

HELLENISTIC JEWRY AT THE DAWN OF THE COMMON ERA

While the period we will be focusing on will span about 400 years, 332 BCE - 100CE, we will need to lay some ground work for this time period and for that we need to look back a bit further, starting around 600BCE with the exile of Judah by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.

An article written by contemporary sources, named the “Babylonian Chronicle” currently in the British Museum states, in translation of course: ‘in the seventh year in the month of Kislev, (Nebuchadnezzar) mustered his troops, and having marched to the land of Hatti, besieged the city of Judah, and on the second day of the month of Adar took the city and captured the king. He appointed a king (governor) of his own choosing, received its heavy tribute and sent (them) to Babylon.’ March 16, 597BCE is therefore the date of the exile and the captured king was Jehoiakim. The chronicle further states that: ‘all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all of the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and all the smiths’. None remained, except ‘the poorest people of the land’. Nebuchadnezzar’s appointed king was Zedekiah and he had sworn allegiance to the Persian king, but again Judah rose up in rebellion and Jerusalem was again besieged. In a rare act of brutality, Zedekiah’s children were murdered in front of him, and after he had witnessed the sight, his own eyes were put out, a standard punishment for a vassal who broke his oath.

So begins the story of the increasing prominence of the Babylonian Jewish community who’s descendants would go on to produce the Bavli - The Babylonian Talmud, and that of the Egyptian Jewish community as well, as many left their homes at the Babylonian advance for other lands including the prophet Jeremiah who, after denouncing the sins of his people and referring to Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of God, settled in Egypt and continued to denounce the sins that had brought the Lord’s wrath, insisting that his words would be justified by history. It is interesting to note that Jeremiah, like his contemporary, Ezekiel, having witnessed the civil wars of his people and having predicted the eventual destruction of the Temple, foresaw a continuing religion *not* tied to the Temple cult, and according to Paul Johnson in “A History of the Jews” earned the title of ‘first Jew’.

In 538BCE, the new Persian king Cyrus, had a document cylinder created, also housed in the British Museum, on which he outlined his policy towards repatriation: ‘I am Cyrus, the king of the world....Marduk, the great god, rejoices at my pious acts....I gathered all their people and led them back to their abodes...and the gods....at the order of Marduk, the great Lord, I had them installed in joy in their sanctuaries...May all the gods whom I have led back to their cities pray daily for the length of my days.’ Deuteronomy calls him ‘the Lord’s anointed’ and the Book of Ezra has Cyrus telling the Babylonian Jews that God has charged him to build him a house at Jerusalem and all those willing may return and build a house of

the Lord, God of Israel. Despite some resistance from the Jews who had remained behind in Judah, 'the poorest people of the land', the repatriation of the land was successful under Zeurubabel in about 520BCE. For much of the next 200 years, the Jews were free to develop a new orthodoxy revolving around a single centralized Temple and further reinforcing a common identity of faith with the redaction of their sacred works. During this time the Jewish population exploded. They spread into territories bordering Judah and became a proselytizing force. All the same, as Johnson describes them 'they were a small people in an age of empires, an uncompromising religious cultural unit in a big bruising world.' This was Jewish life at the time of Alexander's conquest.

Alexander represented the first true European Invasion of Asia and what he brought with him was one of the most powerful cultural forces the world has ever seen. His area of conquest included parts of Asia, Africa as well as most of Europe. The success of Alexander and his successors was due in large part to a superb and modern war machine including immense siege engines, huge warships, colossal forts and a fearsome and absolute weapon, the phalanx, a system of ground warfare whereby a large infantry would employ shields, armor and very close formation to drive through opposing forces. Jews were very aware of this awesome power, having served as mercenaries for the Greeks in many campaigns.

Alexander's successors divided his empire into huge kingdoms, Ptolemy ruling Africa from Egypt, Seleucus ruling Asia from Syria, and Attalus ruling Europe from Anatolia. Originally, Judea came under the rule of Ptolemy. The Greeks came as conquerors to the eastern Mediterranean and settled in as the ruling classes. They showed little inclination to learn the language, customs or culture of the people who came under their authority, nor did they engage in missionary activity to promote Hellenism or Greek culture. They took their superiority for granted. Their only promotion of Greek culture took place in the gymnasium. The other institutions of Greek culture, the stadium, theater, odeum, lyceum, were more or less public works projects for the benefit of Greek citizens. They were excellent architects but also sculptors, poets, musicians, playwrights, philosophers and debaters. They were traders as well, and having control of the trade routes around the Mediterranean, the economy boomed. Greek culture and Greek economics appealed strongly to the societies of the near east and the Jews were no exception.

Life in Judea during the time we have talked about so far has been described by Abraham Levy, a specialist in production studies in antiquity, as a time, in some ways greater than the Renaissance. The Renaissance laid the foundation for an industrial revolution which occurred some 200 years in the future whereas Hellenism came fraught with industrialization. It was this period that saw the invention of the foot driven potter's wheel, enabling potters to produce more product more efficiently, eliminating the need for a second person to turn the wheel. It allowed for a more uniform thickness allowing the pottery to dry evenly and preventing distortions and cracks, thus using material more economically. It also allowed for a more esthetically pleasing product which found a huge market around the Mediterranean.

Another important process developed in the eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period was that of the bi-valve mold. An interesting sounding product and one that was to have great economic import for the region. Although pottery molds were known in the area for centuries, they were single molds because there was no way to insure that a two piece mold would ever fit together properly and the result would usually be an unusable piece. The invention of a key system, a set of mating notches or grooves cut into both halves would insure that the halves would fit together perfectly, every time. Previously items such as oil lamps were turned by hand on a wheel but now they were mass produced, sometimes by very large manufacturing concerns and marketed over large areas. Other important inventions during this period that had huge impact on the world economy of the time was glass blowing, the seasonally adjusted sundial and the horseshoe.

Jewish burial customs were beginning to take on a decidedly Greek influence. The Greek custom of putting coins in the mouth of the deceased to pay for safe passage to the afterlife was discovered in the burial cave of the Priestly family of Caiaphas, as were ossuary with Greek and Hebrew inscription.

Two of the books written during the Hellenistic period were Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, both reflecting Hellenistic themes and ideas. Ecclesiastes explores themes like the pursuit of lasting wisdom. The writer also comes to the conclusion that seeking “success and justice is like chasing the wind, therefore work hard and enjoy the fruits of your labors”, a theme that in many ways echo Stoic thought. Perhaps the concept we are most familiar with from this great work is, “.....a time for every purpose.....” In Ecclesiastes, the author is torn between new ideas and philosophies of the time, and his piety, his critical thought and his conservatism. Also, important religious concepts like an eschatology or final judgement, and heavenly Jerusalem or Zion made their appearance around this time as well.

As Greek culture permeated its way through the region, Jews reacted in several ways. Some chose to retreat into the wilderness and try to recapture the ‘pristine Mosaic enthusiasm’, as Johnson puts it. Many Jews rejected the isolationists and fanatics and supported a tolerant approach. The Book of Jonah, also written around this time, had as its theme tolerance, as when God decides to spare the city of Nineveh, the city that he had told Jonah he would destroy. This tolerance reflects the thoughts and feeling of many of the Jews living and earning a living in the cities, including many pious ones...be tolerant and civil. But in the end, Hellenism was a destabilizing force both spiritually and politically, a boon economically, and a secularizing force as well.

The self-assured superiority of the Greek ruling classes coupled with our modern-day scholarly pursuits have concluded, or at least revealed that Judaism and Hellenism were neither competing systems nor incompatible concepts. Jews did not have to choose between assimilation, and resistance to Greek culture. Their eventual attempt at revolt was aimed directly at a violent and corrupt ruler, rather than the culture as a whole. In fact, the leader of

the revolt, Mattathias, 'had enough aristocratic status and Hellenic education to command respect....'

I have always viewed with wonder the way in which many people I know look at Jewish history. They see our history through the very jaded view of the bible, and refuse to look a little further into the worlds of human nature and politics.

Immediately following the death of Alexander in 323BCE, Judea came under the domination of the Ptolemy's ruling from Egypt, and were afforded significant religious freedom but not political freedom. The tiny country soon became caught in a power struggle of immense proportions, between the Ptolemy's, and Seleucid's ruling Asia from Antioch in Syria. In 198BCE the Seleucid's under Antiochus gained control of Judea and it is seems apparent from his initial documents that he was favorably disposed towards the Jews, as long as they caused no political trouble for him or the army.

In 175BCE, a very big bribe and/or the untimely death of the High Priest Onias III gave the position to his Hellenized younger brother, Jesus who later changed his name to Jason. An even bigger bribe got Jason replaced by an even more extreme Hellenizer named Menelaus. The people's allegiance was divided between Jason and Menelaus, with Jason garnering the greater popular support. Unrest broke out between the factions of Menelaus and those of Jason, with Menelaus having the full support of Antiochus.

It was about this time that Antiochus, sensing a weakening of the Ptolemys, made an expedition to Egypt and was soundly defeated. In need of a moral victory of some sort and remembering the situation in Jerusalem he made tracks for that city. He was able to take the city without a fight, having his supporters, the party of Menelaus open the gates for him. He slew many of the opposing party, sacked the Temple and defiled the Holy of Holies. He built a citadel in the lower part of the city and even built a new altar at the Temple on which he sacrificed swine. He further ordered Temples to Greek gods built in every city and village and forbade the study of the Law and the practice of circumcision. The Samaritans, who had long professed to be members of the Jewish community but were usually scorned, no longer confessed to be their kindred in the face of the onslaught.

The language of state was Greek and Jews learned Greek. In a generation or two Jews grew up as Greek speakers and became integrated members of the community, but their Judaism remained intact. What they required was a way of expressing their Jewishness within that community. They found it within the very close to home. They translated their history and sacred literature into Greek, they retold the legends of the past using Greek language, and Greek literary forms. As we have seen in Ecclesiastes and also Song of Songs, piety is transformed from a harsh and almost unattainable, self-sacrificing goal, to a standard that is reflected and attainable through everyday life and real human emotions.

Most Jews accepted degrees of Greek influence. They did not object to Greek rule any more than they objected to the Persians. They paid taxes, joined the army, held positions of state and in general, were loyal subjects, as long as they were free to practice their religion in peace. The enlightenment that Hellenism brought with it had a profound impact on Jewish society. Their literature was already beginning to reflect the surrounding culture and now a reform movement was forming that hoped to drag the temple-state into the modern age.

Started by the Jewish ruling classes their motives were primarily secular and economic; to make Judea a world class state. There was an intellectual aspect to this movement as well and their goal was to improve Judaism. The reasoning was, if Isaiah and Jeremiah foretold a Judaism capable of surviving without the Temple and the cult, then God must surely be universal in nature. The Greeks had developed a universalist society in that Alexander expected all good men to regard themselves as citizens of the world, good men kin and bad men foreigners. The Jewish reformist intellectuals saw this as a perfect marriage, the universal God and the universal society. They argued that Abraham and Moses, these strangers and sojourners were in fact citizens of the world. It was these reformers who embarked on the first Biblical criticism, noting that the Torah was full of fables and impossible demands and prohibitions and was therefore ready for modernization.

The reformers didn't want to abolish the Law, they wanted to liberalize it. They wanted to drop provisions that would forbid or interfere with their participation in Greek culture, like the ban on nudity. They wanted to reduce the law to its ethical core and combine the Greek *polis* or city-state, with the Jewish ethical and moral God. Marry Greek culture with Jewish universal monotheism. What an ambitious project....and one that was doomed to fail. Greeks were polytheists and their concept of god was quite different from that of the Jews. Their gods were not much more than successful and virtuous ancestors who undergo apotheosis, a divine transformation. It was not a great step for them to deify a monarch. This notion was totally unacceptable to Jews, but it didn't keep the reformers from continuing to push towards a greater embrace of the Greek city-state culture and all that it had to offer. They had an enthusiastic ally in Antiochus.

The High Priest Jason was part of the reform movement but Antiochus needed larger and larger sums of money to fund his war machine and soon replaced Jason with Menelaus, as we learned earlier. Menelaus attempted to institute the reforms that his party had promoted and was met with uproar and division. In 167BCE the situation exploded with a decree that, in effect abolished Mosaic Law, replacing it with secular law. The Temple became an ecumenical place of worship and in keeping with that idea, a statue of Zeus was introduced. Johnson doubts that Antiochus had a hand in the decree as it was unheard of for Greek governments to so influence any of the many cults that came under their domain. The initiative came directly from the Jewish reformers themselves, led by Menelaus, who believed that such a move was necessary to bring about the symbiosis of Greek universalism and the Jews universal god. The priests were divided by the action and many in Judea sided with the *hasidim*, the pious ones. One segment of Judean society that might have been attracted to the concept was the *am ha-aretz*, the ordinary people. Upon the return from the

Babylonian exile those who originally remained behind, *'the poorest people of the land'*, were viewed by the new religious orthodox, led by Ezra, as illiterate, ignorant of the Law and scarcely Jews at all. They had been treated as second class citizens by the religiously rigorous *bnei hagolah*, people of the Exile, and would certainly not object to their losing power and influence. The problem was that the reformers were predominantly elite and wealthy citizens who the people identified with higher taxes, from which the poor suffered the most. So an opportunity to meld the philosophical concepts of the Jews and those of the Greeks was forever lost.

The addition of pagan symbols and rituals, and the decision of Menelaus to require pious Jews to make symbolic sacrifices was just the spark needed to ignite greater hostilities. Stories like that of Eleazar the Scribe being beaten to death for refusing to make the sacrifices that were now required, opened another new concept in biblical literature, the concept of religious martyrdom. For it is at this time that the Maccabees, the sons of Matthais Hasmon, were beginning their guerrilla war against the reformers and their ally, the army of Antiochus, and the suffering of the faithful fed into the propaganda of religious purity and Jewish nationalism, and it was the Maccabees who were now beginning to write Jewish history.

Between 166-164BCE, the Maccabees had driven the Greeks out from the districts around Jerusalem and routed the reformers. In 162BCE, the son of Antiochus, Antiochus V, finally turned on Menelaus, 'the man to blame for all the trouble', and executed him. In 152BCE Antiochus V recognized Jonathan, now head of the Maccabees, as high priest and in 142 they exempted Judea from taxation. Jonathan's successor, Simon, became high priest and further took the position of ethnarch, ruler of Judea. It was the first time that the high priest had also taken the position as political ruler of Judea.

The years between the first decrees and the final expulsion of the reformers were bitter and bloody. The intensity of the assault on Mosaic Law caused a corresponding zeal for the Law by the Jewish nationalists. Judaism had become a narrow enclave of orthodox thought and any moderation or deviation from that orthodoxy treated as apostasy or collaboration with the enemy. Any tampering with the Temple cult was met with mobs of religious extremists, and those mobs were now part of the Jerusalem scene, making the city and Judea as a whole, difficult to govern. The secular spirit and intellectual freedom of Hellenic Judea was gone, but Greek thought was deeply embedded and would ever remain so, as we shall see.

In their battle with Greek education, the hasidim began to develop a national system of Jewish education. Local schools, where all Jewish boys could learn Torah, began springing up around the city, and then around the country. This development became the forerunner of the synagogue and the political party known as the Pharisees, a movement rooted in popular education. The Pharisees would eventually transform into the rabbinate. The education provided in these schools were entirely religious, and while all outward manner of Greek

culture was being purged, Greek rationalism found its way into the schools by way of the Mishnah, the Oral Law. Rationalizing Mosaic Law became the goal of the Pharisees and it was a VERY Greek concept. It meant that the Law could be adapted to changing conditions and administered in a realistic manner. By contrast the Temple priests dominated by a group called the Sadducees, insisted that the Mosaic Law must be unchanged and unchangeable. Their adherence to the Written Law was directly related to their dominance of the Temple cult, AND the fact that the high priest was also the secular head of state, a first in Jewish history. Without the supremacy of the Temple cult and strict adherence to the written Law, authority would be compromised. So they could not admit that oral teachings could subject the Law to creative development.

Such was Judea at the dawn of the Common Era. The cities were dominated by two movements or what can be called political parties in a theocracy. The Essenes were continuing their withdrawal into the wilderness and into a monastic way of life, the Qumran were preparing for the final battle between good and evil, both exemplified by the struggles in Jerusalem, itinerant preachers were canvassing the country supporting one movement or another, or combining aspects of several and forming their own, as Jesus did.

The storm clouds were beginning to gather and the air was thick with political and philosophical tension. The atmosphere was right for a storm, and that storm was the ascension of Rome as the dominant force around the Mediterranean, and much of the known world.

What we know of Jewish life at this time comes from two primary sources, Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. While their actual impact on the events of the day are relatively minor, their impact on Western civilization is not, because it is often through them, or people quoting them that we know, with any degree of certainty, the events that led to the advent of both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. It is through their eyes, Jewish eyes, which many came to interpret the events of the day, the struggles and battles that ensued, and the outcome.

Egypt was a haven of Greek culture under the Ptolemies, and Alexandria was its major city. That the Diaspora Jews in Alexandria enjoyed the comfort, culture and intellectualism of Hellenic culture should not mislead us. It appears that the only other place of sacrifice *sanctioned* by the priesthood in Jerusalem was the Temple in Alexandria, and this with the well wishes of the Ptolemies. While Temples existed in both Israel and Judah during the first commonwealth, the Temple in Israel was abandoned by the official priesthood after the destruction by the Assyrians, and came to be used as the official Temple of the Samaritans, and therefore not recognized by Judea. But the priesthood did sanction the Temple in Alexandria and those who could not make the journey to Jerusalem were encouraged to sacrifice in Alexandria. The Jews of Alexandria saw this as the fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah where he said that ‘there shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt’. It was also the first step towards creating a Judaism without the Temple at Jerusalem.

This was the world in which Philo was raised. While still battling with the Seleucids in Syria, Rome had succeeded in gaining control of Egypt. Rome had a favorable disposition towards the Jews within its empire and the Jews of Egypt were afforded the same. Augustus, in a letter to the Jewish community at Cyrene, confirmed full Roman citizenship and a limited self-government on his Jewish subjects. He even allowed for instances when Jewish custom conflicted with Roman Law, such as allowing Jews to reschedule judicial hearings for days other than the sabbath.

We don't know the exact dates for Philo's birth or death but it is generally accepted that he lived between 15-20BCE and 45-50CE, making him contemporaries of both Jesus and Paul, as well as Hillel who had come from Babylonia to Jerusalem at about that time. Paul and probably Jesus had come in contact with Philo's work and Hillel, while serving as head of the Sanhedrin most likely came across his commentary while adjudicating issues that came before him.

Philo was born into *the* most prominent and affluent family of Alexandria and quite possibly of all Egypt. His brother Alexander, held the title of 'Alabarch', a position that may have been associated with the collection of customs and duties, but encompassed the entire Delta region. The family's influence and wealth brought them close to the prominent elite of Rome including Claudius, the future Emperor of Rome; Antonia, Claudius' mother; Agrippa, Cypros and also Gaius Caligula who had Alexander imprisoned during his reign and who Philo was obliged to travel to Rome for and win his release. It is believed that Philo too held a political position in the city but he was probably drawn to it reluctantly and a little later in life. First and foremost he was a philosopher.

Brought up on the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, he spoke, wrote and thought in Greek. He was a historian, diplomat, public defender, and perfectly at home in all Greek literature. He was a follower of the Platonic School making him a major secular philosopher of his time.....but he was also a pious Jew, writing volumes of commentary on the Pentateuch and Jewish law. Max Dimont writes, in his work 'Jews, God and History', '...he probably played a more crucial role in shaping both Judaism and Christianity than either Rabbi Akiba or Paul, having shaped Judaism around a Grecian metaphysical framework so thoroughly that it influenced both Jews and Christians in the creation of their new theologies.'

This was a time of the expansion of Jewish thought and the expansion of the Jewish mind. Hillel and Philo exemplify both. Hillel as teacher, philosopher and head of the Sanhedrin and Philo as historian, philosopher and scholar show that Jewish thought had reached its greatest spiritual intensity. Bentwich writes in 'Philo'; 'The two grandest expressions of Jewish genius immediately preceded the national downfall'.

If Judaism was a proselytizing force in those times it was so in Greek and Latin, not Hebrew. Philo spoke Greek, and Latin and produced his works in those languages. It was his

work on Jewish topics in those languages that came to the attention of Greek intellectuals and they found it to be, rather than the backward absurdity of an earlier age, an acceptable philosophy. Through allegory Philo argued that God created the world but did not influence it directly, but did so indirectly through *Logos*, The Word. He went on to say that the soul comes from the “Divine Source” and is capable of conceiving the nature of God. The ability to conceive God can be done in two ways, through the spirit of prophesy and meditation, or *Logos*, the Word, Torah. Judaism, he continued, was the perfect way for man to achieve moral perfection, and *Logos* (Torah), was the path to God. Early Christians used meditation and contemplation on the Word to achieve their connection with God.

Philo’s works include as you might expect, an exposition on the Laws of Moses, but also a Mishnaic type of work on the application of the Law to contemporary issues and events, philosophical and religious phenomenon and historical events. Some of his other works include essays on the creation, on Noah’s work as a planter, on drunkenness and sobriety in which he describes the various social clubs of Alexandria at the time, on dreams, virtues, rewards and punishments, and two works combining Plato, Pythagoreanism and Stoicism titled “Every Good Man is Free” and “On the Contemplative Life”, as well as histories and apologia on Jewish life.

An indication of Philo’s credit as an historian can be derived from the many references to his works when tracing the lives of the Ptolemies and the eventual end of their rule, or Rome’s early Emperors, as in Barrett’s stunning work, “Caligula, The Corruption of Power” or when constructing the history of Diaspora Jews in virtually every book professing to tell a Jewish history.

The other major source of information from this time was Josephus. What can you say about a man who *also* grew up in a prominent, wealthy and religious family well versed in Greek culture, who witnessed firsthand the political powder keg that was Jerusalem of the day, who actually fought in the civil war that brought about the eventual destruction of the Temple and the annihilation of much of his country?

Yosef ben (son of) Matthias *ha kohen* (the Priest) born in Jerusalem during the first year of the reign of Caligula, 37CE. He writes in his book ‘The Life of Flavius Josephus’, “The family from which I am derived is not an ignoble one, but hath descended all along from the priests”. Were he writing for a Jewish audience he would have had merely say that he was a *ha kohen* and he would have been understood. But his audience was not predominantly Jewish, it was Roman and therefore the explanation is understandable.

Josephus spent his early years in Greek studies as was the custom for affluent young men and completed his Jewish education under the Sadducees of course, being of Temple priestly status, but also chose to study under the Pharisees and the Essenes. All indications are that he would have been quite happy living the life of priestly status in Jerusalem but events were unfolding that would pull him to a different life.

Many strongly objected to the royal religious establishment, combining high priest and secular head of state which the Hasmoneans had begun. A group chose to separate themselves from the establishment and that group was called the Pharisees. The last of the Hasmonean rulers, Alexander Jannaeus, while officiating as high priest during Sukkot, refused to perform a certain ceremony according to religious custom, at which point some of those in attendance pelted him with lemons. In a rage, Alexander slew about 6 thousand of the assembled. Civil war ensued but rabbinic sources tell us that it wasn't solely religious issues that drove it, there were social and economic issues as well. The Sadducees were mainly comprised of wealthy and privileged people who owed their livelihood to the Temple cult and its high priest, the ruler of Judea. The Pharisees had broad popular support. At the end of the civil war Alexander returned to Jerusalem with his enemies as captives and in one of the most horrific scenes related to us in secular Jewish literature, he crucified 800 of them and while they were still alive, he ordered the throats of their wives and children cut before their eyes. And so ends the rule of the Hasmoneans. The family that had won national independence from the Seleucids and made peace with the Ptolemies, sank into the same corruptions of power that affected so many rulers throughout history.

A minister under the last Hasmoneans named Antipater was an Idumean and his family was forcibly converted by the Hasmoneans. He was able to negotiate an arrangement with Rome whereby Judea would become a client-state and Antipater's family would govern at Rome's bidding. Antipater's son, Herod ruled Judea from 37BCE until his death in 4BCE and did so with great political acumen, and paranoid brutality. He viewed anyone with ties to the Hasmoneans with great suspicion and downgraded the importance of the high priest who, was a Sadducee. This raised the importance of the Pharisees and they gained control over the Temple functions, insisting that the Sadducee high priests performed the ritual in a Pharisaic manner.

After his death his successors proved to be incompetent for the most part and were deposed by Rome, who imposed direct rule over Judea. This caused a substantial minority of Zealots in Judea to challenge Roman rule with ferocity and violent defiance. It was these events that would change the course of Josephus' life.

Josephus had witnessed a bloody riot that had broken out on Passover, a feast that always attracted thousands of pilgrims. One of the Roman soldiers made a provocative gesture and the excited mob began to shout insults at the Roman procurator. The troops reacted with swift brutality and twenty thousand were killed. This and other actions resulted in the high priest being taken in chains to Rome to be tried before the Emperor Claudius. Claudius found in favor of the Jews, but the people of Judea had never before witnessed such humiliation of their high priest. A similar incident again happened under the Emperor Nero and at that time Josephus was elected to travel to Rome and plead their case, much as Philo had done few years earlier for his brother Alexander. Josephus succeeded, but it was too late, the stage was set.

Having been to Rome and seeing the awesome power of the Roman Empire it seems reasonable that a learned, prominent and practical person like Josephus would, at every opportunity, lobby for a negotiated settlement and urge his countrymen not to become enflamed and consumed by the talk of war with Rome. He would later write, “I warned them not to recklessly, and with such utter madness, expose their country, their families and themselves to the direst perils”, but it was too late. A group called the Sicarii had already driven the Roman’s from the fortress at Masada and learning of their success, a handful of young priests had stopped the practice of offering sacrifices in honor of the Emperor, in the Temple. At 29 years old, Josephus found himself in the middle of a war he was sure would fare badly for his country, and also found himself a very lonely voice of conciliation and reason. The next 2 years of oppression, resistance, guerrilla tactics and more oppression and resistance would eventually spin poor Josephus. He would eventually side, reluctantly, with the rebel cause and would be made Governor and protector of the Galilee by them. Once outside of Jerusalem he believed that the Galilee would rally around him and that he would prevent this important agricultural area from falling to the Romans. But did he actually plan to move against them militarily, if required? This is the question that some in Jerusalem began to ask and he began to be viewed with some suspicion. When Josephus finally made a provocative move and razed the palace of the Roman tetrarch, he refused to allow the booty to go towards the war effort and instead had it returned to the pro-Roman party there. Word began to spread that the young governor from Jerusalem was a traitor. His chief accuser had rallied the residents of Tiberius, Galilee’s largest city, against him and civil war in Galilee was close at hand.

Jerusalem decided to dispatch a Commission of Inquiry to Josephus and if he refused to cooperate their orders were to kill him on the spot. Through a number of maneuvers, close calls, deceptions and persuasion, he was finally able to rid himself of the Commission and his enemies on it. He eventually captured 4 of the members and, rather than execute them for that is what they surely would have done to him, he returned them to Jerusalem under guard. He had retained his position as governor, but the real test was upon him. The city of Tiberius was in open revolt to his governorship and he had been quite fortunate to escape several assassination attempts against him.

The Syrian Governor under Nero had earlier attempted to march on Jerusalem and was repulsed and routed, leaving his army to be cut to pieces. Nero was not pleased that a handful Jewish nationalist had rebuked the power and authority of the Roman Empire so he dispatched Vespasian. Vespasian was responsible for expanding the Roman empire into Germany and Britain. He was a brilliant general but had fallen out of favor with Nero and was waiting to be killed by agents of Nero for the crime of falling asleep during Nero’s recitals. It was during this exile that he was recalled and put in charge of the action against Judea.

Josephus had a terrible year trying to shore up support in Galilee and evading his enemy's assassination attempts. In the year 67CE, Josephus was 30 years old and about to confront the greatest general the Roman's had.

Vespasian gathered his legions on the border of Galilee and marched to Sepphoris, a city that had some pro-Roman, and strong anti-Josephus sentiments. The city offered its services to Vespasian in return for its protection from the army of Josephus. Josephus was in Tiberias as Vespasian's army moved east. The ability of the Roman army was such that it was able to flatten out the rocky terrain in order to make the march to the fortress at Jotapata in only four days. He set up camp on a high ridge, with his entire army and their instruments of war in full view of the surrounding countryside, almost daring the clever governor-general of the territory to come himself to defend the city. And Josephus went.

What the army of the Jews had was courage and daring. What the army of the Romans had was 60,000 soldiers, including horsemen, foot soldiers, light infantry, archers and the most technologically advanced war machines the world had yet seen. And the army of Rome laid siege to the city of Jotapata being defended by Josephus, and he knew what the outcome would be. Vespasian took the city in typical brutal fashion and Josephus and a few others were able to find shelter from the onslaught in a cave. On Vespasian's strict orders, Josephus was not to be killed. He was to surrender and be brought to him. It was in the cave that the majority of the group had convinced the others to make a suicide pact rather than surrender. Josephus not wishing to die attempted to convince the others that dying in battle and for a just cause was glorious, but dying by one's own hand was not. The group was unconvinced so Josephus agreed to the pact and even organized the procedure. They would draw lots and kill each other based on the numbers drawn. Josephus was a brilliant mathematician in his youth and managed to work out a formula whereby he would be the last person to be killed. After all the others had followed through with the deed, Josephus was able to convince the last survivor that death was not the way out, surrender was. Though greatly outnumbered, out maneuvered and under a state of siege, Josephus and his half-starved band of fighters were able to keep the great army of Vespasian at bay through wit and courage. But at the end, Vespasian ruled the day and Josephus came as an enemy vanquished.

Josephus gained some admiration from the general because, rather than send him to Rome to be tried by Nero, Vespasian allowed him to stay in the Roman camp. Josephus writes that he had a vision that "Vespasian would rule over Rome, and his son after him", and alludes to the fact that Vespasian may have been amused by his captive and chose to keep him close. It is from this vantage point that Josephus was eyewitness to the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

In researching this project I came across one fact that stood out among all the others that I came across. I was stuck by the fact that it was the apostate nephew of Philo, one of the greatest minds of the Diaspora, who was the commander of the siege against Jerusalem, under the command of Titus, the son of Vespasian.

After the war, Josephus indeed saw Vespasian become Emperor *and* his son Titus. Josephus was awarded a privileged life in Rome for the rest of his days and spent those days writing a massive amount of work. Not wanting his hosts or posterity to forget the noble group he came from, he wrote an extensive work titled ‘The Antiquities of the Jews’ which explained the long history of his people and their customs and beliefs. He also wrote a book entitled ‘The War of the Jews’, in which he recounts the events from the end of Seleucid rule to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Josephus became an apologist for his people when writing against one of their detractors, namely Apion of Alexandria. Not believing the history of the Jews as written by Josephus he instead attributes them to many of the calamities that the Greek and Roman Empires had known. In his work ‘Against Apion’, Josephus fires back with a lesson on the pure reason found in Jewish law, and the place of honor that Moses, the great legislator, should hold among all peoples. He also wrote an autobiography entitled ‘The Life of Flavius Josephus’ where he explains his taking the name Flavius in honor of one of his benefactors.

We need to view Josephus through the window of his realities. A very bright and astute individual educated in Greek culture and philosophy who wished to see his country and his people continue, and in the absence of that, just wanted to stay alive. After the war he was a beneficiary of Rome and at the time when he produced his works, he certainly didn’t want to insult the ones who had allowed him to keep his head and live in suitable fashion. Yet on several occasions he did take both the Romans and Greeks to task, but it was always against a person or persons who could no longer cause him trouble or who had fallen out of favor with the Emperor. It is said that Josephus inflated his role in events and justified his actions against others, as in the incident in the cave at Jotapata. He attributed his drawing of the highest number to ‘divine intervention’, a miracle, but it was most likely a case of very quick thinking in a very difficult situation and the desire not to die.

In a passage from the biography of Josephus, Mirielle Hadas-Lebel writes quite eloquently about the horror that Josephus witnessed and had tried to prevent during the siege of Jerusalem. It was to be the last time Josephus would see Jerusalem. She writes, ‘Terrible things had been happening in Jerusalem. Although the city was empty of Romans, blood flowed like a river through the streets and even through the portals of the Temple. The flower of the nation was being slaughtered with no thought for age or merit. A handful of irresponsible men were battling each other in a struggle for power.’ “....Josephus had witnessed the confirmation of what he already knew: his people had gone mad. The war that had begun with such unthinking excitement and exhilaration was now being waged with self-destructive fury. After having slaughtered the nation’s elite, the factions were now bent on destroying each other while the most formidably organized and equipped army in the world stood at the gates. Their belated return to sanity would have meant nothing....Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of madmen.”

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