a dinner

discussion was a binding trade agreement. Lydia did what was appropriate as the patron of Marcus the baker. Of course such relationships were two sided. Last year, one of Lydia's slaves awakened Marcus in the middle of the night. Lydia needed a favor. She had received special guests, and she was planning an elaborate dinner party for some wealthy families of Philippi for which she needed special bread to serve at this important banquet. The guests had brought a letter that she planned to have read to the group. She needed Marcus to cook something special. How could he refuse his patroness? It took all night, but he made sure the bread was ready.

“The “rules” for what was expected of a patron and a client were not painted on Roman city walls (political slogans were). The rules for the truly foundational institutions of society, like family and patronage, went without being said. Everyone knew what the proper behavior was. A good patron solved the problems of his or her clients: assisting with trade guilds, business disputes, refinancing loans and easing tensions with city elders. Ordinary folks like Marcus had neither the clout nor the social graces to negotiate such endeavors. The patron did “favors” for his clients who then fell under his circle of influence and protection. In return, the client was expected to be loyal (faithful) and was sometimes asked to do things for the patron.” (E. Randolph Richards & Brandon O’Brian, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*)

- Possibly the best example of this to modern Western minds is the Godfather

## Roman Religion

### General Characteristics.

- **Greco/Roman polytheism.**
  - Traditional Greco/Roman paganism was a polytheistic religion that honored a pantheon of anthropomorphic gods who personified the forces of nature.
  - Like the Greeks before them, the Romans were prolific builders of temples and shrines to the gods.
  - **Ivor Davidson:** “The Roman Empire was a world full of gods.... Images of gods and goddesses were found in gardens and in shop windows, and there were shrines and statues at crossroads and along the roadsides. Temples of all shapes and sizes were a standard element of public architecture.” [*The Birth of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 27ff]
    - They believed the gods actually dwelt in these structures.
- **Superstition.**
  - The Roman worldview recognized supernatural forces that pervaded the cosmos.
    - These forces, or demons (Greek: **daimons**), could be either good or evil.
  - Furthermore, the Romans were exceedingly superstitious.
    - Seers determined the will of the gods by observing the flight patterns of birds, the entrails of dead animals, or the feeding patterns of chickens.
    - Until the time of Constantine, astrology was considered a respectable religion among the elite.
    - No military campaign or official act was conducted without first discerning the will of the gods through some act of divination.
    - Most homes included a shrine to the *Lares*, the protective spirits of the household (usually the spirits of dead ancestors).
  - Wealthier citizens often displayed small statues or paintings of the household gods.
  - **L. Michael White:** “It was a numinous world with supernatural forces all around, and one dared not show a lack of proper reverence for fear of retribution.... Thus, the ability to exercise some control over these forces was a

major goal of one's personal religious devotion. For this reason, the magical arts – astrology, divination, and magic – were extremely popular.” [*From Jesus To Christianity*, p. 53]

- **Religious Syncretism and Pluralism.**

- Roman religion was innately syncretistic.
- There was nothing unique or exclusive about Roman religion – it was a composite religion that borrowed from earlier Greek, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Persian influences.
- When visiting other areas of the empire, travelers, traders, and soldiers often paid their respects to local deities.
- Likewise, Roman religion was pluralistic.
  - No one religion (or god) was worshiped exclusively.
  - **Ivor Davidson:** “Openness and tolerance were the norm, and most people [in the Roman world] could not understand why the practitioners of any religion should have felt the need to claim – as the Jews [and later the Christians] did – that their god was exclusive of all others.” [*The Birth of the Church*, p. 35]

- **Civil religion.**

- Roman culture was **sacralistic** – there was no separation of religion and government.
- Romans considered civil religion to be necessary for social harmony in the city-state.
- In most cities, temples dedicated to gods or goddesses were the most prominent public buildings, and Romans officially dedicated religious festivals and athletic games to these deities.
- Like most ancient civilizations, the Romans politicized their gods.
  - Gods served to promote the interests of state, and to defend Rome from its enemies.
- A committee of priests (**pontiffs**) was an adjunct of government.
  - Pontiffs were not professional clergy, but aristocrats who functioned as priests for one year at a time.
  - They presided over public sacrifices and served as guardians of sacred traditions – although, in fact, many aristocrats were skeptical toward religion.
- All citizens and subjects were expected to honor the gods of the state – it would be disloyal and unpatriotic to do otherwise.
  - Everyone was expected to observe the various holidays and participate in the processions and public ceremonies that honored the gods.

- **Emperor worship.**

- Beginning in the reign of Caesar Augustus, emperor worship became an integral part of Roman religion.
- Beginning with Augustus, the emperor was accorded god-like status
- Romans had always envisioned the gods as superhumans – therefore, they had few qualms deifying deceased emperors.
- The more megalomaniacal emperors such as Caligula, Nero, and Domitian demanded to be worshiped as gods *in this life*.

- **Amoral religion.**

- Greco/Roman religion was essentially amoral.
- According to Greco/Roman mythology, the gods were capricious, deceptive and amoral with little or no sense of justice and righteousness.

- There was no concept of sin and salvation.
  - Sacrifices were offered to placate the gods or induce them to grant favors, not to atone for sin.
- Mainstream religion was devoid of commandments, doctrines, and any ultimate authority.
- There was no “orthodox” understanding of an afterlife, and the emphasis was on pleasing the gods in the present world rather than worry about what happened after one died.
- **Paul Veyne**: “Roman paganism... without theology or church, was... more an *a la carte* religion than a religion with a fixed menu.”
- **Fate.**
  - In the 1st century AD, many Romans, including those attached to particular philosophies, tended to depersonalize the gods in favor of a single metaphysical force that pervaded the universe – **Fate**.
  - Originally, the concept of fate was based on the goddess **Fortuna** (Greek: **Tyche**).
  - Fortuna was often depicted as deaf and blind, and Fate was unpredictable, capricious, volatile, and amoral – hence, “fickle Fate.”

## Religion and Social Class.

- During the empire era, geography and social class often determined one’s religious orientation.
- Increasingly, the upper classes ignored traditional religion for Stoicism, Epicureanism or agnosticism.
- Lower classes often embraced mystery religious cults such as the Osiris Cult, Mithraism, or the Great Mother Cult.

## The Mystery Cults.

- Beginning in the 2nd century BC, a variety of exotic mystery cults proliferated in the Roman world.
- Most began in localities where some supposed supernatural event occurred, which spawned a local cult.
- Most of these mystery cults followed a general pattern:
  - A central myth that sought to explain the mysteries of life, death, salvation, and immortality;
  - Some form of initiation rite, which could include baptism (either in water or blood);
  - Some secret, esoteric knowledge or “password” that ensured eternal salvation;
  - Ritualistic fellowship meals.
- Mystery cults became increasingly popular in the 1st century AD.
- The **Orphic** (or **Dionysian**) cult was one of the first – it came to Rome in 193 BC.
  - This was an orgiastic cult based on the myth of the death and resurrection of Dionysus (or **Bacchus**).
  - Dionysus was the god of wine and of animal life, and in order to attain communion with their god, devotees (called **Bacchantes**) indulged in a drunken ritual called a **Bacchanalia**.
    - The purpose was to get thoroughly drunk and thereby experience the power of their god.



## Mystery Cults and Christianity.

- Many of these cults incorporated themes similar to core doctrines of Christianity.
- They offered:
  - Divine revelation;
  - A sense of community;
  - Vicarious atonement for sins;
  - Mystical union with the divine; and
  - Salvation in the afterlife.
- Mystics often went into ecstatic trances and prophesied – often by babbling in unknown tongues – and many believed that a divine spirit took possession of their psyches.
- Transcendent power was also manifested in miracles such as healings and exorcisms.
  - Traveling charismatics such as **Apollonius of Tyana** reportedly performed miracles and were regarded as divine prophets by some.
- Because these were secret societies, we know little about the specific rituals they practiced.
- Officially, the Roman state tolerated these cults so long as they posed no threat to the political or social order.

## Unity in Diversity?

- Despite the confusing plethora of gods and competing religious cults, some thinkers in the Roman world were willing to acknowledge that there was perhaps one Ultimate Reality – a single God – that transcended all human religious expressions.
  - This awareness dates back to the time of Socrates and Plato.

## Philosophy

### A Tangled Mess.

- By the 1st century AD, religion and philosophy were a tangled mess of competing and conflicting values and beliefs.
- Philosophers were an intellectual counterculture whose dress and lifestyle set them apart from mainstream society.
- The geographical breadth and ethnic diversity of the Roman Empire promoted a profusion and confusion of cultural traditions, intellectual speculations, and religious expressions.
  - **Walter Wagner:** “Teachers of rhetoric and philosophy, preachers of Asian and African religions, and defenders of Greco-Roman traditions jostled with astrologers, proclaimers of new revelations, and outright swindlers to offer their versions of the truth and their ways of life to eager and anxious people.” [*After the Apostles*, p. 43.]
- Some philosophers had a quasi-religious view of their vocation.
  - They often spoke of “conversion” in terms of turning away from their old way of life to a new, enlightened mode of living.
- Some philosophical schools, such as the Pythagoreans and Epicureans, practiced intentional community and shared all things in common.
- These various schools of philosophy were the real competition for early Christianity in the forum of ideas, as most religions were amoral and did not have a set doctrine. As such, they are often addressed in the writings of the New Testament

## Platonism.

- In the 1st century AD, Platonism was one of the most popular philosophies.
- **Plato** (428-347 BC) had taught that the material world was transient and imperfect, and that only spiritual concepts (“**Ideas**” or “**Forms**”) were permanent and real.
  - Everything physical and material is a mere shadow of an ultimate reality.
- Platonism was a dualistic philosophy that encouraged its followers to transcend the limitations of their physicality.
  - The physical body is a prison of the metaphysical soul.
- Like many other philosophers, Plato was contemptuous of traditional Greek religion.
- In the *Timaeus*, he declared that all morals and ethics are contained in a single transcendent principle – **The Good**.
  - Although Plato spoke of The Good as “God,” he didn’t think of it in personal terms – it was more of a Force.
  - Nonetheless, he declared that the material world was created by a Craftsman god – a **Demiourgos** – based on eternal Forms.
  - [NOTE: Similarly, **Aristotle** attributed the universe to a single divine power – the “**unmoved prime mover**.”]

## Stoicism.

- Stoicism was one of the most popular and respectable of the popular philosophies.
- **Zeno** (c. 336-264 BC), the founder of Stoicism, was an Athenian philosopher who taught that the universe is controlled by “God” – the divine principle and supreme force that orders the universe.
- Zeno conceived of the universe as a huge, organically connected living body, with “God” as its all-pervasive soul.
  - God could be conceived as **Logos** (Reason), **Pneuma** (Breath, or Spirit), or **Natural Law**.
- Like Platonism, Stoicism held a dualistic philosophy in which the human soul is a divine spark imprisoned within the body.
- Later Stoics de-emphasized the personal qualities of God and preferred to speak of “**Fate**” – the mysterious power that determines all that happens.
  - There is a fixed, rational plan for the universe – i.e., “**Nature**” – and everything has a purpose according to Nature.
  - Fate has so arranged the world according to Nature that all of life ultimately works for good.
- Since no man is master of his own fate or destiny, focus on things you can control: your mind, your attitudes, your reactions, and your desires.
- Happiness comes from moral rectitude – living in harmony with Nature and accepting whatever life brings.
  - Man’s challenge is to accept everything that happens – including misfortune, pain and suffering – with dignified tranquility.
- Mental tranquility is the by-product of living a virtuous life and passive resignation.
  - The primary virtues include self-discipline, courage, duty and moral conduct.
- Stoics believed in moderation in all things and opposed hedonism, indulgence, and any attempts to manipulate the forces of Fate.
- There was a strong humanitarian ethic in Stoicism.
  - Since all men are imperfect, tolerance and forgiveness of others is necessary.



- Many Stoics were socially conscious and encouraged active participation in government and society.
- Many were humanitarians who condemned war and slavery.
- In the 1st century A.D., **Seneca** (4 BC - 65 AD) was the most esteemed Stoic.
  - Blending elements of Stoicism and Platonism, he believed in an all-wise, monotheistic God.
  - He taught that every individual has an innate sense of God-consciousness:
    - “God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean... a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian.... No man can be good without the help of God.”
  - Seneca was highly-regarded by some Christians who believed he had been influenced by the apostle Paul during his stay in Rome. (In fact, Seneca was a hypocrite who used his position in Nero’s court to garner special privileges and enrich himself – very un-Stoic ethics.)
- Some secular scholars have attempted to portray Jesus as an itinerant Stoic philosopher

## **Epicureanism.**

- Epicureanism was a philosophy founded by the philosopher **Epicurus**.
- Epicurus (341-270 BC) advocated practicality in contrast to the esoteric abstractions of Platonism, and individualism in contrast to the social consciousness of Stoicism.
- Epicurus was a deist who claimed to believe in the gods, but held that they lived in the interstellar spaces outside the human sphere and were uninvolved in human affairs.
- In fact, he was a more of an agnostic and a materialist.
  - There is no divine providence and no afterlife.
  - Praying to the gods is foolish and superstitious – they can’t help you.
  - Therefore, humans should live without reference to the gods.
  - Religion should be avoided – it only induces guilt and interferes with our happiness.
  - Borrowing the atomic theory of the universe from the 5th century BC philosopher, **Democritus**, Epicurus believed that humans were materialistic beings composed of atoms.
    - When the body died, the soul also disintegrated.
- In contrast to the esoteric teachings of Platonism, Epicurus made personal sensation the standard of truth.
  - The ultimate goal of life is “pleasure” – i.e., individual happiness – and our own internal feelings and perceptions will guide into all truth.
  - Epicurus didn’t advocate self-indulgence or uncontrolled sensual gratification, but moderation in all things – the ancient Greek concept of **sophrosyne**.
  - The kind of pleasure he sought was mental tranquility and physical comfort.
- Epicureanism was essentially an escapist philosophy:
  - The ultimate pleasure in life is withdrawal from worldly concerns into philosophical contemplation and discussion.
- Later Epicureans abandoned the *sophrosyne* concept and turned the philosophy into a hedonistic, self-indulgent code of life.
  - Epicureans took little interest in social and political affairs.
  - Their main preoccupation was the gratification of sensual desires, and their motto became, “**Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die.**”

- Epicureanism never gained the widespread acceptance of Platonism or Stoicism.

## Skepticism.

- Skepticism was the Hellenistic equivalent of the old Sophist philosophy.
- **Sophists** (“Those who are wise”) were the leading exponents of the humanistic philosophy in ancient Greece – the “pop philosophers” of the day.
  - By profession, most sophists were teachers who trained wealthy and ambitious young men for public service careers.
  - Primarily, they taught the art of rhetoric – the ability to argue clearly and forcefully.
  - Since sophists were relativists who discounted truth, they could argue any point of view with equal fervor.
- Basic tenets of sophism:
  - **Skepticism:** Since all knowledge comes through the 5 senses, it is subjective and limited – we cannot say conclusively that anything is or is not
  - **Relativism:** There are no absolute or universal standards of right and wrong, and morality varies from one individual (and culture) to another.
  - **Individualism:** Ego-centrism and self-fulfillment are the only worthwhile goals in life.
- The refutation of sophist ideas was the primary focus of the great Classical philosophers such as **Socrates, Plato** and **Aristotle**.

## Cynicism.

- The weirdest philosophy was that of the Cynics.
- Not really a coherent philosophy, Cynicism was more of a nihilistic anti-philosophy.
- Cynics were civil libertarians who celebrated individualism and living “naturally.”
  - The enlightened person lived as he pleased with no thought for others or any higher standard of morality.
  - Hence, they advocated free sex and unbridled free speech.
- Cynics were self-appointed social critics who rejected all conventional mores.
  - Many were shameless exhibitionists who adopted a counter-cultural style, dressed in coarse clothes, engaged in provocative public behavior, and took pride in shocking mainstream society.
- The most infamous Cynic was **Diogenes** of Sinope (c. 400-325 B.C.).
  - As a proud societal rebel, he repudiated all traditional values.
  - He ridiculed all religious beliefs as foolishness.
  - Plato characterized him as “Socrates gone mad.”

## Neo-Pythagoreanism.

- Pythagoreanism was a quasi-religious mystical philosophy that emphasized asceticism, mysticism, and numerology.
- Like Platonism and Stoicism, Pythagoreanism held a dualistic view of humanity:
  - The body is base and corrupt – a prison of the soul.
- Pythagoreans practiced daily self-examination of their souls and confession of sins.
- Pythagoras might have been the first Westerner to believe in the transmigration of souls.
- In the decades before Christ, there was renewed interest in Pythagoreanism – **Neo-Pythagoreanism** – that influenced later **Gnosticism**.

- The Gnostic emphasis on *gnosis* – special mystical knowledge as the key to spiritual enlightenment – was borrowed from Pythagoreanism.

## Social Morality

### Conventional Morality.

- Greco/Roman religion was disconnected from morality and ethics, and philosophy was a world of conflicting and competing values.
- All cultures have values and codes of morality, but these can vary drastically from one culture to the next.
- Traditionally, Greeks and the Romans defined morality in terms of **arete** – the martial values such as patriotism, loyalty, courage, honor, sacrifice, etc.
- Greco/Roman values were drastically different from those of the Christian worldview.
  - **John Kagan:** “To understand the ancient Greeks and Romans we must be alert to the great gap that separates their views, and most people throughout history, from the opinions of our own time. They knew nothing of ideas such as would later be spoken in the Sermon on the Mount, and they would have regarded them as absurd if they had. They viewed the world as a place of intense competition in which victory and domination, which brought fame and glory, were the highest goals...“Theirs was a culture that venerated the military values [i.e., discipline, hard work, courage, obeying orders, etc.]... a society that valued power, glory, and domination” and the humiliation of one's enemies. [*On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace.*]
- Higher standards of morals and ethics were rare in Roman society:
  - **Divorce** and remarriage were common – most families had children born of different mothers. (Men could divorce wives by stating 3 times in the presence of 3 witnesses, “I divorce you.”)
  - **Infanticide** was common, especially toward female babies. (The prevalence of female infanticide resulted in a population mix of about 107 men for every 100 women.)
  - **Abortion** was common, except among Jews (and later, Christians).
    - Though there is no direct reference to abortion in the New Testament, we know the early church opposed it due to its condemnation in the *Didache*
- In the late 1st century B.C., Augustus sought to revive traditional Roman moral values.
  - Despite his own moral laxity, he attempted to legislate sexual morality.
  - Concerned with Rome's territorial growth and shortage of manpower, he urged single men to marry and produce more children.
  - He outlawed sex orgies and adultery by women.
- In fact, his moral reforms were a token gesture: Roman hedonism could not be arrested merely by legislation.

## Sexuality.

- Although Rome conquered Greece, the Romans quickly adopted Greek values, including their libertine sexual attitudes.
- Greek culture celebrated male nudity and often displayed male genitalia publicly.
  - In their art, the erect penis represented power and domination.
- Mainstream Greco/Roman society held to a **naturalistic** view of sex – it was a natural bodily function.
  - There was little linkage between sex and love, or sex and morality

- Especially among the upper-class, sexual promiscuity was rampant.
  - Incest, wife-swapping, sex with slaves and prostitutes, orgies, and even bestiality were more or less accepted as a matter of course.
  - Some elite aristocratic women, “a small group of ferocious and licentious royal females,” were notorious for their sexual appetites and practices.
  - However, such behavior among the lower-classes was punishable by death.

## Homosexuality.

- The extent of homosexuality in classical Greece and Rome is uncertain.
  - It certainly was common among the wealthy aristocracy.
- In Classical Greece, some city-states celebrated homosexual behavior while others discouraged it.
  - Even in city-states that legalized it (such as Athens), homosexuality was somewhat controversial.
- The Greek homosexual ideal was **pederasty** – a relationship between an adult man and a boy.
  - The relationship was considered “educational” – i.e., as in a mentor/student relationship – but oftentimes it was also sexual.
  - Aristocrats in some city-states actively competed for the sexual favors of certain young men.
- Some philosophers accepted homosexuality, while others condemned it.
  - **Plato** allowed homosexuality in his ideal state. [Plato, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium* and *Laws*.]
  - **Aristotle** despised men who passively allowed themselves to be sodomized anally.
  - **Xenophon** criticized homosexual anal intercourse as “unnatural” because it treated men as women. [Xenophon, *Memorabilia*.]
- Inevitably, a culture that celebrated the male body and homosexuality were misogynistic cultures that marginalized women.
  - **Norman Sussman**: Homosexuality in Greece “was closely linked to an idealized concept of the man as the focus of intellectual and physical activities.... The woman was seen as serving but two roles. As a wife, she ran the home. As a courtesan, she satisfied male sexual desires.” [Quoted in Dennis Prager, “Judaism’s Sexual Revolution.” *Crisis Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 8 (Sept. 1993).]
  - **Eva Keuls**: Classical Athens was “a society dominated by men who sequestered their wives and daughters, denigrated the female role in reproduction, erected monuments to the male genitalia, [and] had sex with the sons of their peers.” [Ibid.]
- In Roman society, homosexual sodomy was common, but there was a code of “propriety” accompanying it.
  - It was considered unseemly for any self-respecting adult man to allow himself to be sodomized – this was tantamount to acting “effeminate,” or unmanly.
  - On the other hand: For wealthy Roman men of rank, sodomizing boys, females or slaves was generally acceptable behavior.
  - **Paul Veyne**: “Keeping a boy for sexual purposes was a minor sin for gentlemen [of the elite classes]... Brutus, Caesar’s murderer, kept a boy so beautiful that reproductions of a sculpture of him could be seen everywhere... Jealous wives refused to allow their husbands to kiss their boyfriends in their presence... The first sign of a mustache resulted in a major change in the life of a page”...With

the onset of adulthood, the boy's long, girlish locks were cut and no longer was he treated as a passive sex object.

- **Martha Nussbaum:** “Ancient categories of sexual experience differed considerably from our own.... The central distinction in sexual morality was the distinction between active and passive roles. The gender of the object... is not in itself morally problematic. Boys and women are very often treated interchangeably as objects of [male] desire. What is socially important is to penetrate rather than to be penetrated. Sex is understood fundamentally not as interaction, but as a doing of some thing to someone.” [Quoted in Prager, “Judaism’s Sexual Revolution.” Nussbaum was a professor of philosophy at Brown Univ., and later a professor of Law and Ethics at the Univ. of Chicago.]
- **David F. Greenberg:** “With only a few exceptions, male homosexuality was not stigmatized or repressed so long as it conformed to norms regarding gender and the relative ages and statuses of the partners.” Other than the Jews, “none of the archaic civilizations prohibited homosexuality per se.” [Ibid. Greenberg is author of *The Construction of Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press; 1990), an exhaustive historical study of homosexuality.]
- Evidently, some women practiced homosexuality.
  - Most famous “lesbian” was **Sappho** (c. 620-570 BC) of Lesbos, who wrote love poems to another woman that some scholars interpret as erotic. (Scholars are uncertain whether lesbianism was limited to the female community that gathered around Sappho on the island of Lesbos.)

## Public Entertainment.

- Roman civilization was crude and brutish, and celebrated hedonism and violence.
- In Roman cities, wealthy patrons often financed the construction of great theaters and amphitheaters.
  - Public theaters served as popular venues for concerts, dancing, plays and pantomime.
  - Amphitheaters hosted Circus Games – sporting events and gladiatorial games.
- Public entertainment provided mass entertainment and pacified the urban proletariat.
- The Circus:
  - Admission was either free or for a nominal cost.
  - By the 1st century AD, the Roman calendar celebrated 159 holidays, including 93 days of free Games at public expense.
- Popular sports included footraces, boxing and wrestling.
- Chariot-racing was among the most popular spectacles:
  - In Rome, the **Circus Maximus**, with seating capacity of 150,000, was the largest and oldest of 6 chariot-racing tracks in the city.
  - Charioteers were usually slaves trained by wealthy owners.
  - Chariot-racing was an ancient form of demolition derby with frequent collisions and injuries.
  - Spectators bet on teams, and fan loyalty was fanatical.
- Gladiatorial Games:
  - Roman culture was obsessed with the martial arts, violence, and bloodshed, and exhibitions of human slaughter were the most popular form of entertainment.
  - **Keith Hopkins:** “Rome was a cruel society. Brutality was built into its culture in private life, as well as in public shows. The tone was set by military discipline and slavery.” [Keith Hopkins, “Murderous Games.”]

- Gladiatorial contests were part of an extravaganza of violence:
  - Gladiators were usually slaves trained to fight one another or wild beasts.
  - Upon entering the arena, they addressed the emperor: “We who are about to die salute you.”
  - Death in the arena was considered glorious just as death on the battlefield.
  - As the gladiators fought, the crowd cheered, screamed and cursed.
  - Gladiators who won numerous engagements became heroes and celebrities, and sometimes won their freedom.
  - In addition to gladiatorial battles, other bloody exhibitions included feeding defenseless criminals and slaves (and later, Christians) to wild beasts.
- There was a perverse psychology to these Games:
  - Gladiatorial shows allowed spectators to experience warfare vicariously.
  - **Keith Hopkins:** “For more than two centuries, thanks to its defense by frontier armies, the inner core of the Roman empire was virtually insulated from the direct experience of war. Then in memory of their warrior traditions, the Romans set up artificial battlefields in cities for public amusement.” [“Murderous Games.”]
  - Common citizens delighted in holding the power of life and death over those who were even more degraded and less fortunate than themselves.
- Gladiatorial games were controversial:
  - Some philosophers decried the Games as useless frivolities, wasteful and excessively violent.
  - Other intellectuals admired the endurance, courage and strength exhibited by the contestants in these Games.
  - **Marcus Aurelius** visited these spectacles only to fulfill his imperial duties.
  - Christians condemned most forms of Roman entertainment: “The theatre is lasciviousness, the Circus is suspense, and the arena is cruelty.” – **Tertullian**
  - **Walter Wallbank:** “Although many Romans decried these blood-letting contests, there persisted a streak of cruelty in Roman public amusements that can scarcely be comprehended or condoned today.” [T. Walter Wallbank, *Civilization Past and Present* (1981)]

# Part III

## The Jewish Wars

### The Zealot Revolt (66-73 A.D.) Smoldering Hostility.

- Of all the peoples within the Roman Empire, none so persistently and stubbornly resisted the Roman occupation, both politically and spiritually, as did the Jews.
- From the time of Herod the Great, patriotic Jews chafed under Roman rule.
  - When Herod ordered a golden eagle to be hung above the Temple gate in honor of the Romans, some rabbis persuaded a group of young men to cut it down in protest. Herod was so enraged that he ordered the rabbis and the youths burned alive.
- In fact, Jewish leaders were divided in their acceptance of Roman rule:
  - **Sadducees**, the religious elite, generally collaborated with Romans in return for special privileges and social status.
  - Some **Pharisees** argued that Roman occupation was God's punishment for Israel's sins.
  - Other Pharisaical rabbis and "prophets" condemned Roman rule and called for armed insurrection.
- The foremost anti-Roman group was the **Zealots**, a coalition of violent terrorist organizations.
  - A faction of the Zealots, the **sicarii**, were fanatical assassins.
- Throughout the first half of the 1st century, a number of fanatical revolutionaries emerged who fought against Roman rule.
  - These included **Judas the Galilean**, **Simon of Perea**, **Athronges**, **Theudas**, and an anonymous Egyptian Jew.

### Direct Roman Rule.

- In 44 AD, following the death of **King Herod Agrippa I** (r. 41-44), relations between Rome and the Jews in Israel deteriorated rapidly.
  - Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod of Great, had been a popular king.
  - [**NOTE:** Significantly, Agrippa I had begun construction of a new wall on the northern side of Jerusalem. According to Josephus, had the wall been completed, the city would have been impregnable when the Romans besieged it in 70 AD.]
- With the death of Agrippa I, the Senate appointed a procurator to rule directly over Judea.
- Roman governors were typically arrogant, corrupt, contemptuous and provocative.
- Pressure was building for a major explosion of outrage and violence.

### Forewarnings.

- In the early 60s, **Joshua, son of Hananiah**, appeared in Jerusalem prophesying doom and gloom.

- Every day he walked the streets crying, “Woe, woe to Jerusalem! A voice against the city and the holy temple, and a voice against this whole people!”
- His message infuriated the priests, who dragged him before the Roman governor.
  - Joshua was scourged with a *flagellum* until his flesh was shredded and his bones protruded.
  - Otherwise, the governor dismissed him as a lunatic and let him go.
- For the next 7 years, Joshua continued to stalk the streets of Jerusalem, prophesying death and destruction. (In all likelihood, Joshua perished in the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70.)

## The Spark.

- In 64 AD, the magnificent Temple complex was finally finished after 80 years of construction.
- The downside was that its completion left 18,000 construction workers unemployed.
  - Fearing massive unemployment and social unrest, Temple priests suggested to **King Agrippa II** that the porticoes be torn down so the workers could rebuild them.
  - Agrippa II recommended a more practical alternative: put the unemployed laborers to work repairing the streets.
  - So in the interest of preserving domestic tranquility, Jerusalem instituted one of history’s first “make-work” projects, and construction workers were paid a full day’s wages even if they worked only an hour.
- That same year, **Gessius Florus** was appointed procurator, and tensions between Romans and Jews reached the boiling point.
  - Florus was a corrupt and cruel tyrant, even worse than his predecessors.
- Jewish leaders appealed to **Celestius Gallus**, the proconsul of Syria, for relief, but to no avail.
- In 66, Florus infuriated pious Jews when he tried to confiscate the golden **Menorah**, chalices, and other sacred objects from the Temple in compensation for overdue taxes. (The Menorah was a 7-branched candelabrum symbolizing the 7 days of Creation.)
- When the high priest, **Ananias**, and some of the other priests protested, Florus ordered them whipped publicly.
- For centuries, beginning in the Persian period, Temple priests had offered up an animal sacrifice every day on behalf of the reigning monarch.
  - Following this incident, they suspended the sacrifices – an act tantamount to a declaration of war.
- Open conflict broke out between the Romans and residents of Jerusalem.
  - Roman troops rampaged through the streets, indiscriminately beating, harassing, and killing thousands of men, women and children.
  - Jews retaliated by pelting the soldiers with rocks and driving them back inside the **Fortress of Antonia**.
- Jewish civil leaders, including King Herod Agrippa II, tried to mediate the conflict, but their efforts were in vain.
  - The passions of the people were too inflamed to consider compromise.
- Roman authority totally broke down, and Florus fled Jerusalem for the seacoast town of Caesarea.
  - He left behind a small garrison.
- At this point, the Temple priests took control of the revolt.



- The revolt was led by **Eleazar**, son of the high priest Ananias.

## Basic Causes of the Revolt.

- In summary, the revolt was caused by several factors:
  - Militant Jewish nationalism and anti-Roman hostility.
  - Religious factions, controversies, and a growing sense of apocalypticism.
  - Economic problems, including high taxation and unemployment.
  - Class conflicts between the rich and poor.
  - Specific incidents that ignited the insurrection.

## Escalating Violence and Internal Schisms.

- As often happens with revolutions, the Zealot Revolt was led initially by aristocratic elites, who were then supplanted by more violent and extreme elements.
- Throughout the Judean countryside, Zealots rose up to strike at the Romans and their Jewish collaborators.
- **Menahem**, a leader of the *sicarii*, took the Roman stronghold of **Masada** by surprise.
  - The revolutionaries killed the garrison and captured a large cache of weapons.
  - **[NOTE: Menahem was a son of the notorious revolutionary, Judas the Galilean.]**
- Well-armed and vowing to fight to the death, Menachem and the *sicarii* entered Jerusalem in the fall of 66 AD and seized control of the revolution from Eleazar and the Temple priests.
  - They killed many of the aristocratic elite, including the high priest Ananias, and plundered the homes of Jerusalem's wealthy residents.
- Eleazar and his followers, who controlled the fortified Temple complex, retaliated and captured Menahem.
  - **Josephus:** "They tortured him with many kinds of torments, and then killed him."
- With their leader dead, the remaining *sicarii* fled Jerusalem for Masada.
  - There, perched atop their mountaintop retreat, they sat out the subsequent war. (Among those who escaped was **Eleazar ben Jair**, a cousin of Menahem (and nephew of the infamous Judas the Galilean), who became the leader of the Masada rebels.)
- With the Menahem dead and the *sicarii* expelled from the city, many Jews hoped peace would be restored.
- However, Eleazar's party refused to stop fighting until they had total control of the city.
  - They continued to besiege the last remaining Roman stronghold, a fortified tower.
  - The Roman commander offered to vacate the tower and surrender his arms if the insurgents would allow the garrison to leave the city.
  - The Jews agreed, but when the Romans marched out and laid down their arms, they were attacked and massacred.
- Meanwhile, outside Judea, the Jewish revolt set off anti-Jewish riots and massacres.
  - In Caesarea, Damascus, Alexandria, and other cities, Roman officials and local citizens turned on the resident Jews, killing thousands.
- Zealots in Israel responded by raiding Syrian towns and villages, slaughtering the inhabitants.
  - A rising tide of violence swept over the whole country.

- **Josephus:** “The whole province was a scene of indescribable horror.”

## Initial Response.

- **Cestius Gallus**, governor of Syria, marched the 12th Roman legion into Judea to quell the revolt.
- He entered Jerusalem and might have taken the city if he had he acted more boldly, but fearing that he had insufficient strength to take the Temple compound, he withdrew his forces and marched toward Caesarea.
  - Along the way, Jewish rebels ambushed and routed the Romans, killing nearly half of them.
  - Jews also captured valuable military equipment, including slings and catapults.

## Window of Opportunity.

- The revolt broke out at a time when Rome seemed politically unstable and vulnerable.
- **Nero's** berserk rule had caused political confusion throughout the Empire.
  - The main body of the Roman army was preoccupied trying to contain the Gauls and Celts.
- Realizing that the Romans would eventually retaliate, the revolutionaries commissioned generals to organize defenses throughout greater Israel.
  - None of the commanding officers were professional soldiers, and most were priests and religious leaders such as Josephus.
- The revolutionaries, hoping to spark a general uprising against Roman rule, also dispatched emissaries to forge an anti-Roman confederacy throughout the region.
- In Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders celebrated their early victories by striking a new coin bearing the inscription, “**Year 1**”.

## Vespasian's Campaign.

- Outside of Judea, the revolt was far from popular.
- Early in 67, Nero commissioned **Vespasian**, Rome's best general, to suppress the rebellion.
- Throughout the year, Vespasian systematically quelled the revolt in Galilee.
  - Methodically, he laid waste the land and massacred thousands of Jews.
- For the most part, rebel forces were poorly organized and poorly equipped, and much of the opposition disintegrated in the face of Roman military might.
- Josephus' forces made a stand on the fortified hilltop town of **Jotapata**.
  - They reinforced a thick stone wall that encircled the hilltop, and steep ravines made the city nearly unapproachable.
  - The Jews fought fiercely and held off the Romans for 50 days.
  - A deserter defected to Vespasian and informed the Roman commander that the exhausted defenders never posted sentries before daylight.
  - The Romans surprise-attacked at dawn, breached the wall, and slaughtered the defenders.
  - After the massacre, the Romans burned and destroyed the city.
  - [NOTE: Archaeologists recently discovered mass graves at Jotapata – remains of people who were buried at the bottom of cisterns.]
- Josephus and 40 supporters somehow escaped from Jotapata and fled to a remote cave.

- As the Romans closed in, the rebels agreed to a suicide pact.
- However, after all were dead except Josephus and another man, he broke the pact and surrendered to the Romans.
- Brought before Vespasian, Josephus uttered the words that saved his life: “You think that you’ve captured a general, but you’ve captured a prophet. For no longer do I call you Vespasian, but I call you Caesar. For you will be emperor – you and your son, Titus.”
- For the rest of the war, Josephus was a prisoner of the Romans and an eyewitness to many of the events he recorded.
- Other than Jotapata, the only other fierce fighting between rebels and Romans came at **Gamla** in the Golan Heights.
- By the summer of 68 AD, as Vespasian advanced on Jerusalem, news of Nero’s death interrupted the campaign.
  - He abandoned the field and sailed for Rome, accompanied by thousands of his best troops.
- Revolutionaries in Jerusalem thought they had won the war – the Roman Empire appeared to be dissolving!
- On July 1, 69 AD, Vespasian usurped power in Rome and proclaimed himself emperor.

### **Titus’ Campaign.**

- Once firmly in power, Vespasian commissioned his son, **Titus**, to finish the Jewish campaign.
- Titus methodically moved southward, destroying pockets of resistance along the way.
- By the end of 69, the Romans controlled all of Judea except Jerusalem and three rebel strongholds near the Dead Sea.

### **Extermination of the Essenes.**

- In the process of quelling the revolt, Titus’ troops marched against the Essenes.
- When the revolt first broke out, the Essenes believed it signaled the beginning of a new messianic age.
- As the Roman legions marched into the Dead Sea area, the Essenes paraded out in their white robes to encounter the forces of darkness, confident that God would intervene on their behalf.
  - The Romans promptly annihilated them and destroyed their community.
- Prior to the encounter, the Essenes hid their library of sacred scriptures in caves – the famous “**Dead Sea Scrolls**”.

### **Surrender of Herodium.**

- At the hilltop fortress of Herodium (8 miles south of Jerusalem), Jewish resistors held out for weeks against the Romans.
- In the process, they vandalized the palace complex of **Herod the Great** and even desecrated his mausoleum, smashing open his sarcophagus and scattering his bones.
- Eventually, the rebels surrendered rather than face near-certain death.

### **Siege of Jerusalem.**

- Thousands of Jews fled before the Roman army and sought refuge inside the walls of Jerusalem.

- In addition, thousands more descended upon the city in the spring of 70 AD to keep the Passover in accordance with the annual tradition.
- In the intervening two years since Vespasian had left for Rome, the Jerusalem defenders had plenty of time to shore up the city's defenses and stockpile provisions.
  - Instead, they squandered the opportunity as internecine conflict broke out among the various factions vying for control of the revolution.
- Zealots, consisting mainly of Judean peasants, turned on the aristocratic priests, and then various factions among the Zealots set upon one another.
  - **John of Gischala**, a fanatical revolutionary from Galilee, emerged as leader of one group, while **Simon bar Giora**, a native of the Transjordan, led a rival faction.
  - Fighting among themselves, the rival factions destroyed much of the grain stored in the city – a move that gave different groups temporary political advantage but ultimately doomed everyone.
- Beginning in the spring of 70 AD, Titus laid siege to the city.
  - Confident of victory (or divine intervention), the Jews taunted the Romans from atop the city's high walls.
- Within a few weeks, all escape from the city was sealed off.
  - With the city cut off from outside aid and grossly overcrowded, a serious food shortage threatened massive starvation.
- Jerusalem had a complex of 3 inner and outer walls, in addition to the Fortress of Antonia and the Temple complex.
- Using sophisticated technology – **ballistas, catapults, siege towers** and **battering rams** – the Romans grimly and methodically overcame each barrier.
- For the next several months – until the siege ended – Jerusalem was hell on earth.
  - **Josephus**: “For the wealthy to remain [in Jerusalem] was dangerous, since, under the pretext of desertion, many were killed for their money. But the madness of the rebels increased with the famine, and the terrors flared more fiercely each day. Since no grain could be seen anywhere, they broke into homes and ransacked them. If they found any [food], they tormented the occupants for claiming there was none; if not, they tortured them for having hidden it too well. The bodies of the miserable wretches were evidence enough of whether or not they had it: if [seemingly healthy], they were deemed to have plenty of food, while those already emaciated were passed by, for it seemed unreasonable to kill those who would soon die of starvation. Many secretly bartered their property for a measure of wheat, if they were rich, or barley, if poor. Then, shutting themselves inside the innermost interior of their houses, some ate their grains raw in extreme hunger.... “Famine is truly the worst form of suffering and decency its greatest victim. All restraint was shunned as women grabbed food from the mouths of their husbands, children from their fathers, and – most horrid of all – mothers from their babies.... “Partisans everywhere would rob them [constantly], for whenever they saw a locked door, they assumed that those inside were dining and broke down the doors.... They showed no pity for the elderly or infants.... “In their quest for food they devised dreadful methods of torture, stuffing bitter vetch [i.e., a climbing plant indigenous to Palestine] into the genital passages of their victims and driving sharp stakes into their anal passages... to get people to reveal hidden loaf of bread or a single handful of barley.... “Friends wrestled with each other for even the shadow of food. Others, mouths agape from hunger like made dogs, staggered along, beating on the doors like drunken men.... They ate everything, swallowed things even the filthiest animals would not touch. Finally they

devoured even belts and shoes or gnawed at the leather they stripped from their shields.... “Worse still were the brigands who broke into houses, stripped clothes from dead bodies, and emerged laughing. They tested the points of their swords on the corpses and even ran through some who were still alive. Yet those who begged for the *coupe de grace* they contemptuously left to the famine. “Now unable to escape the city, the Jews lost all hope of survival, and the famine became even worse.... A deep silence and a lethal darkness shrouded the city.”

- Amazing, despite the intense suffering and insanity, the Zealots still sacrificed two lambs every day on the Temple altar.
  - Their only hope was divine intervention, and to the bitter end they believed God would save them.
- After all food was consumed and animals eaten, many of the starving Jews resorted to cannibalism.
  - **Josephus:** “I shall now relate something unparalleled in the annals [of history], a deed horrible to tell and incredible to hear.... There was a woman named Mary, the daughter of Eleazar, who lived beyond the Jordan in the village of Bathezor. She was well known for family and wealth and had fled to Jerusalem with the rest of the population, where she was trapped in the siege. The partisan chiefs seized most of the possessions she brought with her, and [others] plundered the rest of her property and food through daily raids. Defying nature, she took her own baby boy, whom she was suckling, and said, ‘Come, be my food....’ With these words she killed her son, then roasted him and ate half, hiding the rest. “At that moment the partisans arrived and, smelling the unholy aroma, threatened her with death if they were not given what she had prepared. She replied that she had saved a fine helping for them and uncovered the remains of her child. Overcome with horror, they were stupefied at the sight.... They went away trembling.... [and] horror immediately filled the entire city.... “At first, they ordered the dead buried due to the intolerable stench, but later... they threw them from the walls into the valleys. When Titus, as he made his rounds, saw them full of the dead, the putrid gore oozing from the rotting bodies, he groaned, and raising his hands he called God to witness that this was not his doing.” [*The Jewish War* x.xxx]
- Relating the sordid story, Josephus was moved to editorialize:
  - “I cannot refrain from stating my feelings: I think that if the Romans had delayed their attack on these wicked scoundrels, the earth would have opened and swallowed the city, or a flood would have overwhelmed it or lightning destroyed it, like Sodom. For it produced a far more godless generation than those who suffered there. It was due to their madness that all the people perished.” [*The Jewish War* 5.566]
- Josephus estimated that during the 2-1/2 month siege, 115,000 corpses were carted out of the city or dumped over the walls.
- During the final few weeks of the siege, the Romans caught hundreds of people every day who desperately attempted to escape.
  - Many were disemboweled by soldiers searching for swallowed coinage.
  - Hundreds more were crucified.
- Describing the awful siege, **Eusebius** notes, “Such was the reward for the guilt and impiety of the Jews against the Children of God” [i.e., against the Christians], and he quotes the words of Jesus:
  - “Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days.... For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been seen

from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” [Matt. 24:19-21]

- By May, half of the city was in Roman hands, and Titus offered terms of surrender.
  - His overtures were rejected with contempt.
- Throughout June, Romans worked to take the Fortress of Antonia that overlooked the Temple.
  - At one point, Roman troops built huge platforms for battering rams to pound the walls of the fort. The Zealots tunneled under the battering rams, using wooden props. As the machines above were moved into position, the insurgents torched the beams and the ground above the tunnel collapsed, killing soldiers and destroying the battering rams.
- On July 5 the Fortress was finally stormed and taken.

## **Destruction of the Temple.**

- The last resisters barricaded themselves inside the Temple compound.
  - They reasoned that now – surely – God would intervene to protect his holy Temple.
- According to Josephus, Titus offered the rebels the opportunity to surrender, or at least to vacate the Temple and continue the fighting elsewhere.
- In early August, the Romans breached the exterior walls of the Temple complex.
- On **August 8**, Roman troops finally broke through and massacred the last remaining rebels.
- At this point, the rampaging soldiers torched the city, trapping thousands in their homes and in the narrow streets.
  - They attacked indiscriminately, killing everyone in sight.
  - **Josephus:** “They clogged the streets with corpses and drowned the city in blood.”
- According to Tacitus, Titus considered preserving the Temple, but decided to raze it in order that the Jewish and Christian religions might be abolished. [Tacitus, *Histories*]
  - The Temple went up in flames as most of the city lay in ruins, ravaged by months of fighting.
- As Jesus had prophesied, the Temple complex was destroyed and “not one stone” was left on top of another.
- The Temple was destroyed on **August 30** – the very day on which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Solomon’s Temple in 586 B.C.
- As Jesus had prophesied, the Temple complex was destroyed and “not one stone” was left on top of another.
  - The **Western Wall** (or “**Wailing Wall**”) that still stands was not part of the Temple *per se*. It was one of the four outer retaining walls of the platform on which the Temple complex was constructed.
  - **Hershel Shanks:** It is the height of irony that “Judaism’s holiest shrine was built, not by Solomon... but by Herod, one of the most hated kings ever to rule the Jews.” [Hershel Shanks, *Biblical Archaeology Review*.]
  - One scholar, **Dr. Ernest L. Martin**, believes the “Western Wall” was actually part of the Fortress of Antonia that overlooked the Temple. He contends that the Second Temple was actually 600 feet further south in the old City of David, built atop the Gihon Spring with its foundations running deep into the Kidron Valley. If his theory is true, then Jesus’ prophecy that “not one stone would be left upon

another” would have been literally fulfilled. As Josephus later noted, “the foundations of our holy Temple were dug up.”

- Some other notable scholars support Martin’s theory:
  - **George Wesley Buchanan, Professor Emeritus, Wesley Theological Seminary:** “None of the Jewish Temples were ever built in the area of the Dome of the Rock. Although a popular theory, it is free from any support from biblical sources. Martin is the first modern scholar to realize this.”
  - **Jack Finegan, author of *The Handbook of Biblical Chronology*:** “Martin’s arguments are very persuasive.” [Ref. *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Mar/Apr 2011), p. 31;
- Ernest L. Martin, *The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot*; and [www.WhoMovedTheTemple.com](http://www.WhoMovedTheTemple.com).]
- In the wake of the slaughter, so many survivors were crucified that the Romans ran out of lumber for crosses.

## The Last Stronghold.

- Somehow, the two rebel leaders, **John of Gischala** and **Simon bar Giora**, along with a few hundred others, escaped from the Temple compound.
- They barricaded themselves inside buildings in the upper city, and continued their resistance.
- Finally, after another 5 months, they were starved into submission and captured.

## Siege of Masada Last Stand.

- Not until August, 73 AD, did the last pocket of resistance fall – the rock fortress of Masada on the western shore of the Dead Sea. (Masada is about 30 miles SE of Jerusalem.)
- The Masada compound held about 950 resistors, including women and children.
- The rebels were led by **Eleazar ben Jair**.
  - This was the same Eleazar who, along with a few other *sicarii*, had escaped from Jerusalem several years earlier following the death of their leader, Menahem.
- Masada was a nearly impregnable citadel:
  - Its steep cliffs rose 1300 feet above the desert floor.
  - Only access to the summit was a narrow, winding path – the Snake Path – too narrow for catapults and siege machines, and easily defensible.
  - The Masada plateau was 18 acres, surrounded by double walls 18 ft. high and 12 ft. thick.
  - Inside the compound was a small city, with 2 palaces, barracks, apartments, and arsenals.
  - More than a dozen cisterns cut into the mountain side provided ample drinking water, and there was enough grain, wine, oil, and dates to last for years.
  - Herod’s palaces were luxurious, including a state-of-the-art bathhouse.
  - His private villa was cut into the cliff-face at the north end of the mountain.

## Roman Strategy.

- Early in 73, **Flavius Silva** led a Roman force of 15,000 against Masada.

- Assessing the situation, Silva set up a base camp and ordered a wall built around the base of the mountain to prevent the Jews from escaping.
- For an army to survive in the arid desert required meticulous logistical support.
  - The Romans needed 400 gallons of water and 16 tons of food every day.
- Masada provided no access to the summit, but a spur on the western side of the mountain provided a base for a ramp.
- In an amazing feat of engineering, ingenuity and tenacity, the Romans built their ramp up the side of the mountain.
  - Over a period of several months, work crews methodically constructed an earthen and stone ramp that eventually reached the top.
  - Coming under periodic bombardment from the resistors, the Romans shielded their work crews with tarps and protective barriers.
  - They also used Jewish slaves in the front lines, whom the resistors were reluctant to bombard.
- After 5 months, the Romans were ready to assault the fortress.
  - They dragged their siege tower and battering ram up the ramp, and began pounding the gate and attacking the defenders on the walls.

## **The Last Hours.**

- With the Romans at the gate, the Jewish rebels realized their time was up.
- On the eve of the Roman breakthrough into the fortress grounds, Eleazar addressed the resistors:
  - “Long ago we decided to serve neither Roman nor anyone else except God, and now the time has come to verify that resolution by action. We, who were the first to revolt and are the last in arms against the Romans, must not disgrace ourselves... We still have the free choice of a noble death...” [Some of the men objected, so Eleazar reminded them of how the Romans would torture any survivors, rape and abuse the women, and enslave the children.] “It is by the will of God that we are to die... Let us die as free men with our wives and children, and deny the Romans their joy of victory! Let us rather shock them with amazement at our brave death... Let our wives die before they are raped and abused and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually...”
  - [NOTE: So the mass suicide was, at least in part, a mass murder.]
- All the defenders died that night, thereby depriving the Romans of the satisfaction of winning a bloody battle after a long, bitter and exhausting siege.
  - Men killed their wives and children;
  - Ten men were selected to execute the others;
  - Finally, one man killed the remaining 9, then set fire to the buildings and drove a sword through his own body.
- Josephus recounts the strange events of the morning after:
  - “Now the Romans expected a battle in the morning, when accordingly they put on their armor... to make an assault upon the fortress, but they saw no enemy – only a lonely solitude on every side... as well as an [eerie] silence.”
  - [NOTE: Details of the last hours of Masada comes from the testimonies of 2 surviving women and 5 children, who hid in a water conduit during the ordeal.]



## Postscript on the Zealot Revolt Holocaust and Diaspora.

- The Zealot Revolt had a devastating affect on the Jewish nation.
- According to Josephus, over a million Jews perished in the Zealot Revolt.
  - This seems ridiculously high – the total Jewish population in Judea before the war might have been only about 1-1/2 million.
  - [NOTE: In 1968, archaeologists discovered the remains of more than 30 Jews who had died during the Zealot Revolt. One victim by the name of Yohanan (John) had been crucified. A 7-inch nail was in his feet, along with small pieces of olive wood from the cross still attached.]
- After the war, the Jews were scattered throughout the Roman world.
  - About 700 prisoners (including John of Gishala and Simon bar Giora) were taken in chains to Rome and paraded through the streets in Titus' victory procession.
  - Thousands of Jews were sold into slavery, and many labored to build the Colosseum in Rome.
  - Others were killed in amphitheaters by gladiators and wild beasts.
- Vespasian imposed an empire-wide tax on all Jews – the **fiscus Judaicus**.
  - The Zealots had received aid and support from Jews throughout the empire, and Vespasian considered all Jews to be partly responsible for the costly war.
- The Senate renamed Judea **Palaestina** (“Land of the Philistines”) to symbolize the extinction of the Jewish nation.
- Vespasian ordered the deaths of all descendants of David “so that no member of the royal house should be left among the Jews.” [Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 3:12]

## The Religious Legacy.

- The destruction of the Temple fundamentally changed Jewish religion.
- There was no longer a special holy place in Jerusalem where Jews believed that God dwelled on earth.
- With the Temple gone, the sacrificial system ended.
- The Judaism that survived the revolt was Pharisaical Judaism.
  - The Sadducees perished in the revolt, along with other rival sects to the Pharisees.
- Judaism, no longer Temple-centered, was henceforth practiced and preserved only in the synagogues.
- Furthermore, after 70 AD, apocalypticism declined.
  - In the decades after the revolt, Jews wrote very little new apocalyptic literature (or at least very little has been preserved).

## Jamnia.

- In the aftermath of the war, a new center for the Jewish religion emerged at **Jamnia**, south of Joppa.
- The founder and intellectual leader at Jamnia was **Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai**, one of Jerusalem's most respected rabbis at the time of the Zealot Revolt.
  - According to legend, Zakkai sought to escape from Jerusalem during the siege. With hundreds were dying every day, he arranged to have his friends carry him

inside a coffin past the guards at the gate, and once outside the walls, he emerged from the box and gained an audience with Titus.

- Using a rather loose, allegorical interpretation of Isaiah 10:34 – “Lebanon shall fall to a mighty one” – he convinced Titus that the prophecy meant that the Temple (constructed from Lebanese cedar) would fall to Vespasian (a “mighty one”).
- Not long after the war ended, Roman authorities granted Zakkai permission to establish an academy at Jamnia for the study of the Jewish law and religion.
- The Pharisaical rabbis and scholars at Jamnia sought to reconstruct Jewish religious life, and essentially defined orthodox Judaism from that time to the present.
- Students were subjected to a regimented study curriculum, after which they were officially ordained and designated as “rabbis.”
- At the time, their efforts were seen as merely an interval between the destruction of the former Temple and the construction of a new one in the future – an expectation that was never fulfilled.

## The Jewish Canon.

- As in the post-Exile period, a priority at Jamnia was to preserve the ancient scriptures.
- According to Josephus, following the siege of Jerusalem, Titus presented to Josephus the “sacred books” from the Temple as a gift.
- Twenty years later, writing to a Roman audience, Josephus sought to explain the uniqueness of the Hebrew scriptures:
  - “We [the Jews] do not have vast numbers of discordant and conflicting books [as do the Greeks], but only 22, containing the record of all time, and justly deemed divine. Of these, five are the books of Moses, containing the Law and the tradition of human history up to his own death. This period covers nearly 3000 years. From the death of Moses to the time of Artaxerxes... the prophets who followed Moses have written down in 13 books the things that were done in their days. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and principles of life....” [NOTE: Josephus apparently considered Ruth to be an appendix to Judges, and Lamentations to Jeremiah.] “From Artaxerxes [c. 400 BC, the age of Malachi] until our time everything has been recorded but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased.... for though so much time has passed, no one has dared to add, subtract, or change anything in them, but it is inborn in Jews from birth to regard the scriptures as the ordinances of God, to live in them, and, if need be, to die for them gladly.”
  - [NOTE: The **Babylonian Talmud** states the same tradition: “**After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.**”]
- The rabbis at Jamnia discussed the authenticity of the ancient writings and settled on a canon of sacred Scriptures.
  - All agreed that the Torah and the Prophetic books were sacred.
  - Controversial books included Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Esther. (Neither Esther nor Song of Songs contains the name of God, and the philosophy of Ecclesiastes seemed incongruent with orthodox Jewish theology.)
  - They rejected the OT Apocryphal writings as inspired scripture.

## **Second Jewish Revolt (132-136 AD)**

### **Anti-Roman Uprising.**

- Among a remnant of Jews, apocalyptic expectations and End-times hysteria did not totally die out with the Zealot Revolt.
  - Jews still awaited a Messiah, and both Jews and Christians still expected a cataclysmic event to usher in a new age.
- Over the next several decades following the revolt, thousands of Jews trickled back into their traditional homeland.
- Almost unimaginably (considering the horrific events of the revolt), another insurrection broke out among the Jews in Palestine in 132.
- For a short time, the rebels set up an independent Jewish state.
- Predictably, this attempt at independence also ended in a horrible bloodbath.

### **Cause of Revolt.**

- Emperor **Hadrian** planned to construct a new Roman city on the site of Jerusalem.
- He also proposed to build a new temple, dedicated to Jupiter, on the site of the former Temple.
- As a promoter of Rome's "civilizing mission" to the world, the emperor sought to humanize some of his subjects' archaic and crude social practices.
  - One of his edicts banned all forms of mutilation, including **circumcision**.
- There is no evidence that Hadrian purposely tried to provoke the Jews, but devout Jews naturally considered these measures to be sacrilegious.

### **Outbreak of Violence.**

- **Simon ben Kosiba** claimed a messianic mission to deliver the Jews from this latest Roman insult.
  - He claimed to be the Messiah and a descendant of King David.
- His supporters hailed him **Simon Bar Kochva** – Son of the Star – and his efforts were supported by **Akiba**, the most influential rabbi of the day.
- Simon was a typical revolutionary – a man of violence who burned in hatred toward the Romans.
  - **Eusebius**: Bar-kokhba was "a murderous bandit who... claimed to be a luminary come down from heaven to shed light on those in misery" – i.e., the Jews under Roman rule.
- Bar-kokhba fought a vicious guerilla war and controlled most of Judea within a few months.
- As in the previous war, the rebels converted **Masada** and **Herodium** into strongholds.
  - At Herodium, they dug a system of tunnels into the hill, which they used to launch surprise attacks on the Romans.
- The suddenness of the uprising took the Romans by surprise.
  - In one encounter, rebels slaughtered an entire Roman legion of 5,000 troops.

### **Roman Revenge.**

- The Romans retaliated with a fury.
- Roman general **Julius Severus** crushed the rebellion after 3 years of bitter fighting.

- According to the sources, the Romans ravaged over 1,000 villages and towns, and some 500,000 people were killed, enslaved or deported.
- As the Romans closed in, Bar-kokhba and his last supporters fled to caves near Masada.
  - The Romans knew where they were and waited patiently to starve them out.
  - [NOTE: One recently-discovered cave contained the skeletal remains of 40 men, women and children. Another cave had several letters, including one from Bar-kokhba asking his sympathizers on the outside to bring food and supplies.]
- In the end, the Romans caught and executed both Bar-kokhba and Akiba.

## **Aftermath.**

- Jerusalem was rebuilt and renamed (**Aelia Capitolina**) as a Roman colony.
- No Jew was permitted access to the city.
- A Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter was erected on the site of the former Jewish Temple.
- Furthermore, Roman shrines to Jupiter and Venus were built on the (alleged) sites of Golgotha and the holy sepulcher. (Whether this was intentional or not is unclear.)

## **Christians and the Jewish Wars**

### **The Zealot Revolt.**

- The Zealot Revolt and its aftermath had a decisive impact on Jewish/Christian relations.
- Jewish Christians (Nazarenes) did not support their fellow-Jews in the revolt.
- As a result, Jewish revolutionaries accused the Nazarenes of cowardice and disloyalty.
- When the war broke out, many Nazarenes sought refuge in the city of **Pella** in Transjordan.
  - Eusebius: Christians left Jerusalem “before the war... in accordance with a certain oracle which had been delivered by revelation to their leaders.”
  - [NOTE: It was exactly 40 years (one biblical generation) between Jesus’ crucifixion and the destruction of the Temple. Jesus had warned the disciples, “This generation shall not pass away till all these things are fulfilled.” (Matt. 24)]

### **The Jamnia Controversy.**

- At Jamnia, Jewish leaders excluded the Nazarenes from participating in the reconstruction of Jewish religious life.
- One of the goals of the rabbis at Jamnia was to define true Judaism in contrast to non-orthodox sects such as the Sadducees and the Nazarenes.
  - EX: In the debates over canonicity, Nazarenes argued for the inclusion of the Gospels and the epistles of Paul and James, but Pharisaical rabbis adamantly opposed these Christian writings.
- Undoubtedly, part of the controversy was political:
  - Since Sadduceeism had been effectively destroyed in the revolt, the Nazarenes now posed the greatest threat to Pharisaism.

## The Jewish/Christian Rift.

- By the end of the 1st century, Christians were officially barred from synagogues.
- In their synagogue liturgy, Jews added a **19th benediction** – a prayer against heretics, including Christians:
  - “For apostates may there be no hope and may the Nazarenes and the heretics suddenly perish.”
- Likewise, Christian attitudes toward Jews hardened.
  - For the first several decades of the Christian movement, Christians had assumed that most Jews would eventually accept Christ as their Messiah.
  - After the Zealot Revolt and the controversies at Jamnia, many Christians tended either to dismiss Jews as stubborn sinners who refused to accept the obvious truth about Christ, or as a cursed race whom God had rejected!
  - This attitude is expressed in the popular Christian literary work, the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

## Resumption of Church Life.

- After the Zealot Revolt, some Jewish Christians returned to Jerusalem.
- According to Eusebius, church leaders chose **Simeon**, son of Clopas, to succeed James as leader of the church.
  - “After the martyrdom of James and the conquest of Jerusalem that followed soon after, tradition has it that those of the apostles and disciples of the Lord who were still alive gathered from everywhere with those who were, humanly speaking, relatives of the Lord, for many of them were still alive. They all discussed together who ought to succeed James, and all unanimously decided that Symeon, son of the Clopas mentioned in the Gospels [John 19:25; Luke 24:18] was worthy of the bishop’s throne. It is said that he was a first cousin of the Savior, for Hegesippus relates that Clopas was the brother of Joseph.” [Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11]
- Simeon led the church until his martyrdom in c. 107 AD.
  - According to Hegesippus, “certain heretics” brought charges against Simeon, who was tortured for many days. The governor was astonished at his endurance, and he died by crucifixion at 120 years of age.
- Over the next 30 years the church had 13 bishops.

## The Final Jewish/Christian Rift Between Jews.

- During the Second Jewish Revolt, Christians once again refused to support the war.
- As a result, Jewish revolutionaries targeted Christians for persecution.
  - **Justin Martyr** (c.155): “In the Jewish War recently past Bar-kokhba, the leader of the revolt of the Jews, ordered Christians only to be subjected to terrible punishments, unless they would deny Jesus the Christ and blaspheme [him].” [Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 31]
- The war and the persecution of Christians marked the final breach in relations between the Nazarenes and their fellow-Jews.

## Historical Disconnect.

- Sometime after the Last Revolt, Christians who settled in Jerusalem founded a new church.

- This group of Gentile Christians had little in common with the Jewish Christian church of earlier times.
- This break in continuity explains the problems in identifying many of the holy sites in and around Jerusalem related to the life of Jesus.
  - The city landscape had been drastically altered by the wars and all the destruction, and these later Christians had no connection to the previous Jewish Christian church.

## **The Last Jewish Christians The Ebionite Community.**

- For centuries, small groups of Jewish Christians continued to survive in Syria, Transjordan and Egypt.
- The most prominent of these groups was the Ebionite community.
- Ebionites considered themselves to be the true heirs of the primitive Jerusalem church.
  - They saw themselves as the bridge between Gentile Christians and orthodox Jews.
- Ebionites were, in some regards, the Christian equivalent of the **Essenes**.
  - They were strict ascetics who practiced poverty, vegetarianism, chastity, and circumcision. (Their name, Ebionites, derived from the Hebrew term for “the poor.”)
- According to their critics, Ebionites held an **Adoptionist** view of Christ:
  - They denied the deity of Christ and his virgin birth.
  - Jesus was a righteous man and a great prophet who achieved spiritual perfection through perfect obedience to God – hence, he became the “adopted son” of God.
  - The Spirit of God indwelt Jesus from his baptism until just before his crucifixion.
  - Hence, Jesus was not the savior of humanity, but a spiritual guide who shows us the way to God.
- They rejected the apostolic claims of Paul and revered James the Just as the true leader of the Christian movement.
- In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius dismissed the Ebionites as deluded, legalistic heretics:
  - “They regarded [Christ] as a plain, ordinary man, born of intercourse between a man and Mary, who gained righteousness through character growth. They observed every detail of the Law and did not think that they would be saved by faith in Christ alone and a corresponding life.” [Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.27]
- According to Jerome (c. 410), the apostle John wrote his Gospel to counter the Ebionite heresy.
- The Ebionites produced at least three significant literary works in the 2nd and 3rd centuries: ***The Gospel of the Nazarenes***, ***The Preaching of Peter***, and ***The Gospel of the Ebionites***.

## **The Nazarenes.**

- Other groups of Jewish Christians, often referred to generically as “Nazarenes,” survived for several centuries after the Jewish wars.

- Although they often resembled the Ebionites, Nazarenes generally had a more orthodox view of Jesus.
  - They also held the apostle Paul in higher esteem.
- One popular work of Christian literature, the ***Gospel According To the Hebrews***, is associated with the Nazarenes.

## **Extinction of Jewish Christianity.**

- Caught between two increasingly antagonistic forces – orthodox Judaism and catholic Christianity – Jewish Christian groups struggled for identity.
  - **Igor Davidson:** Beginning in the 2nd century, “Both Christians and Jews were increasingly determined to define themselves as mutually distinct.... In the process, resolutely Jewish Christians... found themselves squeezed between the two and regarded more and more as deviants by the emerging consensus positions within both Judaism and Christianity. As Jerome would put it, such individuals wanted to be both Jews and Christians, and in the end, they were able to be neither.” [*The Birth of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 151]
- Gradually, Jewish Christian sects like the Ebionites and the Nazarenes disappeared.
  - “Separated from their countrymen by their religious convictions, and from the Holy City... Jewish Christians eked out a precarious and isolated existence until, having splintered into various groups, they were almost extinct by the 5th century...” [Cyril Richardson, *The Early Christian Fathers*]





### The BABYLONIAN EMPIRE and the deportation of the Judahites

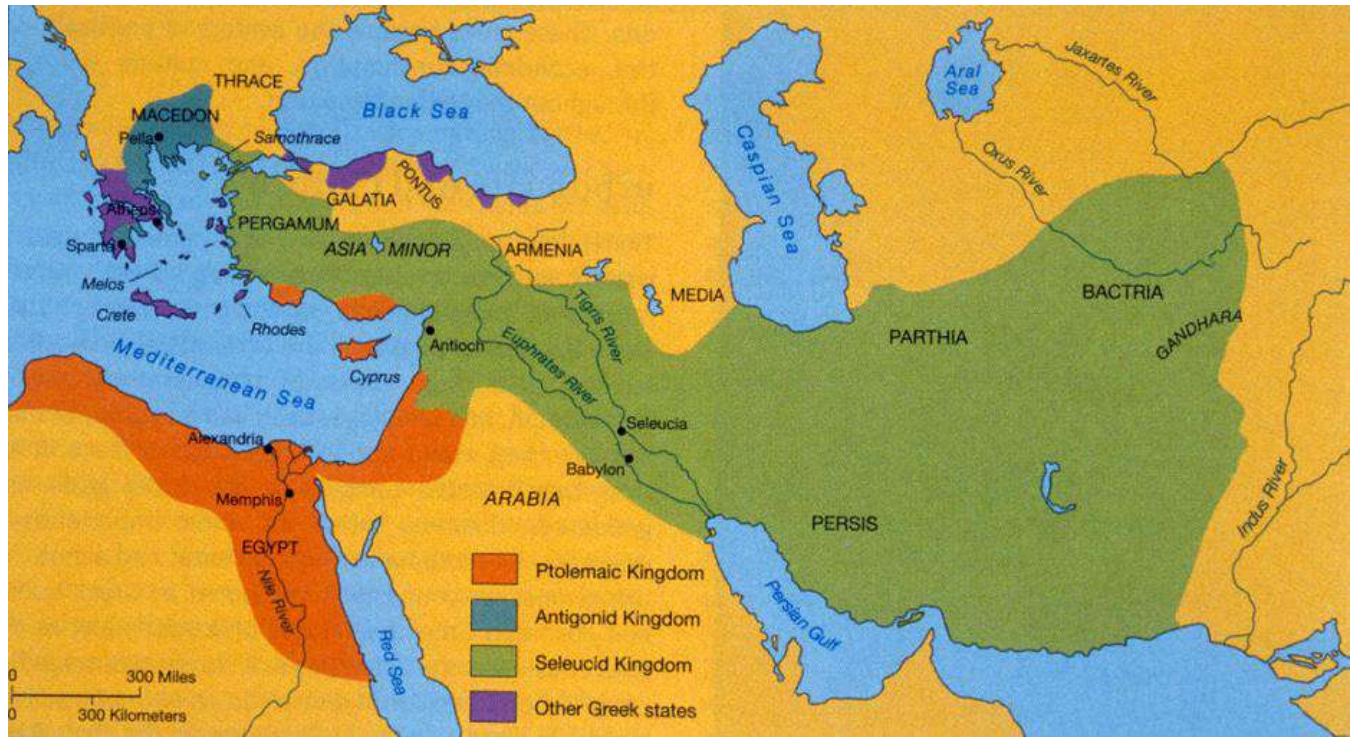
- Babylonian Empire
- Medes Kingdom (allied with Babylon)
- Northern Israelites deported by the Assyrians
- Kingdom of Judah (before the Exile)
- Lands of Resettlement of the Judahites



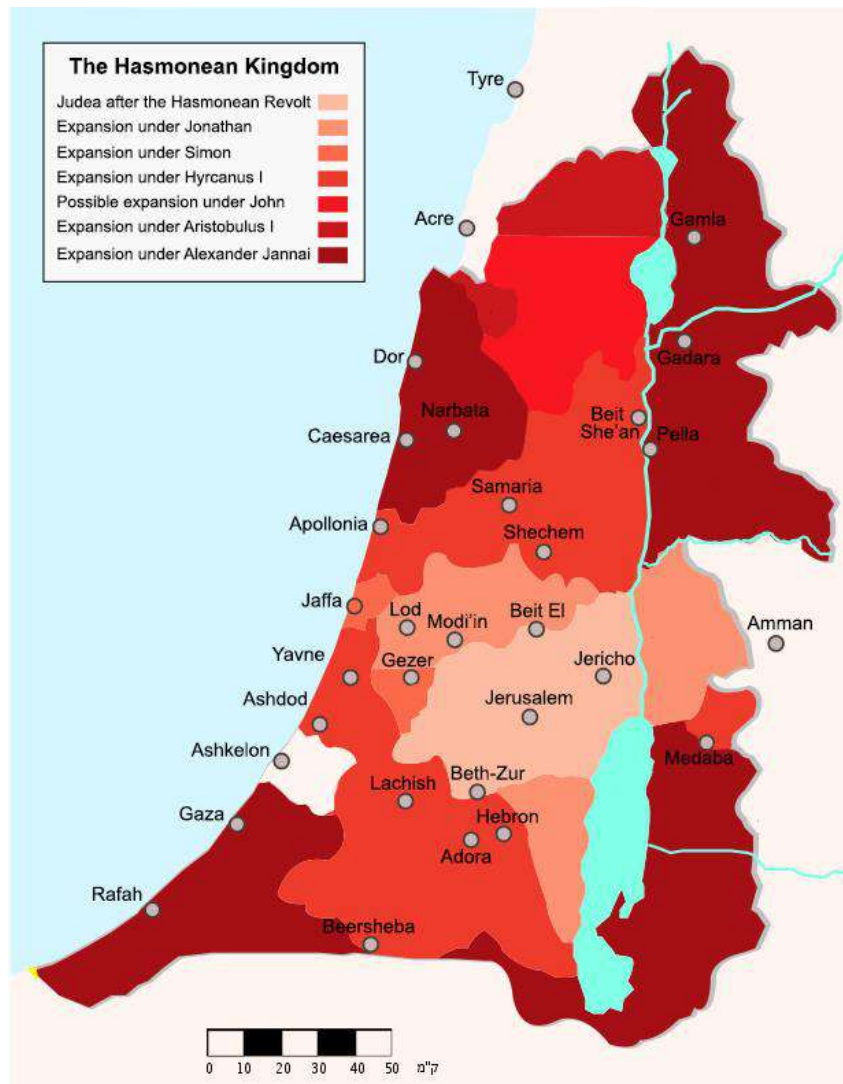
- #### THE EMPIRE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT
- Alexander's route
  - Alexander's empire
  - Battle

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The Divided Greek Empire

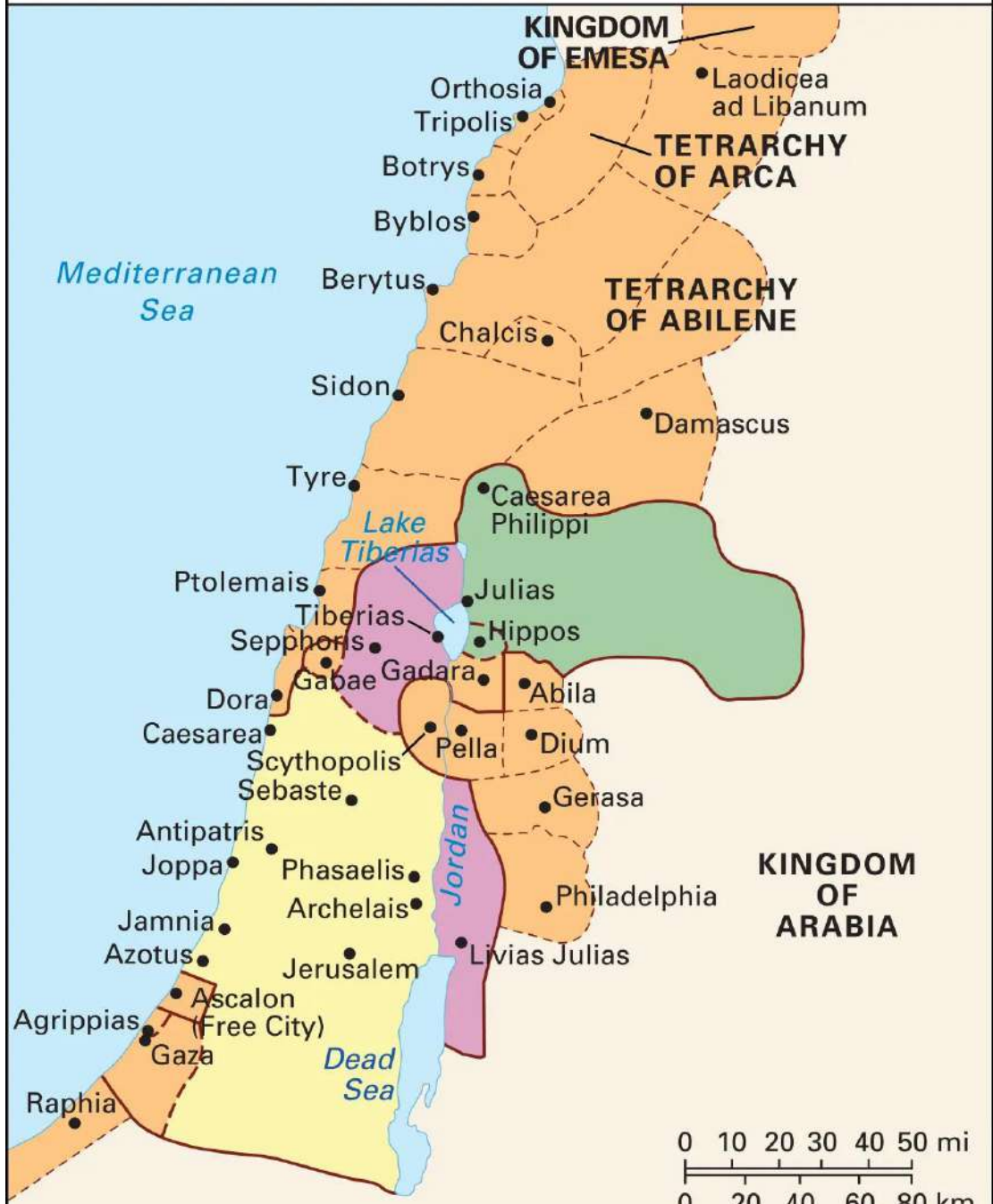






# PALESTINE DURING THE TIME OF HEROD THE GREAT AND HIS SONS

- Boundary of Herod's kingdom (20 to 4 BCE)
- - - Boundary fixed by Augustus in 4 BCE
- - - - Other boundaries
- Division between Herod's sons
  - Archelaus
  - Antipas
  - Philip
- Revenues of Jamnia, Azotus, and Phasaelis bequeathed to Salome, Herod's sister





Palestine in the Time of Jesus



**Areas lost by the  
the Judeans in 67**

**Tetrarchy of the  
Roman ally Herod  
Agrippa II**

**Areas lost by the  
the Judeans in 68**

**Traditional  
site of the  
first  
rabbinical  
sanctuary**

Roman movements

- 67 ■■■■
- 68-73 ————

**Judean Holdouts  
69-73**

**The 1st Judean Revolt  
(Great Revolt) 66-73**

