

Library of Early Christianity

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From the Maccabees to the Mishnah

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Morton Smith. To all of these friends I am deeply grateful, and if I have not incorporated all of their suggestions, it is my own stubbornness which is to blame.

According to rabbinic lore (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a), when a person comes before the heavenly tribunal after his death he is asked, "Did you conduct your trade honestly? Did you set aside time for the study of Torah? Did you raise a family?" My father lived his life in such a way that he could answer all these questions in the affirmative. In business he had a reputation as a man whose word could be trusted. Every morning before going to work and every night before going to sleep, he would sit in his favorite chair and study a Jewish book. I miss him, and I dedicate this book to his memory.

S.J.D.C.

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Ancient Judaism: Chronology and Definitions

The goal of this book is to interpret ancient Judaism: to identify its major ideas, to describe its salient practices, to trace its unifying patterns, and to assess its relationship to Israelite religion and society. The book is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, but in order to make the argument easier to follow, in the first section of this chapter I briefly survey the chronology of ancient Judaism, and in the third section I outline the major themes of each chapter. In the second section I discuss some of the difficulties of periodization and perspective. I conclude with a brief discussion of unity and diversity in ancient Judaism.

Chronology

In 587 B.C.E. many of the citizens of the kingdom of Judah were exiled to Babylonia, thereby inaugurating the *exilic period*. ("B.C.E." and "C.E.," "Before the Common Era" and "of the Common Era," are the religiously neutral equivalents of "B.C.," "Before Christ," and "A.D.," *Anno Domini*, "Year of the Lord.") In 587 Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and the kingdom was no longer. With the conquest of Babylonia by the Persians in 539 B.C.E., the Judeans (or Jews) were permitted by the conqueror, Cyrus the Great, to return to their homeland. Some of them took advantage of his offer. At least two waves of Babylonian Jews returned to the land of Judea during the 530s and 520s B.C.E. After some complex and bitter feuding with the community of those who never had been exiled, the Jews rebuilt the temple and dedicated it in 516 B.C.E. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were active at the beginning of the exilic period; Second Isaiah and his school (the anonymous authors of Isaiah 40–66), Haggai, and Zechariah (the author of Zechariah 1–8) were active at its end.

The *Persian period* lasted only two hundred years, from 539 B.C.E. (the conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus the Great) to 334 or 333 B.C.E. (the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great). The most important achievement of the period, aside from the restoration of the temple, was the activity of Ezra (probably 458 B.C.E., although many scholars prefer a date approximately thirty years later) and Nehemiah (445 B.C.E. and 432 B.C.E.). Ezra led another wave of returnees from Babylonia, tried to dissolve the marriages with non-Jews that had been contracted primarily by the priesthood and the aristocracy, and read "the book of the instruction (*Torah*) of Moses" to the people. Nehemiah had a more variegated career, including the fortification and repopulation of the city of Jerusalem, the cancellation of the debts of the poor, and a long list of religious reforms. The generation of Ezra and Nehemiah is the last to be treated by the biblical historians. Malachi was the last of the prophets (actually "Malachi" is probably not a name but a common noun for "my messenger" or, with a slightly different punctuation, "his messenger"; in other words, the book of Malachi is anonymous), and he probably lived just before Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah mark the end of "the Bible" and "biblical Israel" (see next section and chapter 6).

The conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great inaugurated the *Hellenistic period*. After Alexander's death his empire was divided by his generals. Thirty years of fighting followed. Finally the dust settled (301 B.C.E.) and Judea was part of the kingdom of Egypt (of the Macedonian Ptolemies). A century later Judea was conquered (200 B.C.E.) by the Macedonian kings of Syria (the Seleucids). In the sphere of cultural history the Hellenistic period endured for centuries, perhaps until the Arab conquests of the seventh century C.E. From the perspective of political history, however, the Hellenistic period was much shorter. For most inhabitants of the Levant, it ended when the rule of the Macedonian kings of Egypt and Syria was replaced by that of Rome in the first century B.C.E. For the Jews, it was even shorter.

Throughout the Persian and Hellenistic periods the Jews maintained a quiescent attitude toward their rulers. There is no indication of any serious uprising by the Jews against the empires that ruled them. This changed dramatically in the 160s B.C.E. In 168–167 B.C.E. Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, profaned the temple and persecuted Judaism. In the temple he erected an altar to Zeus, and everywhere he compelled the Jews to violate the laws of the Torah. Various groups of Jews rebelled against the king, the most prominent of them being the clan of Mattathias the Has-

monean and his son Judah the Maccabee (hence the entire dynasty is often called Maccabean or Hasmonean). In 164 B.C.E. the Maccabees reconquered and purified the temple; the end of Seleucid rule followed twenty years later.

The most striking feature of the Hellenistic period is its spectacular finish, but in their own quiet and poorly attested way the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. emerge as an important transition period in the history of Judaism. These centuries witnessed the growth of the *diaspora*, the "scattering" of the Jews throughout the world; the beginnings of the "canonization" of scripture; the writing of the earliest nonbiblical works that have been preserved; the gradual transformation of prophecy into "apocalyptic"; the emergence of a class of *scribes*, lay people learned in the sacred traditions. Some books of the Bible were written during this period, all of them anonymous, but they are impressive in both number and importance (for example, Jonah and Job). The latest book in the Bible, Daniel, was written at the very end of the Hellenistic period during the dark days of the Antiochian persecution.

The *Maccabean period* lasted a century, from the victory of 164 B.C.E. to the entrance of the Romans into Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. During their tenure, the Maccabees gradually increased their power and prestige. They began as rebels against the Seleucid empire, but less than ten years after Judah's death his brother was appointed high priest by a relation of Antiochus Epiphanes! By the 140s and 130s B.C.E. the Seleucids had little choice but to accept the independence of the Maccabean state. The rise of the Maccabees within the Jewish polity was just as phenomenal. They began as insignificant country priests and became high priests and kings, the rulers of an independent state. They pursued an aggressive foreign policy, seeking alliance with Rome against the Seleucids and carving out for themselves a kingdom larger than that of David and Solomon.

Their fall from power was caused by both internal and external enemies. During the reigns of John Hyrcanus (135–104 B.C.E.) and Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.E.), many Jews opposed Maccabean rule. These opponents were not "Hellenizers" and "lawless" Jews who supported Antiochus' attempt to destroy Judaism, but loyal Jews who had had enough of the Maccabees' autocratic ways. The Seleucids and the Greek city-states of the region never fully accepted Maccabean independence, but the most potent external threat came from a power that first entered the scene as a friend and ally. It was to the advantage of the Romans that the Jews rule themselves, but not too successfully. The Romans wanted an alliance with the Jews, not an alliance between equals but one that

would clearly recognize Roman superiority. The Romans quickly realized that the Maccabees were a "nationalist" element that could not be combined easily with their own imperial vision, so the Maccabees were pushed aside and a new dynasty was created.

The new dynasty owed everything to the Romans and therefore supported them wholeheartedly. The founder of the dynasty was Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.E.). He attempted to be the king over all his subjects, not just the Jews. He built pagan cities and temples as well as Jewish cities and the temple of Jerusalem. He also built numerous fortresses, the most famous of which was Masada. To pay for all these projects he imposed heavy taxes, and because he always felt insecure in his rule, he killed numerous members of the aristocracy, whose claims to prestige and status within the Jewish community were stronger than his own. He also killed many of his wives and children, suspecting them (sometimes rightly) of plotting rebellion.

The Roman Jewish symbiosis was at its peak during the reigns of Herod the Great and his grandson Herod Agrippa I (41–44 C.E.). But the Romans were moving away from rule over the Jews through vassal kings to rule through Roman administrators, called *procurators* or *prefects*. These were a motley lot, and for the most part they were not very sensitive to the needs of the populace. Some were brutal (notably Pontius Pilate), others corrupt, most incompetent. As a result of their mistakes, of ethnic strife in the country between Jews and pagans, of social unrest in the Jewish polity, and of severe economic problems, a war broke out against the Romans in 66 C.E., approximately 128 years after the Romans first entered Jerusalem (from 63 B.C.E. to 66 C.E. is 128 years, not 129, because there is no year 0). This is the "great revolt" or the "first revolt."

Taken by surprise, the Romans suffered a few serious defeats at first, but in the summer of 67 C.E. Vespasian marched from Syria into Galilee and began the slow and deliberate reconquest. By the year 68 C.E. the entire country except for Jerusalem and a few isolated strongholds had been pacified. Vespasian was in no rush, however, to storm Jerusalem. The Jews were killing each other in their own power struggles, the siege was causing a famine, and, most important, there was a power vacuum in Rome in the wake of Nero's suicide in June of 68 C.E. Vespasian had everything to gain and nothing to lose by taking his time. He played his cards correctly, with the result that in July of 69 C.E. he had himself proclaimed emperor, and spent the rest of that year securing his power. A new emperor needs a victory to prove his worth, and Vespasian entrusted the war to his son Titus. In the summer of 70 C.E. Jerusalem

was retaken and the temple was destroyed. A few "mopping up" operations remained, notably the taking of Masada (73 or 74 C.E.), but for all practical purposes the war was over. The *second temple period* came to an end.

The war of 66–70 was the first revolt against the Romans, but not the last. In 115–117 C.E. the Jews of Egypt, Cyprus, and Cyrenaica (in modern-day Libya) rebelled against the Romans. The Jews of the land of Israel apparently did not participate in this war to any significant extent, and the causes and course of the war are most obscure. (During the same years the Jews of Babylonia, alongside their Parthian rulers, fought the Romans who had invaded their country, but from all indications this was a separate war altogether and need not be considered in this book.) The other major rebellion is that of Bar Kokhba (132–135 C.E.), sometimes called the "second revolt." The causes and course of this war are most obscure as well, but from all indications the wars of 115–117 and 132–135 were serious affairs with serious consequences. The war of 115–117 resulted in the decimation of Egyptian Jewry, which had been the largest and most important Jewish community of the Roman diaspora. The Bar Kokhba war resulted in the paganization of the city of Jerusalem (now rebuilt under the name Aelia Capitolina) and the changing of the country's name from Judea to Palestine.

The latter part of the second temple period, that is, the period from the rise of the Maccabees (160s B.C.E.) to the destruction of the temple (70 C.E.), was another rich and significant chapter in Jewish history. This was the age of sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, the Qumran community, Christians, Sicarii, Zealots, and others) and of sectarian literature; of apocalypses and of varied speculations about God's control of human events, the nature of evil, and the secrets of the end time; of the growth of the synagogue, of liturgical prayer and scriptural study; of the "golden age" of diaspora Judaism, especially in Egypt, which produced a rich literature in Greek seeking to package Jewish ideas in Hellenistic wrapping; and of Judaism's intense interaction with its host culture, producing in some quarters a hatred of Judaism, but in others an attraction to it (resulting in "converts" and "God-fearers").

Roman rule over the Jews continued until the Parthian and Arab conquests of the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. (by which time the Roman empire had become Christian and Byzantine), but the centuries after the destruction of the temple often receive the name *the rabbinic period*. The word *rabbi* means "my master" and was originally a deferential form of address (like the French *monsieur*). By the first century C.E. the title was normally used by students when ad-

dressing their teacher (John 1:38). In the second century C.E. the meaning of the word began to change. It remained a generic title for "teacher" or anyone in a position of authority, but it also became a technical term designating a member of that society which, from the second century to the sixth, in both Israel and Babylonia, created a voluminous and distinctive literature. The earliest of these works, completed around the year 200 C.E. was the Mishnah. The Mishnah in turn was the subject of two gigantic commentaries (or, more accurately, works that claimed to be commentaries): the *Talmud* of the land of Israel (also called the Palestinian Talmud or the Jerusalem Talmud), completed around the year 400 C.E., and the *Talmud of Babylonia* (the Babylonian Talmud), completed around the year 500 C.E. (but not edited for another two or three centuries after that). The rabbis also produced a series of commentaries on scripture, and various other works. In this book "the rabbis" and "the rabbinic period" refer to the society and religion of the second to sixth centuries C.E.

Periodization and Perspective

Periodization derived from the political setting of ancient Judaism is relatively objective. That the *Persians, the Hellenistic dynasties, the Maccabees, and the Romans* successively ruled the Jewish polity in the land of Israel is a "fact" accepted by all historians. In contrast, periodization derived from religious or cultural achievements is not bias-free, at least not when it is applied to ancient Judaism, and therefore is best avoided. The bias may derive from Judaism, Christianity, or any other system of belief that has a stake in the interpretation of ancient Judaism.

At the end of the previous section I gave a relatively objective definition of "rabbinic period," but, as I shall discuss in chapter 7, even my restricted use of the term has an element of subjectivity. The Judaism created by the rabbis of antiquity gradually became the dominant form of Judaism, and thus it remained until the nineteenth century. The rabbis were the "winners" of ancient Jewish history. But in the second to sixth centuries the rabbis were not nearly as dominant as they would become later, and the concept "the rabbinic period" slights the rabbis' opponents (the losers), and falsely implies that after 70 C.E. all Jews accepted the rabbis as their leaders and followed the way of rabbinic Judaism. Nevertheless, in spite of this element of pro-rabbinic bias, the "rabbinic period" remains a useful and justifiable concept because, inasmuch as historians of Judaism rely almost exclusively on literary evidence, it

highlights the fact that the major literary evidence for the Judaism of the second to sixth centuries is exclusively rabbinic.

If we accept the claims of the rabbis themselves, the rabbinic period begins much earlier than the second century C.E. The rabbis believe that they are the bearers of a sacred tradition revealed by God to Moses, and the direct heirs of the communal leaders of the Jews throughout the generations. According to this belief (or "myth"), by which the rabbis legitimated themselves and their teachings, the rabbinic period begins with "Moses our rabbi." Only fundamentalist Jews accept the historicity of this perspective, but modern scholars, especially Jewish scholars, have been influenced by it as well. Until recently scholars spoke readily of a normative Judaism, as if rabbinic Judaism (and its antecedents) was always the dominant and authentic expression of Judaism. Many scholars still view the second temple period through rabbinic spectacles, assuming that all the central institutions of society were under rabbinic aegis, and ascribing enormous influence and power to various proto-rabbinic figures. But none of these beliefs can be substantiated by historical evidence. For the believer rabbinic Judaism is normative Judaism, and the rabbis were always at the center of Jewish history. For the historian, however, "the rabbis" and "the rabbinic period" become meaningful entities only after 70 C.E. I shall return to this point in chapters 5 and 7.

Christianity is responsible for an entirely different perspective and periodization. Nineteenth-century scholars, especially in Germany, used the term "late Judaism" (*Spätjudentum*) to designate the religion and society of the Jews after Ezra or after the Maccabees. The term disparaged, and was meant to disparage, the Judaism it designated. The Judaism of the second temple period was "late" because it was approaching the end of its appointed time and was about to relinquish to Christianity whatever value it still retained. "Late Judaism" was a sterile, lifeless organism, waiting in vain for the infusion of spirituality that only Christianity could provide. After the birth of Christianity "late Judaism" lost all importance and could be ignored by scholars and Christians alike. The fact that Judaism continued to flourish and develop for millennia after the period of "late Judaism" did not affect the currency of the term, because the term derived not from historical analysis but from theological belief.

Several modern writers continue to use the term "late Judaism," unaware of its origins and implications, but in recent years many scholars have begun to use the term "early Judaism" as its bias-free replacement. What once was "late" is now deemed "early"! While

"early Judaism" lacks the anti-Jewish overtones of "late Judaism," it is chronically vague, and therefore other, more precise expressions are preferable.

Another legacy of Christianity is the term "intertestamental period." Since the "New Testament" is the "end" of the "Old Testament," the centuries that linked the two were dubbed "the intertestamental period." This perspective is not necessarily prejudicial to its subject, but it usually is, because it regards "intertestamental Judaism" as the preparation for the emergence of Christianity. Books with titles like "Judaism in the Age of Jesus" or "The Jewish Background to the New Testament" often have as their purpose, whether explicit or implicit, the demonstration that "intertestamental Judaism" was somehow "fulfilled" or "completed" when it gave birth to Christianity. But ancient Judaism is worthy of study in its own right, not only because it is the matrix of early Christianity. Whether Christianity is indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament and of intertestamental Judaism is a question that a historian cannot answer.

Many writers, both Jewish and Christian, call the period covered by this book "postbiblical Judaism," in contrast with "biblical Israel," the period that preceded it. The contrast between "Israel" and "Judaism" is important, as I shall discuss in the next section, but the word "biblical" is confusing. By the first century C.E. (see chapter 6), many Jews in antiquity believed that "the Bible" was completed in the time of Ezra during the Persian period (mid-fifth century B.C.E.). If this belief is correct, the distinction between "biblical" and "postbiblical" is simple: something which is "biblical" is pre-Persian, something which is "postbiblical" is post-Persian. The belief, however, is erroneous, because the Bible contains many works that were written after the Persian period, most obviously the book of Daniel. Thus if we apply the label "postbiblical" to the books of Enoch and Ben Sira, because they were written in the third century B.C.E., we are faced with the anomaly that these "postbiblical" works predate the "biblical" book of Daniel. (Of course, we could call Daniel, too, postbiblical, but such a description seems strange since Daniel is in the Bible.) Thus, the believer can use the term "biblical" as a chronological indicator, but the historian cannot.

From Pre-exilic Israel to Second Temple Judaism

Josephus remarks when describing the rebuilding of the second temple that those who returned from Babylonia should be called

"Jews" (or "Judeans," *Ioudaioi* in Greek, literally "those of the tribe of Judah") rather than "Israelites" (*Jewish Antiquities* 11.5.7, §173). Josephus was referring to nothing more significant than a change in name, but that change masks a much more significant shift. The religion, society, and culture of the pre-exilic kingdoms of Judah and Israel differ in many important ways from those of the period after the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C.E. The practices, ideas, and institutions that were elaborated during the second temple period formed and still form the basis of the religion known as "Judaism."

How does Israelite religion differ from Judaism? In many respects, of course, it doesn't. The two are linked by a common belief in the one supreme God who created the world, chose the Israelites/Jews to be his people, and entered into a covenantal relationship with them; by a shared attachment to the holy land of Israel, the holy city of Jerusalem, and the holy temple; and by the same sacred calendar and by many of the same religious observances. Even more important than these commonalities is the fact that the Jews of all times have always seen themselves not merely as the successors to, but also as the continuators of, the legacy of pre-exilic Israel. Christianity claimed (and, to some extent, still claims) to be the true Israel, but this claim was accompanied by an assertion of newness. Christianity is the fruit of a new creation, a new revelation, and a new covenant (a "New Testament"). Premodern Judaism never developed this sense of "newness," and it is this sense of continuity which more than anything else connects second temple Jews to pre-exilic Israel in spite of numerous changes and enormous upheavals.

Pre-exilic Israel was a tribal society living on its ancestral land. Membership in a tribe, and consequently the rights of citizenship (for example, the right to own land), depended exclusively on birth. There was no established process by which a foreigner could be absorbed into the Israelite polity. Second temple Judaism, in contrast, was not a tribal society. When the Jews returned from Babylonia they returned not as tribes but as clans. The entire tribal structure was destroyed. Many Jews did not return to the land of Israel, but remained in Babylonia; later, many Jews left the land of Israel in order to live throughout the Mediterranean basin. As a result of these changes, Judaism gradually defined itself more as a religion than as a nationality. It created the institution of *conversion* which allowed foreigners to be admitted into "citizenship." As a religion Judaism prohibited all marriages between Jews and non-Jews, a prohibition unknown to pre-exilic Israel (see chapter 2).

Pre-exilic Israel worshiped in the temple through the slaughter and roasting of animals. Most of the actual service was performed not by lay Israelites but by the priests, since only priests were permitted entrance into the inner precincts of the temple. Prayer was not a standard part of worship, either in the temple or anywhere else (although, to be sure, in moments of crisis and joy the Israelites knew very well how to pray). For as long as the temple remained standing, Judaism maintained the sacrificial cult, but it also elaborated new liturgies consisting of prayer as well as the recitation and study of scripture. This mode of worship even influenced the temple cult, but it acquired for itself a special home in a new institution, the synagogue.

Second temple Judaism also developed a regimen of private worship unknown to pre-exilic Israel. The word of God was to be the object of constant study and meditation, not only because this activity would teach the conduct that God expected, but also because the very act of study was deemed to be an act of worship. In addition to study, daily prayer became part of the piety practiced by the religious elite. The commandments of the Torah were elaborated and expanded, thus affording the individual Jew an opportunity for demonstrating his or her loyalty to God. The piety of pre-exilic Israel centered on the group (the people of Israel or the family), while the piety of second temple Judaism centered on both the group and the individual. (Throughout this book I shall refer to the democratization or individualization of religion, but I concede at the outset that no ancient society, including ancient Judaism, allocated the individual as much freedom and importance as does modern Western culture. Relative to modern culture ancient Judaism is not individualistic at all, but relative to pre-exilic Israel it is.)

Pre-exilic Israel and second temple Judaism also differed in their understanding of *theodicy*, God's administration of justice. Everyone agreed that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, but God's accounting methods were the subject of intense scrutiny. Pre-exilic Israel believed that God administered justice in this world. The righteous and the wicked were not always the direct recipients of God's attentions, because God could reward or punish their offspring in their stead (emphasis on the collective). Second temple Judaism insisted that God punishes or rewards only those who deserve it, and that the conduct of one's ancestors is irrelevant (emphasis on the individual). Since God does not always seem to set matters right in this world, he must do so in the next. Second temple Judaism therefore elaborated complex schemes of reward and punishment after death and/or at the end time. Some of these schemes

included the resurrection of the dead. Just as God will reestablish justice for the individual, he shall do so for the nation by destroying the yoke of the nations and restoring the sovereignty of the people of Israel. Jerusalem and the temple will be restored to their former glory and God's anointed one (*messiah*) shall reign securely. All of these *eschatological* doctrines (that is, doctrines concerning the *end time* or ultimate future) are innovations of second temple Judaism.

Even as it elaborated new theories to account for God's mysterious ways in administering the world, some segments of second temple Judaism admitted that the problem was insoluble. They accounted for the triumph of evil by positing the existence of numerous supernatural beings who opposed God's dominion and everything that was good and true. Mirroring this cosmic struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil is the struggle within each person of good and evil spirits. Some of these schemes are so dualistic that we may debate whether or not they should be called monotheistic (expressing a belief in one God). Even those Jews who would have nothing of these radical dualistic schemes nevertheless believed in angels and spirits of all sorts. The God of second temple Judaism was much more "transcendent" than the God of pre-exilic Israel. God needed intermediaries to run the world, and humanity needed intermediaries to reach God. (All of these theological developments are discussed in chapter 3.)

Pre-exilic Israel was ruled by kings and guided by prophets, second temple Judaism was not. A representative of the Davidic monarchy was the governor of Judea at the beginning of the Persian period, but after him the Davidic monarchy disappears from society, although it exercised a powerful hold on the eschatological imagination. Only in the rabbinic period did alleged descendants of the Davidic line emerge again as communal leaders. Instead of kings, in second temple Judaism the priests wielded temporal power. In Maccabean times they even assumed the title "king," but they were ousted by Herod the Great and his descendants. Nevertheless the office of high priest remained a much more visible post than it had been in pre-exilic Israel.

Prophets no longer enjoyed the prestige and authority that had been theirs in pre-exilic times. In second temple Judaism prophets became apocalyptic seers, mystics, healers, and holy men. A new type of authority figure emerged to replace the classical prophet: this was the *scribe*, whose authority derived not from his pedigree and institutional setting (like the priest), not from his charismatic personality and direct contact with God (like the prophet), but from his erudition in the sacred scriptures and traditions. Various sects

as well claimed authority on the basis of their superior erudition. The party against which this superior erudition was brandished usually was the priesthood.

The first temple, at least after the Deuteronomic reform, was the sole institution in which the Israelites could worship God. The second temple too claimed exclusivity, but faced severe competition. Sects arose in the second century B.C.E. and disappeared only after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Most sects seem to have argued that the priests were corrupt and that the temple was polluted, or, at least, unworthy of the exclusiveness and importance it claimed. Each sect presented itself as the true temple and its adherents as the true priests, because only the sect knew how to serve God properly. Other organizations too competed with the temple, but in a more benign fashion. Synagogues and schools were built throughout the land of Israel and the diaspora. After the destruction of the temple these institutions became the focal points of Jewish worship and piety (see chapters 4 and 5).

Second temple Judaism is a "book religion." At its heart lies the Bible, the book which Jews call "*Tanakh*" and Christians call "*the Old Testament*." Pre-exilic Israel produced the raw materials out of which most of the Bible was constructed, but it was second temple Judaism that created "the Bible," venerated the very parchment on which it was written, and devoted enormous energies to its interpretation. This process is called "canonization." The Jews of the second temple period realized that they lived in a postclassical age. They studied the books of the ancients and did not try to compete with them. They turned instead to new literary genres and new modes of expression. This development is at the heart of the shift from Israelite religion to Judaism (see chapter 6).

Unity and Diversity

Second temple Judaism was a complex phenomenon. Judaism changed dramatically during the Persian, Hellenistic, Maccabean, Roman, and rabbinic periods. Generalizations that may be true for one period may not be true for another. In addition, at any given moment Jews practiced their religion in manifold different ways. The Jewish community of Egypt in the first century C.E. was far from uniform in practice and belief, and we have no reason to assume that any of the Egyptian interpretations of Judaism would necessarily have found favor in the other communities of Greek-speaking Jews throughout the Roman world (for example, in Rome, Asia Minor, North Africa, and parts of the land of Israel). The Judaism of the

land of Israel was striated not only by numerous sects but also by numerous teachers and holy men, each with his band of supporters. We have no reason to assume that any of the Palestinian interpretations of Judaism would necessarily have found favor in the other communities of Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking Jews throughout the east (for example, in Babylonia and parts of Syria). With such diversity, was there any unity? What links these diverse phenomena together and allows them all to be called *Judaism*?

As I remarked above when discussing the link between pre-exilic Israel and second temple Judaism, the most potent force unifying the two is self-perception or self-definition. The Jews saw (and see) themselves as the heirs and continuators of the people of pre-exilic Israel; the Jews also felt (and still feel) an affinity for their fellow Jews throughout the world, in spite of differences in language, practice, ideology, and political loyalty. Such feelings are normal for minority groups in both ancient and modern times. Because of the Jews' attachment to each other, unsympathetic gentile observers accused (and accuse!) them of hating the rest of humanity (see chapter 2).

This self-perception manifested itself especially in the relations of diaspora Jewry to the land of Israel and the temple. The Maccabees tried hard to win the support of diaspora Jewry, basing their campaign to some extent on loyalty to the mother country. They instructed the Jews of the diaspora through a series of epistles to observe the newly introduced festival of Hanukkah, which celebrated the repurification of the temple in 164 B.C.E. (2 Macc. 1-2). It was during the century of Maccabean rule that First Maccabees was translated from Hebrew to Greek, and that Esther was translated into Greek by a priest from Jerusalem. At this same time the author of the *Letter of Aristeas* described how seventy-two elders went from Jerusalem to Egypt, where they would translate the Torah into Greek. The Maccabees also reinterpreted Exodus 30:11-16 to mean that every Jew was obligated to contribute one half shekel to the temple in Jerusalem every year.¹ Herod the Great continued this policy. He appointed as his high priests Jews from Babylonia and Alexandria, the two largest diaspora communities. When the Jews of Asia Minor needed an advocate to plead their cause before the Romans, Herod sent his chief adviser, who succeeded brilliantly in their behalf.

Even if these overtures were motivated more by a desire for support rather than a sense of kinship, diaspora Jews, especially those of Egypt, responded to them. They contributed large sums of money to the temple, and by Herodian times at the latest streamed

unity

in the thousands to Jerusalem in order to witness and participate in the festival rituals of the temple. Philo describes Jerusalem as the "mother-city" of the Jews and went there on pilgrimage at least once.² The book of Acts mentions that Jews from virtually every part of the world could be found in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5-11).

The mutual loyalty of Palestinian and diaspora Jews had political implications too. During the second century B.C.E. two Jewish generals of the queen of Egypt refused to lead her army against the Maccabean ruler, because, they said, it was impious for them to fight their co-religionists. In addition, they warned that the Jews of Egypt might rebel against the queen were she to attack their home country. When the last representatives of the Maccabean line were in Rome in the middle of the first century B.C.E. in order to plead their respective cases, the Jews of Rome turned out en masse to support their favorite. During the war of 66-70 C.E. some diaspora Jews supported the revolutionaries and sent them aid. The fact is revealed by a Roman historian of the third century C.E. who wrote that the rebels were assisted by "their co-religionists from across the Euphrates (that is, Babylonia) and, indeed, the entire Roman empire."³

Thus, like the bumblebee which continues to fly, unaware that the laws of aerodynamics declare its flight to be impossible, the Jews of antiquity saw themselves as citizens of one nation and one religion, unaware of, or oblivious to, the fact that they were separated from each other by their diverse languages, practices, ideologies, and political loyalties. In this book I do not minimize the varieties of Jewish religious expression, but my goal is to see the unity within the diversity.

2

Jews and Gentiles

The relationship of Jews and Judaism to gentiles and gentile culture is a complex topic that consists of three distinct but inter-related themes: political (to what extent should the Jews submit to foreign domination?), cultural (to what extent should the Jews absorb pagan ideas and practices?), and social (to what extent should Jews mingle and interact with gentiles?). I shall examine each of these separately, beginning with the simplest, the political.

Political: Gentile Domination

From 587 B.C.E., the destruction of the first temple and the exile to Babylonia, until 1948 C.E., the establishment of the modern state of Israel, the Jews of both the diaspora and the land of Israel lived almost exclusively under foreign domination. During extensive portions of the pre-exilic period, the northern kingdom suffered political subjugation at the hands of Aram and Assyria, and the southern kingdom at the hands of Aram, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia, but at no point before their actual destruction did either kingdom lose its monarchs or its nominal independence. The dissolution of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.E. led to the ultimate disappearance of "the ten tribes" (although the Samaritans would later claim, perhaps correctly, to be the descendants of these tribes). The dissolution of the southern kingdom, however, did not lead to the disappearance of the Judeans. They returned to their land, rebuilt their temple, and tried to continue as before—but without a king and without political independence.

This political situation raised religious questions: Why did God allow the Jews to be subjugated by gentiles? Why didn't God protect his people? Why do the gentiles but not the Jews deserve temporal power? The answers to these questions will be treated in the next