

DAVID A. deSILVA

**AN
INTRODUCTION
TO THE
NEW TESTAMENT**

**CONTEXTS, METHODS
& MINISTRY FORMATION**

SECOND EDITION

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ABBREVIATIONS

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

1QS	Rule of the Community, Manual of Discipline
11QT	Temple Scroll (11Q19)
4QMMT	Some Works of the Law (Miqsat Ma'ase HaTorah, 4Q394-399)
4Q521	Messianic Apocalypse
CD	Damascus Document/Rule

APOCRYPHA AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

Bar	Baruch
1 En.	1 Enoch
Jub.	Jubilees
Let. Aris.	Letter of Aristeas
1-2-3-4 Macc	1-2-3-4 Maccabees
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
Sir	Sirach (Ben Sira)
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom

ANCIENT AUTHORS AND SOURCES

Aristotle

<i>Eth. nic.</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>

Cicero

<i>Off.</i>	<i>De officiis</i>
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Did

Didache

Dio Chrysostom

<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
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Diodorus of Sicily

<i>Bib. Hist.</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Historica</i>
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Epictetus

<i>Diss.</i>	<i>Dissertationes</i>
<i>Ench.</i>	<i>Enchiridion</i>

Eusebius

<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
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Ignatius

<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	<i>Letter to the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign. Smyrn.</i>	<i>Letter to the Smyrneans</i>
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	<i>Letter to the Magnesians</i>

Irenaeus

<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses</i>
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Isocrates

<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Ad demonicum</i>
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Josephus

<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>Life</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>

Justin Martyr

<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
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Juvenal

<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satirae</i>
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Philo

<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>In Flaccum</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>

Plato

<i>Gorg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
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Pliny the Younger

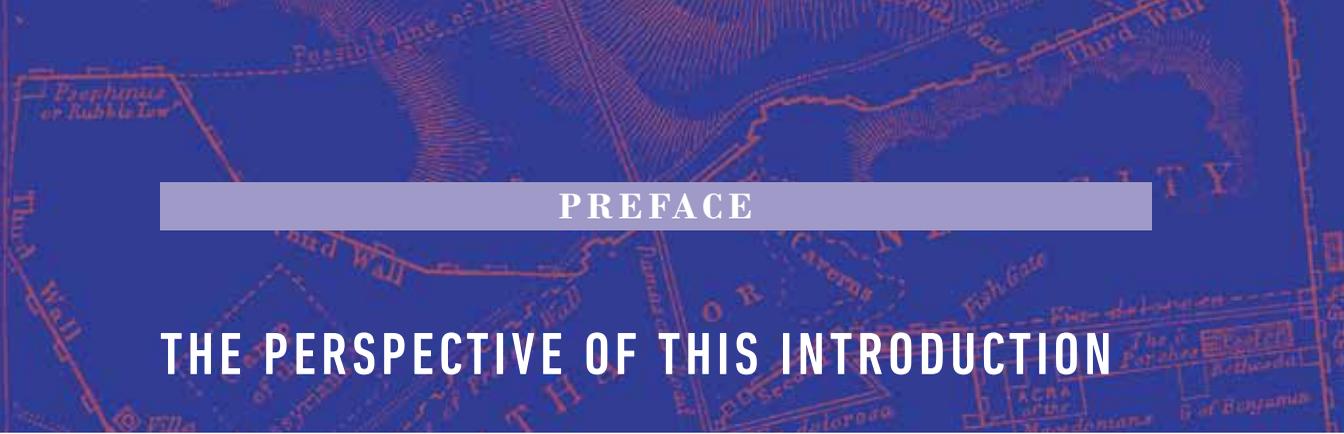
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistolae</i>
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Plutarch	
<i>Mor.</i>	<i>Moralia</i>
<i>Self-Praise</i>	<i>On Inoffensive Self-Praise</i>
Polycarp	
<i>Pol. Phil.</i>	<i>Letter to the Philippians</i>
Pseudo-Aristotle	
<i>Rhet. ad Alex.</i>	<i>Rhetorica ad Alexandrum</i>
Pseudo-Cicero	
<i>Rhet. ad Her.</i>	<i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>
Quintilian	
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutio oratoria</i>
Seneca	
<i>Ben.</i>	<i>De beneficiis</i>
<i>Constant.</i>	<i>De constantia sapientis</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>De providentia</i>
Sophocles	
<i>Oed. col.</i>	<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>
<i>Oed. tyr.</i>	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
Strabo	
<i>Geog.</i>	<i>Geographica</i>
Tacitus	
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Historiae</i>
Thucydides	
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i>

PERIODICALS AND SERIES

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentary
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
HNTC	Harper New Testament Commentary
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>

LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>SIG</i>	<i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testaments Studies Monograph Series
<i>TD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament



PREFACE

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THIS INTRODUCTION

IN OUR CURRENT ENVIRONMENT I find two rather different ways of reading and searching the Scriptures. With a devotional reading of Scripture, hearing from God is the focus. In the academic study of Scripture, the focus is on understanding the text in relation to its historical context.¹ These two approaches and their results are often posed antagonistically against each other. There are critical scholars who devalue the devotional reading of Scripture and the quest to hear the voice of the living God thereby. There are others who dismiss the academic study of these texts as inconsequential, since the Spirit is “all they need” to interpret the Scriptures. The former reduce the witness of Scripture to a basic, workable, rational morality that does not significantly interfere with the modern agenda. The latter privilege their potentially idiosyncratic and erroneous readings and applications with divine authority.² As the reader will

¹As J. J. Griesbach, one of the leading figures in nineteenth-century Gospel studies put it, “the New Testament must be explained as every ancient book is explained” (quoted in William Baird, *A History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 139).

²David L. Dungan has written a bold analysis of the ways in which the historical-critical study of the Bible arose as part of a movement to delegitimize the power of king and priest and to end religious interference in secular affairs. Historical criticism, he avers, served to reduce Scripture to a book that taught private morality, of no consequence to the political and economic spheres, which were now made safe for capitalism, democracy, and rationalism. Reflecting on his own work as a biblical scholar, he writes, “I never knew that I was a foot soldier in a great crusade to eviscerate the Bible’s core theology, smother its moral standards under an avalanche of hostile historical questions, and, at the end, shove it aside so that the new bourgeois could get on with the business at hand” (*A History of the Synoptic Problem*

quickly discern, I find neither position and neither result acceptable.

Both kinds of inquiry can and should work together in the community of faith. The academic study of the Scriptures can be used by people of faith as a means to allow the text to speak its own word on its own terms. But this avenue of inquiry is also best pursued prayerfully and in connection with the God who continues to speak through these texts. With these spiritual disciplines, the fruits of academic study are brought back into the conversation with God and with other Christians about what God would say to God’s people today through these texts. The critical study of the New Testament acknowledges the distance between the modern reader—in his or her cultural, political, theological, and economic setting—and the author and original readers of a New Testament text. The devotional use of the New Testament presumes the immediacy and accessibility of the Word for the worshiper. Pursuing both avenues of inquiry, allowing neither to overwhelm the other, bringing the results of each into vigorous interaction with the other, puts the Christian leader on the surest ground, enjoying the riches of both while being less liable to the limitations of either.

This introduction to the New Testament seeks to nurture this kind of integrated

[New York: Doubleday, 1999], 148). His book serves as a reminder that there are no neutral readings of Scripture and that every reading—whether devotional or critical—grows out of an agenda, legitimates real-life arrangements in this world, and is made possible only by a host of presuppositions about the way things “really” are.

approach to Scripture, attending both to the methods and results of the academic, critical study of the New Testament and to the ways in which these texts continue to speak a word from the Lord about discipleship, community, and ministry. My objectives in writing this book are to prepare Christian leaders to (1) more fully engage the critical and prayerful study of the New Testament and (2) more reliably discern the direction the Spirit would give through these texts for nurturing disciples and building communities of faith that reflect the heart and character of their Lord. These objectives have shaped this introduction in a number of ways.

First, I take a text-centered as opposed to phenomenon-centered approach. My focus remains on the texts that make up the New Testament (and, of course, on the situations envisioned by each text) rather than the broader phenomena behind the New Testament that belong properly to early church history and Christian origins. I am interested primarily in the context, production, and message of each text, in the pastoral challenges each addresses, and in the way each author brings the revelation of God in Christ to bear on those challenges. There is thus no attempt to reconstruct the Jesus of history, though I do, of course, introduce the working principles of that important scholarly pursuit. There is no discussion of the history of the expansion of the church from the “Q community” to Rome, except insofar as such topics have bearing on reading and understanding particular New Testament texts.

Second, I give a great deal of attention (probably a full tenth of the book) to a wide range of interpretative strategies that represent foundational skills in the scholarly study of the New Testament and that remain available and accessible for every student’s exploration of the text. These Exegetical Skill sections appear in every chapter on a New Testament text (twice in some chapters). I usually include an extensive example of the exegetical strategy at work in the

exploration of a particular passage and offer suggestions for further exercises and study. It is my hope that these sections will not only open up new strategies for reading but also enable readers to interact more critically with commentaries and other literature written about the text (including devotional literature *and* sectarian propaganda). The student is urged to employ a variety of these avenues of exploration when studying any particular passage in the New Testament. Each interpretative strategy is designed to answer particular questions or bring into focus certain kinds of data: only in conjunction with one another do they provide a meaningful basis for interpretation.

Third, my discussion of the message of each text, and more particularly my reflections on how the text contributes to ministry formation, gives this textbook a distinctive focus on the church (from the local congregation to the global family of God) and the work of ministry (from the general ministry of all Christians to a variety of professional ministries). The New Testament texts are formative and transformative, a facet that often goes unexplored in New Testament introductions. If academic study of these texts is to inform their prayerful and practical application, a New Testament introduction is precisely the place to begin forging that connection. Since I believe that hearing the text in its original pastoral context leads directly to the most fruitful explorations of how the text invites Christian leaders and workers in our age to enliven its ideals anew, I close each chapter with a section on “ministry formation.” These sections are intended (1) to keep the reader mindful of the ways that careful study can connect with careful application (to close the gap between the two ends of the typical seminary curriculum, namely, biblical studies and practical theology) and (2) to stimulate thought and discussion about what I take to be the primary value and purpose of these texts—shaping faithful disciples, supportive communities of faith, and ministry to the world.

In the process of writing this introduction I have been continually reminded and often daunted by the fact that the study of the New Testament is a broad field with many questions and problems that despite centuries of critical study remain unanswered. I do not, therefore, pretend to write as an expert on every topic. Some chapters and sections will reflect decades of careful study, reflection, and prior writing on my part (e.g., the chapters on Hebrews, Revelation, and the cultural environment of the New Testament). Some sections reflect my own initial efforts to wrestle with issues I have encountered but only begun to engage seriously in the preparation and writing of this volume. The reader is therefore invited to wrestle alongside a fellow learner with these magnificent texts that have opened up hearts to God, nourished faith, and shaped lives for two millennia.

The present revised edition differs from the original edition in several important respects. My first goal was to bring the discussions of each chapter up to date with my current thinking, particularly where I have done further research and publication in specific areas or had cause to reexamine specific questions and my handling of them. Thus the chapter “The Four Gospels and the One Jesus,” several chapters on Paul and his letters, the chapters on Hebrews, the General Epistles, and Revelation, and material on rhetoric and on the archaeological context of the early churches have undergone considerable rethinking and rewriting. The entire text, however, has been examined for possible improvement. Bibliographies have been updated and expanded throughout, as have references to scholarship (e.g., in the footnotes). The photographic illustrations have been completely reconsidered and more purposefully selected. At the same time, I have been careful to retain those aspects that have made the text useful for those who have invited it into their classrooms (and who have my gratitude).

While the footnotes and bibliographies show those older and wiser students to whom

an author is indebted for intellectual support, it is the custom of authors to use a preface to acknowledge the many other people whose support, influence, insight, and love contribute equally, if not more, to the book. Dr. Daniel G. Reid of InterVarsity Press kindly received my proposal for this textbook prior to the year 2000, offered many helpful suggestions for making the book more useful for the audience it seeks to serve, and showed a great measure of patience with this laborer as I took a full year longer to complete the first edition of this book than we had originally agreed. We began conversations about a revised edition sometime in 2014, and the present volume benefited once again from his suggestions. I am profoundly grateful to Dan for his support in this and several other projects, and for his constant encouragement since I began my academic career.

Several readers made helpful comments after reading portions of the initial draft of this book, but pride of place must go to Dr. Paul N. Anderson of George Fox University for his generosity in providing many specific, detailed suggestions that have made this textbook stronger. The revised edition has benefited from hundreds of corrigenda collected by Dr. N. Clayton Croy and Mr. Jerry Boyd, the latter in the course of reading the book aloud for “Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic,” as well as a number of students over the years who kindly forwarded corrections (thus also demonstrating that they had done the reading). Dr. David Sloan, a former student who always did the reading, made numerous and specific helpful suggestions regarding how I might refine the treatment of Q for this edition.

The majority of illustrations in the first edition were selected from the five thousand-plus pictures in the *Pictorial Library of Bible Lands*, a digital collection maintained by Mr. Todd Bolen, the remembrance of whose generosity continues to evoke gratitude. Since 2011 I have enjoyed several opportunities to travel to many sites and museums in Italy, Greece,

Turkey, and the Middle East, with the result that the majority of photographs in the present edition come from my own journeys. I am deeply thankful to Educational Opportunities Tours, and to its president and CEO, James Ridgway, for affording me several of these trips as a guest lecturer in their program. I am also grateful to the trustees and administration of Ashland Theological Seminary, whose support made other, independent explorations possible through study leaves and professional development funding. Carole Raddato kindly supplied four photos from her vast database (followinghadrianphotography.com) to make up what was lacking from my own travels.

Greek, Roman, and Judean coinage is of great value for displaying the ideology of the period, and I am particularly indebted to Numismatica Ars Classica (NAC AG, London) and Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. (Lancaster, PA) for their representatives' kindness and generosity in allowing me to include many choice images from their archives. I would like to thank personally those who dealt patiently with my requests in various capacities both for the first and the revised editions: Mr. Victor England, Mr. Brad Nelson, Mrs. Dale Tatro, and Mr. Travis Markel of Classical Numismatic Group; Ms. Poppy Swann, Ms. Emma Dodd, and Ms. Kira Eisenach of Numismatica Ars Classica. I am also grateful to Dr. Robert Deutsch of the Archaeological Center in Jaffa and to the late Mr. Sandy Brenner of JerusalemCoins.com for providing images of museum-quality coins from their inventories and archives.

Several university libraries have also extended generous permission to include images of important papyri in the present edition, including the Papyrology Collection of the Graduate Library, the University of Michigan; the Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University; and the Spurlock Museum, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I remember with special gratitude the late Dr. Traianos Gagos, former

archivist of papyrology and associate professor of papyrology and Greek at the University of Michigan, who granted me the original permission to use an image of the vitally important manuscript P⁴⁶ in his care. A number of illustrations come from the Flora Archaeological Center at Ashland Theological Seminary, and I thank Mr. Sam Renfroe, our university photographer, and Dr. Kenneth Walther, my now-emeritus colleague in New Testament and curator of the collection, for their assistance. I also wish to thank the late Mr. Bruce Ferrini for his assistance in acquiring several illustrations.

As in all such endeavors, I am grateful to the trustees, administration, and faculty of Ashland Theological Seminary for their ongoing encouragement and support of my research and writing. My wife, Donna Jean, and my sons, James Adrian, John Austin, and Justin Alexander, deserve my heartfelt thanks for their support during the writing of this, as of all, my books. They were witnesses to the many struggles I faced as I wrote the first edition as well as to the breakthroughs that make writing, in the end, worthwhile. I thank Donna Jean also for compiling the index of modern authors and for helping to compile the subject index both for the first and the revised edition.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents but, in this volume, especially my father, Dr. J. A. F. deSilva. He always pursued excellence in his intellect and in his professional achievements and set a fine example in this regard for me to follow. In my youth he always took the time to take me to the park on weekends and taught me the importance of always finding time to play with my own sons. He taught me that there are two sides to every argument, and he perhaps contributed more than anyone else to my awareness of ideology and rhetorical strategy in people, no less than in texts. It is with gratitude, respect, and love that I dedicated the first edition, retained here, to him.



USING THE “EXEGETICAL SKILL” SECTIONS

A PRIMARY GOAL of most courses in New Testament introduction is to cultivate facility in exegetical method. This book seeks to do the same by introducing the reader to a broad, representative sample of the skills that open up a rich, full exegesis of biblical texts. Most often the procedures and results of each skill are discussed not merely in theory but in connection with a specific New Testament passage, along with suggested exercises for developing the particular skill. In this way, the reader can learn about the method, see it in action, and practice its application.

Exegesis is not fully engaged simply by performing one or two of these methods; rather, the fruits of the application of a good number of these skills must be combined and integrated before the interpreter can truly claim to have mined the text and unearthed its message and significance. Interpreters therefore need a master plan for exegesis that will lead them to engage the text from a wide variety of angles and lenses. This is the goal of many books on exegetical method, the most popular of which, however, seem to me to be far too restrictive in their scope. That is, they tend to focus the interpreter on questions of historical setting, literary genre, grammar, and the meaning of words. All of these are important, to be sure, but they do not provide a multidimensional appreciation for the richness of the text.

The paradigm that I employ here is based on a master plan for exegesis called socio-rhetorical interpretation, a model developed by Vernon K. Robbins.¹ I have found this to be an

especially appropriate approach to exegesis for people involved in Christian ministry, since the goal of socio-rhetorical interpretation is to enter as fully as possible into how a text works to persuade its hearers at every level, using a great variety of resources, and to nurture and sustain Christian community in the face of the exigencies of a particular situation. It connects us with the ancient texts precisely in the manner in which modern Christian leaders, again in the face of the exigencies of particular situations, hear, interpret, and apply these texts to persuade others to deeper discipleship and to nurture and sustain meaningful and supportive relationships throughout the global Christian community.

Socio-rhetorical interpretation is not so much a new method (although the less familiar name might suggest this) as a model for analysis that encourages interpreters to make use of the full spectrum of established exegetical skills and to do so in a way that puts the results of each discrete avenue of investigation in conversation with the results of all the other methods. It is a model that invites careful study of the text at a number of levels: the interpreter

Socio-rhetorical Interpretation (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996). Socio-rhetorical interpretation has advanced considerably since 1996. For a programmatic introduction to the current state of socio-rhetorical interpretation, see Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, vol. 1 (Blandford Forum: Deo Press, 2009). For two recent examples of fully executed interpretations, see Roy R. Jeal, *Exploring Philemon: Freedom, Brotherhood, and Partnership in the New Society* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); B. J. Oropeza, *Exploring Second Corinthians: Death and Life, Hardship and Rivalry* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016). I deliberately retain the framework of the 1996 iteration of socio-rhetorical interpretation for this volume as, in my opinion, the more helpful and accessible form for the beginning exegete.

¹Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996); Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to*

(1) engages the text itself in detailed analysis, (2) examines the ways the text converses with other "texts" in its environment, (3) investigates the world that produced the text, and (4) analyzes how the text affects that same world. The image Robbins uses for the ancient texts is that of a tapestry—many threads are interwoven together in a text to produce multiple textures that together provide us with a rich, three-dimensional understanding of the meaning and impact of the text we are studying.

As we give close attention to the words on a page, we explore "inner texture," the threads that the author has woven together to make a meaningful text. At this level we want to be sure we are as close as possible to the author's original wording (textual criticism) and understand the meanings and connotations of the words that we are reading (word studies or lexical analysis; grammatical analysis). We pay careful attention to the way in which the passage derives meaning and significance from its relationship to the whole work of which it is a part, especially from neighboring passages and thematically connected passages (literary context). We examine the ways in which the repetition of words and phrases helps the hearer identify themes, discern emphases, and make correlations (repetitive texture). At this level we also give careful attention to the way in which a text persuades its readers or hearers to accept the values, behaviors, or decisions it promotes (rhetorical criticism). We also reflect on the way the text communicates and creates meaning as literature (narrative criticism) if appropriate, and consider ways other genre-specific signals can help us "hear" the text more authentically (interpreting parables; epistolary analysis).

A second level of analysis calls us to examine the conversations the author is creating with other texts, a phenomenon called "intertexture." New Testament authors very often quote verses or incorporate lines from the Jewish Scriptures; they even more often allude to events, echo

phrases, and reconfigure the pattern of familiar stories from the Old Testament and Second Temple-period literature in the new texts they create. Early Christians also drank deeply from the streams of the Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish traditions. What resources, then, does an author use? How does he incorporate, reshape, and reapply them? When the audience hears the older texts woven into the new text, what impact will the text have that the passage might not otherwise have made? How does an author's perspective and purpose emerge through the study of changes made to a literary source (redaction analysis)? The fruitfulness of such investigations will be explored as we consider the use of comparative materials in New Testament exegesis and the analysis of intertexture at a variety of levels.

New Testament texts are not merely about words and conversations between texts, but they also en flesh the Word in very real, three-dimensional social and cultural contexts. A third arena for exegesis, then, is social and cultural texture, which moves from the world of the text to the world of the author and audience. Every passage we study speaks out of and to a real historical situation that we must seek to recover, and each text represents that situation in a strategically shaped manner (discerning the situation behind a text). The text also has meaning for its hearers because the author shares and communicates within the same social and cultural matrix, into which we must fully enter if we want to hear the text as they did. Readers of this textbook are therefore given a thorough introduction to cultural-anthropological analysis of New Testament texts, first through explicit treatments of the cultural and social environment of the first century, and then through applications of these insights to the reading of specific texts. The practice and potential fruitfulness of each is highlighted in the context of a discussion of a particular Gospel (honor discourse in Matthew, purity and pollution in Mark, patronage and reciprocity in

Luke, and kinship in John), emerging again in discussions of other texts as appropriate.

Most New Testament texts, like modern sermons based on them, seek to influence history and social relationships as well. We will therefore explore how a passage orients its audience to the world of everyday life and how it seeks to shape their relationships and interactions with one another (social-scientific analysis). What kind of community does a text seek to nurture? What role do rituals and religious symbols play in shaping relationships within the group and relationships with (or boundaries against) those outside? What is the relationship between the symbols invoked in a text and the real-life behaviors an author wishes to promote?

Finally, we have to consider "ideological texture," which recognizes that a text is not just a vehicle for ideas but rather a vehicle by which the author hopes to achieve a certain goal. What goal or goals drive the author? How does the author fashion the text to achieve this goal? This may involve changing the audience's perception of their situation, alerting them to dangers that are going unperceived, or drawing stark alternatives in order to move the audience to choose more readily the course or stance the author promotes. Successful analysis of the author's ideological strategy requires the integration of insights gleaned from exploring the other textures. Repetition of words and phrases, rhetorical analysis, use of other texts (intertexture), use of cultural and social scripts, and the rest each have the potential to advance the author's agenda for the hearers in their situation. In this way we will unearth the ideology within the text.

As we probe ideological texture, however, we also need to look honestly and critically at the interests and agendas that have guided the interpretation of the text by scholars and by

religious and lay leaders, as well as our own ideological environment and agenda for interaction with the text. Cultural studies, post-colonial criticism, and feminist criticism have been of great value in raising our awareness of how biblical interpretation is a political and ideological act. As we explore our own ideology and biases more openly, we are freed to pursue self-critical interpretations, encounters with the text in which we step outside our own ideology and allow it to be critiqued by other interpreters and by the text itself. It is at this point that we are most powerfully confronted with the text as Word of God, interpreting *us* rather than the other way around.

An interpreter will not always use all the resources of socio-rhetorical interpretation when studying every passage. Some skills are more suited to one kind of text than to another. A full exegesis requires, however, that we engage each of the four textures when studying a text and to reflect on the interplay between these areas of investigation. How does repetition of words and phrases contribute to the persuasive strategy and advance the ideology of the author? What are the rhetorical contributions of the author's invocation of other texts (such as the Jewish Scriptures or Jesus traditions)? How do the results of historical reconstruction of the situation and social-scientific analysis mutually inform each other and in turn inform rhetorical and ideological analysis? By pursuing such a thorough and integrated investigation of the text, our understanding of a passage of Scripture will be enriched by the full range of interpretive strategies. Our awareness of the richly textured manner in which the text spoke within and to its original context will provide a much more reliable and creative basis for hearing and proclaiming the word afresh—in a rich, multidimensional way—in a new context.

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community by the preaching of the apostolic witnesses to what God was doing in Jesus. Access to the traditions about and sayings of Jesus—together with the direction and guidance of reliable apostolic voices—was therefore of critical (and one dare say primary) importance to the early church. These voices played the central role in shaping early Christian identity, community life, and response to the world, with the Hebrew Scriptures providing legitimation and grounding. This access and guidance came firsthand through leaders such as Paul, James, Peter, and John, and through those directly trained by them; only after letters and Gospels began to be written were *texts* available to fulfill the same purpose.

What kinds of questions and challenges would confront the people who joined the early Christian community? First, they would naturally want to learn more about the identity and focus of the movement, the teachings of the one they had come to call “Lord,” and the manner in which they should live out their lives as a community. They would be asking:

- Who is this Jesus whose identity is to shape ours? What is his significance, and why does he deserve my complete loyalty and obedience?
- What does it mean to follow Jesus? How should calling him “Lord” affect the way I live, the things I do or refrain from doing, the ambitions I pursue or decline to pursue, the way I use the things of the world, and so forth?
- How is the scandal of the Messiah’s disgraceful execution to be understood as something positive, purposeful, and beneficial? What does the mystery of this crucified, risen, and returning Messiah tell us about our relationship with God and place in this world?
- How can we be sure that we are indeed the heirs of God’s promises and a legitimate phenomenon in the history of the one God’s dealings with humanity?
- How are we to live together as this new “people of God”? What codes of conduct and values are to guide our interactions with one another? What qualities should be apparent in and what characteristics banished from this new community? (As might be expected, a great deal of the texts that would compose the New Testament address these questions.)
- What should our worship look like? What are the distinctive rituals that set us apart and give us identity? How should they be performed and what is their significance? How are we to administer the life of the community?
- When will our labors have their reward (e.g., when will Christ return)?
- How are we to keep our hearts focused on God’s reward and not be distracted by the temporal ambitions that marked our pre-Christian lives and still mark the lives of our peers?
- How can we discern the true prophet or reliable teacher from the deceiver? Where are the boundaries of this new faith and way of life?

Forming a new community, the early Christians also needed to come to terms with their relationship with other communities. A number of particularly pressing questions centered on the relationship of this new people of God to the historic people of God, the Jews. These questions were made more pressing by challenges from and actions performed by some Jews and Jewish Christians, as well as by the fact that the Christian group claimed the *Jewish* Scriptures as its own. This raised several prominent issues discussed at length in the early church:

- What is the role of Torah—the law of God and the covenant it regulates—in the new people of God?

- What is the place of Gentiles in the people of God? Must they become Jews first and enter by means of the signs and statutes of the Mosaic covenant?
- If Jesus is the Messiah promised to the Jewish people and prophesied in their Scriptures, why have they responded so poorly?
- What is the church's relationship to the Jewish Scriptures and to the promises made to the particular nation Israel? Does the church exhibit continuity or discontinuity with Israel and the revealed plan of God?

Christians had to come to terms not only with questions of how to relate to the Jewish people and their heritage but also to non-Christian Gentile society (the Greco-Roman society). This was especially pressing for Gentile converts to Christianity, whose way of life radically changed simply by the move from a polytheistic, pluralistic approach to religion to the strict monotheism enjoined by the preachers of the gospel (see, e.g., 1 Thess 1:9-10). Pious expressions of devotion to the gods cradled all kinds of social gatherings, from the household to the business guild, from the private dinner to the civic festival. Refusing to join such rites would be regarded with puzzlement, suspicion, and eventually hostility. Moreover, the provinces were generally thriving under Roman imperial rule, and the continued stability of the empire and the order it ensured were highly desirable. Small wonder then that a growing movement that encouraged "impiety" (the avoidance of idolatry) and spoke of an imminent overthrow of the present order (the coming of the kingdom of God) should meet with resistance. Again, this led to a barrage of questions asked by Christians throughout the Roman world:

- How do we make sense of the world's hostility toward the work of God, the alleged good news, and the people of God?
- If we are God's children, why do we face shame and marginalization? How are we to maintain self-respect in the face of being held in dishonor (and often actively dishonored) by a great number of our neighbors?
- When do we "live at peace with all people," and when does accommodation become apostasy?
- How should we relate to non-Christian family members? What effect does our commitment to obey Jesus have on our roles in the household?
- How should we interpret what we see going on around us every day—our neighbors' continued devotion to the traditional religions, Roman imperial presence and propaganda, the economics of empire and province—so we won't be drawn back into the life we left behind?

Of course, other kinds of questions arose as well. The list could be multiplied. Every New Testament text—whether Gospel or history, epistle or apocalypse—emerged as a response to one or more such pastoral concerns, whether for the nurture of disciples in the faith, the putting out of "fires" in various congregations, the encouragement of faithful witness in the face of hostility, whatever the challenges happened to be. The Epistles and Revelation help us become aware of the range of concerns and issues that were being raised within the early church, but these reflect the very same concerns and issues that, in a different way, the Gospels also address. This awareness should help us read the Gospels not only at their face value (i.e., "lives" of Jesus) but also as texts that serve pastoral needs, showing the ways Jesus traditions were applied in the early church to real questions, debates, and issues. Moreover, as we become more aware of the kinds of questions these texts were written to answer, we also become more adept at discerning how

their answers can address questions that still (or newly) challenge communities of disciples.

FORMATION OF A “NEW” TESTAMENT

Early Christians came to speak of the new covenant (in Greek, this was indistinguishable from the phrase “new testament”) quite early. The concept was made available by Jeremiah, who prophesied concerning a time when God would establish a new covenant unlike the old covenant made at Sinai (Jer 31:31-34). This new covenant would succeed where the old covenant had failed, namely, enabling people to be obedient to God from the heart so that the divine-human relationship would rest secure. The author of Hebrews seizes on this image to explain the significance of Jesus’ death and ascension into heaven (Heb 8:1–10:18) as the ratification of this new covenant. The traditions about the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, recorded as early as Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:25; see also Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20), also connect Jesus’ death with the inauguration of the new covenant.

Just as the Jewish Scriptures contained the texts that bore witness to the formation and living out of the first covenant at Sinai, so early Christians began to gather and collect the texts that bore witness to the new covenant in Christ, all the more as the living voice of the apostolic witnesses became less accessible with the deaths of the apostles and eyewitnesses of Jesus. It was only natural that the books that preserved this apostolic witness and that spoke to the Christian community’s central questions and concerns as it dedicated itself to the promises and obligations of this new covenant would rise to a position of authority and centrality in that community.

The process of selection was self-evident in many cases. Writings of the apostles who had founded the congregations with their preaching and nurture, together with the Gospels that meaningfully brought together large amounts

of the traditions about Jesus and sayings of the Lord, would naturally continue to be valued and consulted regularly as touchstones for identity and direction. These were the texts into which early Christians could look in order to remember who they were, texts that accurately reflected the Christians’ understanding of who they were. It was equally evident in many cases when a text reflected not the self-understanding and vision of the “Great Church” (that which would emerge as the orthodox church as opposed to heretical movements) but rather the identity and vision of a select few within the church (for example, the reflections of the proto-Gnostic vision in Gospel of Thomas or the radical advocacy of celibacy, and thus renunciation of the social and domestic order, in Acts of Paul and Thecla).

Although written to specific churches, Paul’s letters appear to have enjoyed a wider readership rather early. Paul himself recommends that the Colossians and Laodiceans read each other’s letters from himself (Col 4:16), and the reference to “all” of Paul’s letters in 2 Peter 3:15-16 suggests that a collection of at least some of Paul’s letters was already known to the author of 2 Peter. If *any* of the major theories of the composition of the Gospels is correct, then at least the earliest Gospel (generally held to have been Mark) enjoyed a sufficiently wide and early circulation to have become a source for other Evangelists. A papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John (P⁵²) found in Egypt bears witness that John, probably written in Asia Minor, was read and copied as far away as Egypt by the early second century. Tatian, a student of Justin Martyr, conflated all four Gospels into a single, continuous narrative called the *Diatessaron* in the mid- to late second century, providing further evidence for the circulation of all four Gospels by the middle of the second century.²

²Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 64; Eduard Lohse,

The postapostolic fathers (church leaders active between 95 and 150 CE) quote many of the texts that became part of the New Testament, though only in the rarest occasions referring to them as “scripture.” Even where direct quotations are not made, these authors show themselves to be significantly informed by and familiar with these texts, their writings very frequently resonating with identifiable passages in the Gospels and epistles.³ When Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, speaks of the public reading of the “memoirs of the apostles” in the church alongside the “writings of the Prophets” of the Old Testament (*1 Apology* 67.3-5), he gives a clear sign of the growing authority of the written Gospels at that time alongside the Jewish Scriptures that the church inherited from Judaism.

As these texts circulated more widely and began to be set apart as a standard collection of witnesses to Jesus and the apostolic voice, other developments contributed in unforeseen ways to the impetus to define the boundaries of this collection. First, there was the specific challenge of Gnosticism in the second century, one of the more popular innovations on the apostolic witness. Marcion, an influential proponent of a form of Gnosticism in the West, drew up a list of authoritative apostolic documents that included only the Gospel of Luke (purged of its Jewish connections) and ten letters of Paul (the Pastoral Epistles are omitted). Second, there was a proliferation of spinoff texts patterned after the genres of the literature received by the church as a whole.

Many new Gospels (such as the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas), further “Acts” of various apostles (the Acts of Andrew, the Acts of Paul and Thecla), a few epistles attributed to one or another apostle, and several apocalypses (of which the most widely read was the Apocalypse of Peter) began to circulate. The majority of these clearly promoted a different understanding of Jesus and his significance as well as a different vision for discipleship and the church from what had previously been received as “apostolic.”⁴

It became increasingly important, then, for church leaders both to promote *all* those books that had been widely used and accepted by the churches (against the shorter list of Marcion) and establish the *limits* of this collection (against the proliferation of texts written in the names of apostles but promoting a nonapostolic faith). Against the claim that there should be only a single Gospel in witness to Jesus, we hear the late second-century Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, theologizing about the fourfold Gospel as a reflection of the four winds, the four elements, and the four faces of the living creatures that surround God’s throne (Rev 4:6-8; cf. Ezek 1:5-14).⁵ We find Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement quoting the majority of texts that were later called the New Testament as possessing the authority of the Spirit and of God. By the end of the second century, there was already a broad consensus on a collection of the four Gospels and the thirteen Pauline epistles, which would form the almost undisputed core of all third- and fourth-century lists of canonical writings.

An early and important monument to this process is the Muratorian Canon, a fragmentary

The Formation of the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 19.

³See the fuller discussion in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 39-73; Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett, eds., *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Gregory and Tuckett, *Trajectories Through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 7-68, 267-86.

⁴See Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 75-106; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 134-57; Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 2:141-64.

⁵We will return to the topic of the fourfold Gospel collection in chapter four.

discussion of the canon dating from the end of the second century.⁶ This catalog of texts sought to provide a comprehensive list of the church's Scripture and to mark the boundaries by discussing several kinds of excluded texts. The beginning of the discussion is lost, picking up at the close of the discussion of Mark's Gospel. The catalog goes on to discuss the church's acceptance of the Gospels of Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles, all thirteen letters ascribed to Paul, Jude, 1 and 2 John, and Revelation (probably the text intended by "Apocalypse of John"). It also specifically mentions the Wisdom of Solomon (usually thought of as being included in the Old Testament)⁷ and the Apocalypse of Peter among the received books, although the author acknowledges that the public reading of the latter in church is a matter of dispute. It commends the Shepherd of Hermas as edifying reading but denies it the status of the others since it was written after the time of the apostles. The writings of various Gnostic sects and specifically the "forged" Letter to the Laodiceans and Letter to the Alexandrians are rejected from the reading list, with the list saying that "it is not fitting for gall to be mixed with honey."

A number of important observations can be made from this text. First, the author is concerned to provide a list of what texts are, by consensus, received and read by the churches with which he is familiar, but not unilaterally impose a standard list on his readers. The honest mention of dispute concerning the Apocalypse of Peter, without attempting to

force a judgment, reveals this. The list bears witness to a basic consensus regarding the Gospels and Paul but a certain fluidity in usage as far as the General Epistles are concerned. Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John do not appear on the list at all. It also bears witness to the increasing importance of apostolicity as a criterion of value. For all its devotional worth, Shepherd of Hermas cannot claim to have been written by an apostle or at an apostle's direction, so it remains at a second tier of importance for the churches. Despite their claims to apostolic authorship, the Letter to the Laodiceans and Letter to the Alexandrians are examined and rejected as spurious on the basis of their content, which witnesses not to the Pauline gospel but to Marcion's innovations thereof.

Origen, a third-century Alexandrian church father, and Eusebius, a well-known Christian scholar flourishing in the early fourth century, also discuss the state of "consensus" among the churches regarding the Christian Scriptures. These authors use the categories of "acknowledged" and "disputed," with the Gospels and Pauline corpus well established among the former, along with 1 Peter and 1 John. Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation tended to fall among the latter.⁸ Hebrews, for example, was by this point well established in the East, being read as Pauline, but not in the West, where its apostolic origin was (rightly) disputed. Revelation is firmly established in the West, though not in the East. Origen and Eusebius also take note of those books that were explicitly rejected from standing as part of this central core. Some of these rejected books were still highly regarded as edifying, such as the Shepherd of Hermas or the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement. While these texts clearly reflected the church's sense of its authentic identity, their distance from

⁶Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*, 158-69; Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 191-201. The second-century date, however, is vigorously debated by A. C. Sundberg Jr., "Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List," *HTR* 66 (1973): 1-41; G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); McDonald, *Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2:274-304. It must be admitted that canonical lists such as this are more of a fourth-century phenomenon.

⁷Protestant Christians, of course, later separated this text out as apocryphal, including it in the Old Testament Apocrypha.

⁸See especially Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1-7. Both fathers are discussed in Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 135-41, 201-7.

and dependence on “apostolic” writings and witness made their authors stand more “with us” (the readers) than at the church’s roots and foundation. Rejection for others, however, such as the Gospel of Thomas, meant their disdainful dismissal as heretical.⁹

It was not until the middle of the fourth century, with the “Easter Letter” written by Bishop Athanasius in 367 CE and disseminated throughout the churches, that we can begin to speak of an endpoint to this process of emerging consensus. His listing of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we now know it shows that by this point even the collection of the General Epistles had advanced far toward a point of agreement between the churches, an agreement that was ratified at the Councils of Hippo in 393 CE and Carthage in 397 CE. These acts by bishops, however, merely represent the formalization of what the church universal, with a very few exceptions, already knew. They were attempts to make public throughout the churches the standard collection that the church universal (that is, the apostolic church) had selected as the authentic witnesses to the apostolic gospel.¹⁰

The endpoint of a process of consensus, however, is rarely so cleanly achieved. The fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus and the sixth-century Codex Claromontanus, two important manuscripts of the Christian Bible (including both the Old and New Testaments), continue to include the Epistle of Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas, and the latter also includes the Acts

of Paul and the Apocalypse of Peter while omitting Hebrews. The fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus includes two letters attributed to Clement of Rome (the first, authentic letter would have been written about 95–100 CE). Whether these were attempts to save these texts from oblivion by continuing to copy them (to provide a Christian community with easy access to these texts) or to make statements about the authority of these texts for the community that produced them is difficult to assess with certainty, but the likelihood of the second of these possibilities remains quite strong.

Despite such ongoing debates in some circles,¹¹ the limits of the New Testament observed by the fourth-century bishops came to define the second Testament for the Christian church as a whole. As we examine this process, we can begin to recognize criteria of canonicity at work. It would be misleading, however, to think of councils of bishops voting on each book of the New Testament with a checklist of criteria in hand, although a number of these criteria became important where a book was disputed. It is more to the point that these criteria appear to have been at work at the grassroots level as Christian communities elevated certain texts as having lasting and central value. These include

- apostolicity: first, in the sense of agreement with the faith, ethos, and practice learned from the apostles and received throughout the church;¹² second, in the sense of being authored by, or at least authorized by, an apostolic witness;

⁹See Lohse, *Formation of the New Testament*, 23–24; Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 135–41, 201–7; Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*, 192–95, 197–207.

¹⁰The process of the formation of the New Testament was somewhat different in the Syrian churches. First, Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, the conflated harmony of the Gospels, was widely used in place of the four separate accounts until the fifth century CE. Second, a number of the General Epistles took much longer to gain acceptance (and in some small circles of the Syrian church still do not have acceptance as canonical). See further Lohse, *Formation of the New Testament*, 24–25; Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 218–23; Patzia, *Making of the New Testament*, 100.

¹¹It should be remembered that even Martin Luther raised questions about the value and apostolicity of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation, holding these explicitly to be of secondary value to the genuine apostolic word such as is found in Paul and 1 Peter (see his prefaces of these books in his editions of the New Testament published between 1522 and 1545).

¹²This first aspect of apostolicity is sometimes treated separately under the heading of “orthodoxy,” as in H. Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 69–70; Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 251–53.

- antiquity: thus Ignatius, Polycarp, and Hermas, though orthodox, do not become standard texts;
- catholicity: both in the sense of the applicability of these texts to the church in every place and in the sense of the widespread use of and reverence for these texts in churches throughout the Mediterranean basin.¹³

The third criterion is particularly worth emphasizing. The authority and liturgical use to which the particular texts arose across the broadest sweep of the Christian churches contributed significantly to the recognition of these particular books as canonical. Thus “the canonization of early Christian writings did not so much confer authority on them as recognize or ratify an authority that they had long enjoyed.”¹⁴

¹³The particularity of Paul’s letters posed something of a challenge in this regard, but this was solved in a number of ways. One of these noted that Paul wrote letters to seven churches (the number of the *churches* is foregrounded; this actually includes *ten* letters), seven being the number of perfection or completion; thus Paul, in the collection of his letters as a whole, addressed the universal church. See Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 264–66. On these criteria and their application, see further *ibid.*, 251–54; McDonald, *Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2:325–48.

¹⁴Harry Gamble, “Canonical Formation of the New Testament,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 192.

Although *inspiration* would later become linked with *canonicity*, the early church did not equate the two. Everything in the New Testament was deemed to be inspired, but everything inspired would not be found in the New Testament. The churches of the first several centuries were very much aware of the activity of the Holy Spirit and the prophetic word in the congregation and among church leaders. Many noncanonical authors considered their own works inspired (e.g., Ignatius, Clement of Rome, the author of *Epistle to Diognetus*), and the writings of Gregory the Great and Basil of Nyssa could be lauded as inspired by their peers.¹⁵ The attempt to define a standard collection of inspired texts was not an attempt to distinguish between words that God had inspired and words that God had not inspired, but rather an attempt to gather together the literary resources that would continually and reliably point the churches back to the apostolic witness. The canon acted as an anchor to keep the church moored in the harbor of orthodoxy and a fountain that would continue to refresh them with the voice of the apostles and the voice of Jesus as they continued to wrestle with endless permutations of the same questions and challenges that had called those texts into being in the first place.

¹⁵Patzia, *Making of the New Testament*, 106; Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 256.

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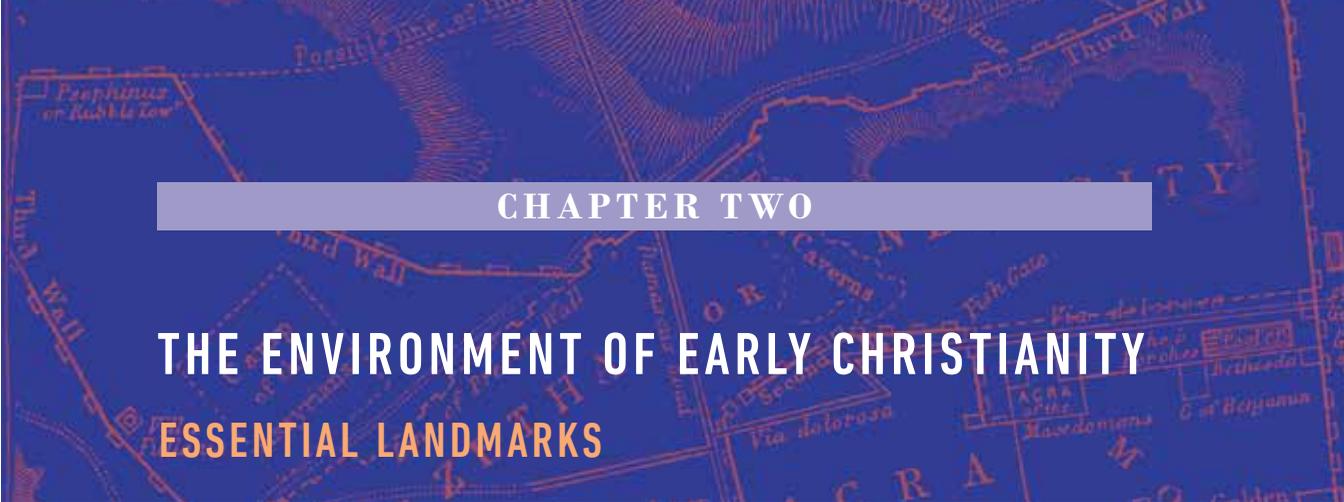
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CHAPTER TWO

THE ENVIRONMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

ESSENTIAL LANDMARKS

WHEN THE WORD BECAME FLESH, it did so within a rich matrix of social, cultural, political, economic, and religious realities. We are accustomed to thinking about how the Word speaks to us in our situation (or to “me” in “my” situation), but we often do so without considering how the Word spoke within the setting of its incarnation. The word that Jesus brought was a “word on target” for Jews in early first-century Israel. The challenges that Christ followers faced as they sought to respond to the gospel were challenges posed by the conflict between the call of God and the demands and opportunities presented by the society and culture around them (and by the inclinations inside them!). The apostles’ visions for their congregations took shape with reference to and in response to the local settings in which Christians were called to witness to the one God and his Christ.

Entering as fully as possible into the world of those who wrote and received the stories of Jesus and the world of the early church throughout the Mediterranean brings us a richer and deeper understanding of the New Testament texts that spoke *within*, and *to the people of*, that world. The more we immerse ourselves into that world and hear how the word called forth a faithful response within that world, the better equipped we will be to proclaim that word reliably and incisively in our significantly different settings. In this chapter we will begin a journey that will con-

tinue throughout this book. We will explore information about the political, cultural, and religious environment of the New Testament with a view to illuminating the individual texts and the situations within which they spoke and sought to achieve particular effects.

PROLOGUE: IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

Since in its earliest decades the Jesus movement took shape within Judaism, we will also begin our overview by looking at the development of several “programs” within Palestinian Judaism by which Jews sought to secure Israel’s future, and a few key events that had a lasting impact on Jewish consciousness. This approach does not seek to minimize in any way the influence of Greco-Roman culture on the emerging church. Indeed, we will find that Greek culture was already interacting in important ways with Jewish culture on Judean soil centuries before Jesus was born, with the result that the church’s Jewish roots already drew the nutrients of Greek culture into the sapling Christian communities in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora. We only need to look at the writings of Josephus (a Judean Jew) and Philo (an Alexandrian Jew) to see how fully enculturated into Hellenism Jews could be—both in the ancestral land of Israel and in the lands of “exile.”

Focusing on the ways different groups of Jews conceived of Israel’s hope and the strategies they pursued to secure its well-being will

help us understand that the various movements around Jesus were not merely driven by beliefs or traditions but also by a cause. More was at stake in the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees or between Pauline Christianity and non-Christian Judaism (and significant circles of Jewish Christianity!) than matters of doctrine and practice. The well-being of the Jewish people, the preservation of their place in God's covenant, and the attainment of their hope were all involved as well. This will also help us understand that the Pharisees were not just narrow-minded grouches, nor the Zealots wide-eyed fanatics. Each group had firm convictions, rooted in centuries of experience, about how God would bring God's faithful ones to the good things God had promised for them.

Jews in the Hellenistic period (conventionally thought of as 332–63 BCE), especially in Palestine, conceived of their hope as being attainable by one of three basic strategies. The first strategy involved assimilation to the Gentile world in varying degrees. Prosperity and the secure enjoyment of good would come to the individual Jew or even the nation as a whole as a result of blending in with the dominant, Greek culture. A second strategy focused on political independence and autonomy for the Jewish people. This included visions of the conquering Messiah, the son of David who would restore the kingdom and the power to Israel, although the figure of a Messiah was not essential to this hope. A third strategy centered on spiritual renewal and purification. Under this heading fall attempts to restore or renew covenant loyalty through Torah with the hope of God, then, renewing the covenant promises, visions of priestly messiahs, promises of the breaking in of the Spirit of God to renew all things, and apocalyptic expectations (which are not apolitical, sometimes promoting a non-militaristic expectation of divine intervention, sometimes promoting armed revolution).

In the practice and ideology of actual groups, several of these strategies could be combined.

For example, the Hasmonean family (see “The saviors of Israel: Political independence and Israel's hope” below in this chapter) combined significant assimilation to Greek culture (at least, after their rise to power) with political independence as the strategies to bring good to the nation. The sectarian community at Qumran combined spiritual renewal with readiness for armed resistance. In their day-to-day lives they devoted themselves to scrupulous observance of Torah and purity; their intense apocalyptic expectations, however, called for their own readiness to participate in the end-time battle, when they would be at the head of the army of God, cleansing Israel of the unrighteous. Zealots combined the quest for political independence through armed revolution with devotion to God and, in some cases, exceptional piety.

Israel: From independent monarchy to peripheral client state. The foundational stories that shaped Jewish identity involved God's choosing a particular kinship group, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, and fashioning a choice destiny for this group. When oppressed by Egypt, God visited judgment on that Gentile nation and led God's chosen race forth to take possession of the land of Canaan. Dispossessing the native Canaanites, God established the descendants of Jacob in the “land of promise,” ultimately making of them a great nation-state under the kingship of David and Solomon. This ideology of election by God, possession of a particular homeland, and political independence was shaken by events that followed not long after Israel had reached its zenith.

In 721 BCE Sargon II, king of Assyria, conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, deporting many Israelites to Assyria and Media and resettling foreigners (probably a combination of military retainers, veterans of his campaigns, and displaced populations from other conquered territories) among the remaining

Israelites (2 Kings 17). In 597 BCE Nebuchadnezzar made the southern kingdom of Judah a province of his expanding empire. Ten years later, as a result of revolutionary stirrings in Judah, Nebuchadnezzar made another punitive expedition to Judah, destroying Jerusalem and its temple and deporting its elites (2 Kings 24–25; Jer 52). The destruction of the temple, the end of Jewish independence, and the exile of many from the land of promise became occasions for reexamining and reshaping Jewish identity and hope. Since departure from the covenant was deemed to be the cause of these misfortunes, careful observance of the Torah came to be viewed as the path to recovery. This also became the means by which Jews maintained their distinctive identity as a group both in the lands of exile and in the Gentile-dominated land of promise.

In 539 BCE Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and became heir to its empire. He allowed those Jews who so wished to return to Judea and rebuild their temple and capital city. While cultic worship then resumed, disillusionment with the second temple and with continued Gentile domination also set in. Some Jews questioned more and more whether the “restoration” achieved during this time really corresponded to the idealistic visions set forth by Isaiah and Ezekiel, or whether they should look forward to new interventions of God. Dissatisfaction with the present gave rise to new hopes for the future, often referred to as apocalyptic eschatology. The restored temple also came to stand at the center not only of Jewish unity but of Jewish disunity as well, as questions later arose concerning what families had the qualifications to administer the temple cultus (e.g., Zadokites versus Hasmoneans), what calendar should be followed in calculating sabbaths or festivals (a solar or lunar calendar, a point on which the Qumran community disagreed sharply with the Hasmonean administration of the temple), and other such questions.

During this period the Jewish people also began to wrestle with questions of definition: Who was the genuine Jew? There were significant tensions between those who returned from exile in Babylon, who had kept their genealogies and bloodlines pure (Ezra 9–10; Neh 13:23–27), and those who had remained in the land of Israel, who considered themselves fully Jewish but whose pedigree was suspect in the eyes of the returnees. Sectarianism was born as the “congregation of the exile” distinguished itself from the “people of the land,” and as criteria for belonging to the people of the covenant were weighed. Would belonging to the covenant be a matter of religious observance, or genealogy, or both? As Ezra and Nehemiah enforced endogamy within the “congregation of the exile,” making the returnees put away foreign wives and disown their children by these women, questions were being raised concerning how and how far Jews can relate to their non-Jewish (or questionably Jewish) neighbors.

The challenge of Hellenization and the strategy of becoming “like the nations.” A new phase in world history began with the rise of Philip II of Macedon, who united the city-states of Greece and Macedonia into a force capable of competing with the Persian Empire. It fell to his son, Alexander III (“the Great”), to use this force to unite Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and the lands that had belonged to the Persian Empire as far as the Indus River into a single empire (see fig. 2.1). This empire was administered according to the principles of the Greek *polis* (city-state), with Alexander founding new cities or reshaping existing capital cities across this broad expanse after the model of the Athenian constitution. Within each of these cities the organs for propagating and maintaining Greek culture among the dominant elites were found: the gymnasium and lyceum, where youth were trained in Greek language and literature, athletics, and

culture; theaters, stadia, and hippodromes, for the enjoyment of Greek forms of entertainment (the first of which, incidentally, was an important venue for Greek thought, poetry, and music); and temples, for Greek forms of worship. Through his efforts the influence of Greek culture was felt in cities throughout the known world.¹

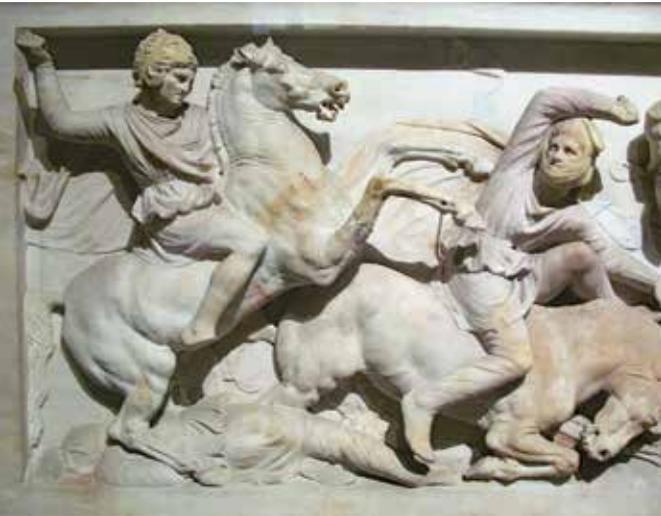


Figure 2.1. Alexander the Great riding down Persian soldiers. Detail of a frieze from a sarcophagus from Tyre. (Istanbul Museum)

After Alexander's death in 323 BCE at the age of thirty-three, his empire was divided among his generals, the *Diadochoi*, or "successors." These generals went on to form dynasties of their own and were in frequent conflict with one another as each strove to increase his share of Alexander's legacy. However, they were united in continuing to nurture an environment in which Greek culture encountered and penetrated indigenous cultures. This process is known as Hellenization, a vitally important and potent process in the formation of the world into which the church was born.

¹A somewhat fuller account of the Hellenistic and Hasmonean periods can be found in David A. deSilva, "The Hellenistic Period," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill Arnold and Richard Hess (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 426-59.

Hellenization did not mean the eradication of native languages or cultures but rather the coexistence and, to a large extent, the blending of Greek culture with native cultures. The most basic level of Hellenization involved learning the Greek language, the pathway to power and influence for native elites. Since politics and diplomacy were conducted in the language of the conquerors, learning this language was necessary if one wished to have a place in the hegemony of the dominant culture.² Merchants and artisans would have also been interested in learning at least enough Greek to facilitate doing business. The majority of an indigenous population—those who were tied to the land—would have had little occasion or need to learn Greek. Perhaps as an ancillary trend, native elites, especially, took Greek names for themselves and gave Greek names to their children. This may stem from an interest on the part of natives to present themselves more as an open and adaptable part of the dominant culture than as part of a subjugated, barbaric people.

Travel was greatly facilitated during the Hellenistic period, with the result that many people migrated, taking their ideas and their cultures along with them. Again, native cultures were not lost,³ but the degree to which a people gained exposure to other cultures increased. People of one region were more apt to be exposed to elements of the philosophies, religions, traditions, and stories that constituted "cultural literacy" for Greeks and other people groups united within the Hellenistic kingdoms. Jewish authors came more and more to use the literary genres and topics of Greek and other non-Jewish cultures during this period. This process was much more rapid

²Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks, Barbarians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 62; on Hellenization in general see further Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959), 344-57; J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 88-91.

³L. L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1:170.

in the Diaspora than in Palestine, but by 75 CE a Palestinian Jew named Josephus composed a history of the Jewish Wars after the pattern of Greek historiography, complete with speeches displaying facility in Greek rhetoric, and incidentally introducing Jewish sects in terms of their resemblances to Greek philosophical schools. A full generation prior to this, Philo and the anonymous author of 4 Maccabees interpreted the observance of Jewish laws in terms that would have been intelligible to any Greek philosopher or moralist as the means by

which reason may rule over the passions (the emotions, desires, and physical sensations that subvert virtue). Aside from the possibilities for dialogue that this opened up between Jews and Gentiles, the very fact of Jews rethinking and reevaluating their ancestral ways in terms of Greek standards of morality and ethical achievement was an astounding witness to the far-reaching effects of Hellenization on people of a non-Greek culture.

The lasting results of Hellenization in Judea and its environs were extensive. We can no

THE SEPTUAGINT

The Septuagint is a monument to the Hellenization of Jews in the Diaspora, particularly in Egypt. According to the Letter of Aristeas, Ptolemy II commissioned a translation of the Jewish Torah into Greek for the Library of Alexandria. More probably, the translation was necessitated because Jews living in Egypt had become alienated from their ancestral languages and required their Scriptures to be available in Greek. The Torah (the five books of Moses) was translated into Greek fairly closely by the late third century BCE. Over the course of the next century the prophetic books and the writings were also translated into Greek and became the Scriptures for many Diaspora Jews and eventually for the early Christian churches throughout the Mediterranean (see fig. 2.2).

Those responsible for translating the different books worked with divergent philosophies of translation. Some books follow the Hebrew text closely and woodenly. Other books are more like paraphrases of the Hebrew than

translations. The grandson of Yeshua Ben Sira (a Jerusalem sage flourishing in the late third to early second century BCE) observed concerning the translation of Hebrew into Greek that “what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not exactly have the same force when translated into another language. Not only this book [referring to his own translation of his grandfather’s wisdom sayings], but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original” (prologue to Ben Sira). The act of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek greatly facilitated the interplay of Greek thought and philosophy with Jewish interpretation of its own tradition, since topics of Jewish faith were now brought fully into the linguistic framework of Greek thought.

The leaders of the emerging rabbinic movement did not regard the Septuagint so kindly. Perhaps because it lent itself so well to Christian claims about Jesus, perhaps because it lent itself so well to a highly Hellenized Judaism,

they likened the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek to a second golden calf and opposed its continued use in synagogues. It came to be supplanted by translations “authorized” by rabbinic authorities, far more literal and wooden.

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Hellenistic cities in the land of Israel

longer maintain the idealized and highly ideological picture of a Judaism untainted by Greek culture thriving in Palestine, contrasted with a highly acculturated Judaism in the Diaspora. Rather, by the Roman period especially, there were a wide range of degrees of Hellenization in both Palestine and the Diaspora. Within the borders of the ancestral land of Israel itself, there were Gentile populations well represented. Galilee was home to many Gentiles, including a noted Stoic philosopher. The region called the Decapolis east and south of the Sea of Galilee was a federation of Greek cities with Graecized populations. Herod the Great's Caesarea Maritima was constructed as a seaside resort city for Greeks and Romans, and it became the headquarters of the Roman governor.

Hellenization was not in and of itself incompatible with remaining a faithful Jew. On the contrary, some of the most Hellenized Jewish authors also show themselves the most zealous advocates for and strictest followers of the Jewish way of life. There were, however, lines that pious Jews could not cross but which their leaders and Gentile authorities might try to push them across. It was at these points that adopting the "Greek way of life" would have been deemed unacceptable, and not at the level of speaking Greek or expressing one's commitment to God in terms of Greek philosophy and ethics. When we come at last to the Maccabean Revolt, we should not confuse its attempt to preserve the Jewish way of life with a cultural war against the influence of Hellenism. It was rather a reinforcing of those lines that simply could not be crossed.

The successors to Alexander of immediate interest to the Jews were Seleucus I, who secured Syria, Asia Minor, and Babylonia for his empire, and Ptolemy I, whose forces held Egypt. Palestine stood as a buffer zone between these powerful warlords, belonging at first to the Ptolemies, from 323 to 198 BCE. The Ptolemaic kings allowed the Jews to govern themselves and observe their law and customs, being

satisfied with taxes and loyalty. In 198 BCE Antiochus III, the great-great-grandson of Seleucus I, wrested Palestine from Ptolemaic control. He continued the Ptolemies' policy of toleration, confirming the Jews' right to self-regulation under the Torah (see Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3.3-4 §§138-153).⁴ The accession in 175 BCE of his second son, Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" ("the manifest god"), brings us to the beginning of the most significant and well-documented crisis of Second Temple Judaism before Pompey's invasion and the advent of Roman power (see fig. 2.3).⁵

Prior to Antiochus IV's accession Judea was governed by Onias III, a rather conservative high priest. Onias's more progressive brother, Yeshua (who took the Greek name "Jason"), raised an enormous sum of money as a gift to the new king, Antiochus IV, seeking the privilege of being named high priest in his brother's place and of refounding Jerusalem as a Greek city. Jason established a list of citizens, no doubt composed chiefly of those who supported his progressive innovations. He established a gymnasium with a list of young men enrolled to take part. This became the educational and cultural center of the new Jerusalem.

Jason's policy of voluntary Hellenization had a great deal of support among the upper classes. Only if this were the case could Jason have promised such an extensive annual "gift" to Antiochus. All our sources agree that a group of renegade Jews actively pursued the Hellenization of Judea and secured the right to become a Greek city from Antiochus IV at their own initiative, and many in Jerusalem enthusiastically took part in the Greek institutions (see 1 Macc 1:11-13; 2 Macc 4:13-15). What kind of Jews were these? Josephus tells of a certain Joseph ben Tobias who, during the period of

⁴For a critical assessment of Josephus's report of these rights, see Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 82-88.

⁵I have attempted to bring this vivid history to life in my *Day of Atonement: A Novel of the Maccabean Revolt* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015).

Ptolemaic rule of Palestine, attained great wealth for himself and brought economic benefit to his country by being willing to adapt himself to Gentile customs and expectations.⁶ In a letter to an official, Joseph writes, “many thanks be to your *gods*,” a striking concession. He also appears to have sold a Jewish girl to a Gentile as a slave and to have kept some of his own male slaves uncircumcised, two practices forbidden by the Torah. Joseph maintained good relations with Samaritans, who helped finance his first visits to Alexandria, despite the

benefactors, not renegades. They sought to bring Israel into the international arena, making it a player in international politics and economics. Jason’s policy brought untold opportunities for the elite to enhance their wealth, prestige, and influence. Such a policy also meant, however, that Torah had been replaced as the foundation of government by a Greek constitution (this is reflected, somewhat exaggeratedly, in 2 Macc 4:10-11).

In 172 BCE, however, a rival faction in Jerusalem made a bid to Antiochus IV with a substantially bigger bribe and replaced Jason with Menelaus (notably, another Greek-named Jew). While the population of Judea was no doubt appalled by Jason’s purchase of the most sacred office, at least he was a suitable incumbent, being a descendent of Zadok. Menelaus, however, had no such credentials. At this point people remembered as “Hasideans” (probably derived from *hasidim*, “faithful ones”) broke with the temple and became a potential force for rebellion. Jason, moreover, retained his supporters and watched for an opportune time to regain his position—another source of volatility in an unstable situation.

The stage was set for radical action. While Antiochus IV was pressing an attack on Egypt, a false rumor spread that he had been killed in battle. Jason seized the opportunity to rally his supporters and drive Menelaus into the citadel of Jerusalem. The local population, however, also seems to have used this occasion to rid themselves of both problems—driving Jason out of Jerusalem and keeping Menelaus, who had made himself utterly abominable by raiding the temple treasury to pay the promised bribes to Antiochus, besieged in the citadel.⁷ Menelaus got word to Antiochus IV, who treated



Figure 2.2. A well-preserved codex leaf from the Septuagint translation of Exodus, written on papyrus and bearing a resemblance to the Alexandrian textual tradition of Exodus. The page would have been folded in half as part of a bound volume, with the right page coming first. The right page contains most of Exodus 26:22-25; the left page contains Exodus 30:19-21. (Courtesy of a private collector)

tendency of his fellow Jews to avoid dealings with Samaritans. Nevertheless, he never appears to have regarded himself as “apostate.” Rather, he represented the kind of nonexclusivist behavior typical of many Jewish elites and certainly of those who would have supported Jason and his reforms. Jason and his supporters saw themselves as national reformers and

⁶The story of Joseph ben Tobias is recorded in Josephus, *Ant.* 12.4.1-11 §157-236; see Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, 1:192-98, for a critical discussion of this source.

⁷Jason appears to have fled Jerusalem before Antiochus’s armies had arrived, leading Victor Tcherikover (*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* [repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999], 188) to posit an intermediate revolt, in which some conservative party ousted Jason shortly after Jason ousted Menelaus.

Jerusalem as a city in revolt against his own rule, brutally slaughtering thousands. Continual resistance finally led Antiochus, perhaps under the advice of Menelaus himself, to attack the people's adherence to their ancestral customs (the Torah) as the root of their rebelliousness. In 167 BCE Jews in Jerusalem were forbidden to circumcise their young or to possess copies of the Torah. Those who persisted in practicing Torah observance met with terrible punishment. Foreign mercenary soldiers were brought in to maintain order; the temple was made the common property of the Jews and Gentiles in Jerusalem, and the rites and accouterments altered to accommodate the worship practices of the foreigners, including the rededication of the sanctuary to multiple gods. This change in cult practice was remembered in the sources as the "abomination of desolation" (1 Macc 1:54; Dan 9:27). At this point the process of Hellenization had overstepped the limits of the people's tolerance, and a revolution against Menelaus's priesthood and Greco-Syrian rule ensued.

These events made a long-lasting impression on Jews—so much so that apocalypticists tended to use these events as a prototype of the final woes or persecution of the righteous. The persecutions themselves came to be interpreted as divine punishment for the nation's leaders' willingness to set aside the Torah and thus a warning about the dangers of Hellenization, which far outweighed its promise. Significant segments of Judaism came to view with suspicion any impetus to loosen the observance of Torah. If Jews followed some figure who taught the setting aside of Torah, it might endanger the whole nation, bringing down another chastisement from God. Reactions to Jesus and Stephen, for example, may be understood in part as responses against their questionable regard for the Torah and temple, the two pillars of assuring divine favor. The motivation of Saul (Paul) and the other Jewish persecutors of the early Christian movement may be seen more clearly as zeal for the Torah and

the safety of Israel, lest this newest movement lead to God's wrath on the nation that was slow to declare its absolute allegiance to Torah. Attempts to pursue the "hope of Israel" through assimilation, therefore, encountered greater



Figure 2.3. A silver *tetradrachm* of Antiochus IV. The image on the obverse bears a portrait of the king; the reverse bears an image of Zeus, seated with "Victory" standing in his hand. The inscription reads "of King Antiochus, God Manifest, Bringer of Victory." (Photos courtesy of Sandy Brenner, www.jerusalemcoins.com)

resistance hereafter from those who had become even more certain that the "hope of Israel" lay in fidelity to the distinctive way of life set out for it by God in God's covenant.

The saviors of Israel: Political independence and Israel's hope.

The attempt to suppress observance of the covenant and the intolerable situation in Jerusalem and Judea led a priest named Mattathias and his five sons to initiate revolution. A Syrian official came to Mattathias's village of Modein calling for an idolatrous offering as a sign of acquiescence to the

new policy and submission to the regime. Mattathias reenacted the zeal of Phineas the son of Aaron by killing this official and the first Israelite who stepped forward to comply. Mattathias and his sons rallied a guerilla army, including at first the enigmatic Hasideans, and

The momentum of the revolution outpaced Antiochus IV's increased commitment of his forces to pacifying Judea, with the result that Antiochus IV finally revoked the prohibitions against Torah observance. Judas Maccabaeus (the "Hammer"), the military leader among the

ALEXANDER AND HIS MORE SIGNIFICANT SUCCESSORS

- **Alexander the Great** (336–323 BCE)
- **Ptolemy I**, general and successor to Alexander in Egypt (king over Egypt and Palestine from 322 to 285 BCE)
- **Ptolemy II Philadelphus** (285–246 BCE), hero of Letter of Aristeas
- **Ptolemy VI Philometor** (180–145 BCE), Ptolemy against whom Antiochus IV campaigned
- **Cleopatra VII Philopator** (51–30 BCE), wife of Marc Antony
- **Seleucus I**, general and successor to Alexander in Babylonia, Armenia, and Syria (king from 301 to 281 BCE)
- **Antiochus III** ("the Great," 226–187 BCE), who wrested Palestine from Ptolemaic control
- **Seleucus IV** (187–175 BCE), son of Antiochus III
- **Antiochus IV** "Theos Epiphanes" ("the god revealed," 175–164 BCE), antagonist in 1–2 Maccabees, supporter of radical Hellenization of Jerusalem



Figure 2.4. Bronze bust of Seleucus I Nicator from the "Villa of the Papyri," Herculaneum. (*Naples Museum*)

began to purge Judea by attacking Jews who had abandoned observance of the boundary-keeping commands of Torah. Boys left uncircumcised were forcibly circumcised; Jews who had accommodated too far were left to fear for their lives (1 Macc 2:44-48; 3:5-6). The threat was not taken sufficiently seriously by the Greco-Syrian government, with the result that insufficient forces were dispatched at first to crush the revolution. This resulted in some early victories that fueled the fire of resistance, supplied the growing rebel army with weapons and armor, and demoralized the Syrian occupying forces, more or less setting the tone for the campaigns that followed.

five brothers, and his revolutionaries recaptured the temple itself and purged it of its pagan trappings, rededicating it to the Torah-regulated service of God. The movement that had begun as an attempt to restore religious freedom to Judea pressed forward until nothing short of political independence had been gained for the nation by the surviving brothers of Judas, who were themselves established at the head of the new nation-state successively as its high priests. As this office passed on to the sons of Simon, the last surviving brother, the Hasmonean dynasty was born. The title of high priest, and from 104 BCE on the title of king, remained in this family until 63 BCE.

Judas and his brothers were remembered as nothing less than messianic. Judas was praised as “a lion in his deeds,” words used in Hosea 5:14 to speak of God’s appointed agent (1 Macc 3:4), and as the “savior of Israel” (1 Macc 9:21), the one through whom God brought deliverance to God’s people. Simon’s reign is described in 1 Maccabees 14 in explicitly messianic terms: the prophetic visions of old men sitting at leisure in the streets and of people sowing in peace while the vine yielded its fruit and the ground its harvest (Zech 8:4, 12; Ezek 34:27; Mic 4:4) are woven into a poem showing how these promises of a messianic kingdom were fulfilled in Simon’s time (1 Macc 14:8-9). Judas and his brothers became the pattern for the military, political messiah. They renewed the vision of the hope of Israel as a political hope, securing religious, cultural, and ethnic identity through power, a vision that became important again with the advent of Roman rule (and the end of the short-lived political independence gained by Judas’s successors). The image of the earthly, military Messiah figure has its real roots here. We should also pause to observe that the “zeal for the Torah” associated with Mattathias and his sons (see 1 Macc 2:27), by which Judas “turned away wrath from Israel” (1 Macc 3:8), involved forcing apostate Jews to return to the covenant. This again remained an important feature for the development of the early church. Non-Christian Jewish persecutors were informed by this tradition of how to enact zeal for Torah, a connection Paul makes explicitly in Philippians 3:6: “as to zeal, a persecutor of the church” (NRSV).

The Hasmonean dynasty degenerated into a series of kings who resembled more the Gentile Seleucids than the dream of a new Davidic monarchy. Even from its inception some Jews criticized the family for not giving the high priesthood back to the Zadokite line. One important point of contention between the Qumran community (the sect with which the Dead Sea Scrolls are most commonly con-

nected) and the Hasmonean leadership concerned precisely this “usurpation” of the high priesthood. Although the descendants of Simon pushed the borders of the newly independent Judea to regain the dimensions of the Solomonic kingdom, acts of brutality against Judean opponents, questions about the dynasty’s legitimacy, and internal rivalries

THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY

- **Mattathias** (d. 165 BCE), father of Judas and his brothers, first leader of Maccabean Revolt (against Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV)
- **Judas “Maccabaeus”** (165–160 BCE), third son of Mattathias, second leader of revolt
- **Jonathan** (160–142 BCE), fifth son of Mattathias, third leader of revolt; named high priest by Alexander Balas, son of Antiochus IV
- **Simon** (142–135 BCE), second son of Mattathias; named “high priest, commander, and leader” of the Judeans (1 Macc 13:42; 14:35, 41)
- **John Hyrcanus I** (135–104 BCE), son of Simon; leader and high priest
- **Judas Aristobulus I** (104–103 BCE), oldest son of John Hyrcanus I, first to take title “king” alongside “high priest”
- **Alexander Jannaeus** (103–76 BCE), youngest son of John Hyrcanus I
- **Salome Alexandra** (76–67 BCE), wife of Alexander Jannaeus
- **Aristobulus II** (67–63 BCE), older son of Alexander Jannaeus
- **Hyrcanus II** (63–43 BCE), younger son of Alexander Jannaeus

PARTHIAN INVASION AND INTERREGNUM

- **Mattathias Antigonus** (40–37 BCE), son of Aristobulus II
- **Herod the Great** (37–4 BCE), “legitimate” successor to dynasty through marriage to Mariamne I, granddaughter of both Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II (her parents were first cousins)

THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The term *Apocrypha* refers to a collection of Jewish writings contained in the Old Testament canon of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches but excluded from the Bible of Protestants and Jews. These texts were written between 250 BCE and 100 CE by pious Jews seeking to make sense of their experiences and to discover how to remain faithful to God in a changing world. Some originated in the land of Israel (written either in Hebrew or Greek); many were written by Jews living outside Israel in what is called the Diaspora (written mainly in Greek, some in Aramaic).

Many of these books stand firmly in the tradition of the Old Testament writings. Historical books such as 1–2 Maccabees continue the story of God's dealings with his covenant people such as is told in 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. The Wisdom of Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon stand in the tradition of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Some of the Apocrypha arose as Old Testament books were rewritten or expanded, such as 1 Esdras (a version of Ezra-Nehemiah), the Greek versions of Esther and Daniel (both of which contain substantial additions), and the Prayer of Manasseh and Letter of Jeremiah (inspired by events and situations narrated in the Old Testament). There are a number of stories written both to entertain and to reinforce important values, such as Tobit and Judith, as well as prayers and psalms, a “prophetic” book (Baruch), an apocalypse (2 Esdras, itself a composite work), and an essay on the way strict

obedience to the Jewish Torah better trains a person in all the virtues prized by the Greek world than any Greek philosophy (4 Maccabees).

Catholic and Orthodox churches stand in a long tradition of the Christian use of and respect for these texts as reliable resources, a tradition that extends all the way back to the early church. We notice a growing willingness to speak of these texts as Scripture during the second and third Christian centuries and the inclusion of most or all of these books in the Bibles of the fourth- and fifth-century church. These books made a great contribution both to the New Testament and to the development of Christian theology during these early centuries. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches stand in this tradition.

Protestants, on the other hand, continue the tradition of the vocal minority in the early church who questioned whether these books should be regarded as of equal value to the other canonical books or relegated to a second tier. Jerome, a fourth-century priest and scholar, argued forcefully that since the Jewish rabbis did not acknowledge them as Scripture, neither should the church that inherited its Old Testament from the synagogue. The Protestant policy of “Scripture alone” as a guide to theology made it important to establish the boundaries of Scripture, all the more as the more objectionable practices such as making atonement on behalf of the dead to free them from punishment after

death were based on apocryphal texts (see, e.g., 2 Macc 12:39–45). This stood behind Masses celebrated for the dead and the selling of indulgences—in short, behind many of those practices that Luther explicitly attacked. By taking up the old critique of Jerome and arguing that the Apocrypha should not be considered Scripture, Protestants were able to undercut support for this major issue.

There is a tendency among Protestants to undervalue these writings, even to regard them as dangerous. (Why else would they be “removed” from the canon?) The Reformation heritage, however, commends these texts as resources to be read and valued (just not to be used as an independent source for theology and points of doctrine). Luther himself took pains to translate the Apocrypha and included them in his German Bible, separated out between the Testaments. The Church of England recommended them as edifying devotional literature and as useful for teaching ethics. As publishers began to publish Bibles without the Apocrypha (which made books cheaper to produce and easier to sell), setting a new standard for Protestant Bibles, unfamiliarity led to prejudice and contempt, which led to a harmful avoidance of this literature.

The Apocrypha provide us with essential information about the history of the period between the Testaments; the theological developments during the period; the ways Old Testament traditions were selected, remembered, and

expanded; the piety and ethics of the Jewish people at the turn of the era; and the religious, cultural, social, and political challenges they faced. Moreover, the influence of the books of the Apocrypha on New Testament voices and authors is unmistakable, as will be pointed out throughout this book. If the early church found these books such valuable resources (independent of the questions of inspiration or canonicity), it would be a shame for the modern church to neglect them.

These books, however, are not merely of academic interest. The Apocrypha are also of lasting value as devotional reading, bearing

witness to the faith and piety of the Jewish people in the centuries around the turn of the era and to the way many met the challenges to their calling to be a holy people with covenant loyalty. These books teach a zeal to walk faithfully before God in the face of adversity, encourage a commitment to choose obedience to God over succumbing to the passions or the weaknesses of the flesh, and witness to the experience of God's forgiveness and the hope of God's deliverance—all of which cannot fail to strengthen the faith both of Jews and of Christians.

For further reading:

- deSilva, D. A. *The Apocrypha*. Core Biblical Studies. Nashville: Abingdon, 2012.
- . *Introducing the Apocrypha: Its Message, Context, and Significance*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018 (1st ed., 2002).
- Harrington, Daniel J. *An Invitation to the Apocrypha*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.
- Voicu, Sever, ed. *Apocrypha*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 15. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

weakened the family's position. The dynasty ended in civil strife, with two brothers involved in a feud for the titles of high priest and king. One side appealed to Rome to settle the issue, which was all the opening Pompey the Great needed to begin to bring Judea under Roman administration—first by awarding the title “high priest” to one of the brothers (John Hyrcanus II), but denying the title “king” to both.

Despite the family's fall from grace in the popular eye, Judas and his brothers left an enduring legacy—a renewed zeal for the restoration and secure establishment of the kingdom of Israel. Even though Jews no longer viewed the Hasmonean kings as worthy or faithful leaders, they continued to hope for a worthy king in the future who would take the best achievements of the Hasmoneans and combine them with the perfect embodiment of traditional Jewish virtues. Thus messianism and the fostering of hopes for God's perfect restoration of Israel (seen in shadowy form in the Hasmonean restoration) also flourished during this period. Of course, the advent of a new Gentile empire on the Judean scene—the

Roman republic—renewed all the old questions and concerns about how to live securely as Jews under the domination of non-Jews.

The renewal of Israel through fidelity to God.

For some the hope of Israel lay in the hands of God alone. During the Hellenization crisis it appeared to some that only God's direct intervention could restore Israel. God would bring God's promises to pass; the role of the community was simply to keep faith with this God through diligent observance of God's law. This conviction was not the sole property of any one group but rather pervaded many circles within Judaism.

One manifestation of this conviction was apocalypticism. Apocalypticists looked to the larger contexts in which they lived, beyond the present moment to the distant past and forthcoming future, beyond the visible scene to the unseen activity in the realms above and below. Looking to conflicts in the past explained tensions experienced in the present. Looking to God's forthcoming interventions made continued fidelity to God's commands advantageous.

Looking beyond the visible world gave a behind-the-scenes perspective on the realities encountered and experienced by the audience of the apocalyptic message. In the heavenly realm God's rule is already manifest—the whole cosmos is not out of order, only the earth. The inhabitants of heaven are subservient to God's will, and only the inhabitants of the earth and the demonic powers fail to recognize God's authority.⁸ Placing everyday life within these broader contexts changes how aspects of the everyday world are understood, interpreted, and even valued.

Apocalypticism essentially arose in response to the apparent failure of the Deuteronomistic view of history. Deuteronomy declares that those who are faithful to Torah prosper while those who violate it are punished. The history of the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah written in the books of Samuel and Kings sought to demonstrate the truth of this claim by explaining the fall of both kingdoms as the result of their departure from Torah. The experience of Hellenistic-era Jews radically challenged this premise, since the apostate was more likely to enjoy prosperity in this life than the faithful Jew, who from time to time was actually endangered by and sometimes brutally executed for his or her commitment to God's law. Thus the doctrine of two ages came into being—this temporary, present age, when wicked people have the upper hand, and the age to come, when God's rewards and punishments will be meted out and the faithful will enjoy the blessings that God's justice guar-

antees them. Apocalypticism was also fueled by the apparent failure of other promises of God, for example, the promise made to David to establish his line forever. The conviction that the God of Israel was absolutely faithful led to the positing of a future time when all these promises would be fulfilled, when the prophets' visions of Israel's prosperity and glory would all seem like understatement.

Dualism is a prominent characteristic of apocalypticism. This dualism manifests itself temporally, distinguishing between the present age, which is hopelessly corrupt, and the coming age, the reign of God and God's servants. It manifests itself socially, as humanity is divided up into the children of darkness, who are lost together with this age, and children of light, who are God's favored elect. Many apocalyptic circles no longer defined Israel in terms of ethnicity but rather in terms of a shared spiritual commitment. With this the concept of an elect remnant of faithful ones as the "true" Israel came into view. The dualistic thinking promoted a marked pessimism with regard to the majority of humanity and to the possibility of justice and peace in this age. There was a strong preference for grounding the message in the world beyond experience and beyond disconfirmation. Visions and revelations from God or an angel were the preferred media of communication, creating a sense of proximity to that heavenly, otherworldly realm.

Apocalypticism proved to be a flexible and powerful ideological strategy by which to maintain commitment to a particular group and to the "hope of Israel" more generally. It rescued the tenability of the Deuteronomistic worldview—rewards and punishments were no longer expected to be meted out in this life. Making the realm beyond experience more real for the audiences through visions and direct supernatural communications helped them to invest themselves more fully and freely into otherworldly rewards, even when the temporal cost was great. Apocalypticism also enhances

⁸Apocalypticism thus gives strong impetus to the development of angelology and demonology; the stories of the inhabitants of these unseen realms are given more specificity. God is surrounded by distinct orders of angels, many of whom are now known by name. The story of the angels who left heaven to mate with human females (Gen 6:1-4) becomes the canonical anchor for extravagant epics concerning the fall and rebellion of these angels, the forbidden lore they brought to humankind to lead them astray, the birth and death of the giants, whose souls became the evil spirits that afflict humankind, and the like (see 1 En. 6-36; the story is known to the authors of 2 Peter and Jude).

group solidarity and group boundaries, articulating the privileges of the group as the elect and the immense disadvantages facing the outsiders, who are damned. Maintaining allegiance to the group, showing solidarity until the end, and being “found faithful” emerge as primary strategies for attaining the apocalyptic hope. Finally, apocalypticism is especially suited to enabling resistance to the dominant culture by promoting the view that, while outsiders might seem to be a powerful majority in the present age, in a short time the group members will be shown to have chosen the right side with the innumerable hosts of heaven belonging to their party. Apocalyptic thought and forms of expression became increasingly important in the Hellenistic period (see, notably, Dan 7–12 and 1 Enoch) and emerge in almost every book of the New Testament as well as in Jewish responses to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE (e.g., 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch).

Many Jews regarded the intensification of attention to the doing of Torah and bringing every aspect of their lives into line with the law of God as the paramount strategy to attaining the well-being of the nation and of individuals. The Hasidim, Essenes, and the more familiar Pharisees, who emerged prior to and during the Hasmonean period as powerful coalitions within Judea, embodied this response in their belief that loyalty to the covenant was the path to Israel’s prosperity and security under God’s favor. Only by returning with a whole heart to Torah, the covenant, would Israel enjoy a future of blessing and peace. Opportunities for division, or sectarianism, arose within this general consensus, chiefly in connection with *how* the Torah was to be interpreted and applied beyond the rather limited cases actually covered within the Pentateuch. Disagreements between Pharisees, Sadducees (who appear to have been found among the priestly aristocracy), and Essenes (including the Qumran community) often revolved around minute points of how

the law was to be performed correctly. Pharisees and the Qumran covenanters, in their different ways, exemplified how the concept of an elect within Israel worked. The Pharisees and the inhabitants at Qumran both viewed themselves as the sole group that paid proper attention to the covenant and fulfilled its stipulations and requirements correctly. They were the faithful, and nonmembers were following Torah imperfectly at best. Behind these debates, we must always remember, stood not a petty-minded legalism but the conviction that the nation’s faithful response to God and enjoyment of God’s promised blessings were at stake. Many of the conflicts between Jesus and representatives of these groups can be seen to fall within these lines as well.

Strict observance of Torah as a strategy to experience God’s blessings might be combined with apocalypticism or with political messianism or both. Early Judaism was capable of great variety and recombination. It was also combined with an intense interest in and commitment to the Jerusalem temple. Indeed, the functioning of the temple emerged for some Jews as the cornerstone of Israel’s hope. As long as the temple was functioning, and thus the means of reconciliation to the patron deity kept readily at hand, Israel’s hope was secure. There was no division of the Torah into moral and cultic laws: the two were bound together, supported each other, and assumed the proper functioning of the other. Some Jews proved far more resilient, however, in the wake of the removal of the temple from the scene by the Roman legions in 70 CE.

The advent of Rome and a new impetus to assimilate. In the wake of the failure of Alexander’s successors to revive his unified empire, the balance of power in the Mediterranean gradually shifted westward as one central power, guided from one central city, emerged as the true successor to Alexander in the region. Both the Roman republic and the Roman

Empire continued and expanded Alexander's ideology of world domination, promoting the unification of all people in a Helleno-Roman culture, administration, and shared religious pantheon (ever expanding to accommodate the gods of newly conquered peoples). Under its emperors, Rome fulfilled this ideal better than any predecessor: culture remained thoroughly Greek, with the distinctive Roman flavoring of central administration, glorification of power, and promise of peace through unopposable force.

The power of the Roman republic began to be felt in the eastern Mediterranean during the time of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. When Antiochus III attempted to annex the coastal lands of Asia Minor, a representative of Rome halted Antiochus's advance and imposed a heavy tribute on him. When Antiochus IV invaded Egypt, a Roman consul prevented him from taking control of Egypt, warning him against attempting such an enterprise again. Already Rome was policing the affairs of otherwise sovereign kingdoms, using its role as peace-keeper as a prelude to more direct control.

Because Rome's power rested on its armies, it was essential to provide for the armies' rapid deployment throughout the territory controlled by Rome. Roman engineers built on and vastly improved existing road systems and trade routes, incidentally facilitating travel between cities for all merchants, travelers, and preachers of one philosophy or another. The missionary endeavors of Paul and other evangelists, the relentless movements of other Christian teachers and emissaries of various churches, and the ongoing and regular contact between Christians of different communities profited greatly from the Roman road network.

Roman rule came to Judea after Pompey the Great, a leading general and later a triumvir of the Roman republic, intervened in the feud between John Hyrcanus II and Judah Aristobulus II. In the interests of more effective government of the peoples in Palestine, Pompey assigned

large parts of the former Hasmonean state to the Roman governor of Syria and, after conferring only the title of high priest on Hyrcanus, appointed an Idumean named Antipater and his sons, Phasael and Herod, as governors of Judea and Galilee.

There was a strong impetus to accept Roman power as the hope of Israel, just as so many other peoples and nations had embraced Rome as their own salvation. This need not have meant participation in idolatrous cults, for Rome was exceptionally tolerant of Judaism. It was enough to cooperate, to facilitate Roman administration, to drink in the benefits of the *pax Romana*, the peace provided by Roman power. The priestly aristocracy, the Herodian family and its administration, and many enterprising Jews had nothing to gain from antagonizing Rome and everything to gain from promoting submission to the Roman yoke.

The new political messianism. Not all Jews, however, were content to leave Israel under the governance of a Gentile power. Indeed, Pompey's entry into Jerusalem stirred up tremendous anti-Roman animosity. After defeating Aristobulus, Pompey personally inspected the interior of the temple, desiring to see its treasury and its holy of holies, thus desecrating it in the opinion of Jews. Pompey meant no harm; he took no souvenirs. Nevertheless, it was a traumatic reminder of what foreign domination had always meant: not even the temple, the holy place of God's dwelling where God's favor could be secured for Israel, was safe. It also fueled anti-Gentile stereotypes that spoke of the arrogance and godless character of non-Jews, especially non-Jews in positions of power.

This gave new impetus to expressing the hope of Israel in terms of military deliverance and political power. The so-called Psalms of Solomon responded directly to the advent of Pompey. The author laments the wickedness of the later Hasmonean dynasty and calls down divine

judgment on the Gentile who trampled the holy place with his boots. In two of these psalms (Pss. Sol. 17 and 18), the author cries out to God to send his anointed one to drive out the wicked Gentiles and to overturn the native rule of the Hasmoneans, and establish the kingdom of David once more. This is not an otherworldly hope. It is the cry for a very tangible, this-worldly kingdom ushered in by a powerful general-king whom God selects, the cry for the fulfillment of the promises made to David that one of his line would sit on the very real throne of the very real nation of Israel.

Throughout the period of Roman domination, Jewish resistance movements continued (sporadically) to emerge, rallying together supporters with promises of God's miraculous deliverance of Israel through the hand of the latest would-be "anointed." These movements became especially numerous in the years leading up to the First Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE. For example, Theudas (perhaps the one mentioned anachronistically in Acts 5:36) staged an unsuccessful revolt, promising to part the Jordan and reenact Joshua's conquest of the land. The sons of Judas the Galilean (who had himself been executed for sedition in 6 CE) were captured and executed by the governor Tiberius Julius Alexander (46–48 CE). The unnamed Egyptian for whom Paul was mistaken in Acts 21:38 had gathered together a large crowd on the Mount of Olives, promising to ride in and take the city, only to have his followers dispersed or slaughtered by the Roman governor Felix (52–60 CE).

The hope for political independence and restoration of Israel through armed revolt took on something of an organized shape with the rise of the Zealot movement, which was fueled ideologically by the examples of Phinehas and Mattathias but was not limited to members of a terrorist party. It was a widely shared hope for Israel, such that Jesus' own disciples are shown continually slipping into this mode of thinking about Jesus' mission, even after Jesus' resur-

rection (Acts 1:6). Jesus may himself have countered such expectations for a messianic "Son of David" who would restore the glory of the Davidic monarchy to Israel in his question to the scribes (Mt 22:41–46). It is nearly certain that the Jewish leaders (see Jn 11:45–50) and Roman authorities (see the questions posed and inscription written in Mk 15:2, 9, 12, 26) interpreted Jesus' actions according to this model as well, leading to his execution as a leader of sedition.

This vision of and strategy for attaining the hope of Israel culminated in the two disastrous revolts against Rome, the first in 66–70 CE and the second in 132–135 CE, the revolt of Bar Kosebah, whom Rabbi Akiba hailed as Bar Kokhba, "son of a star," the Messiah (and, after the defeat, Bar Koziba, "son of a lie"; see fig. 2.5).



Figure 2.5. Silver *tetradrachm* (called a *sela*) from the second year of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (133/134 CE). The obverse shows the face of the Jerusalem temple with the ark of the covenant visible within and bears the inscription "Shimon," for the leader of the revolt. The reverse features a *lulav* and an *etrog*, symbols of the Feast of Sukkoth (Booths), and bears the revolutionary inscription "Year Two of the freedom of Israel." (Courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, cngcoins.com)

Continued commitment to Torah. Alongside these developments many Jews persisted in their belief that God's good promises would come to Israel in good time and that faithfulness to God's law was the only agenda that needed to be pursued. The Pharisees, for example, continued to derive guidance from Torah for new situations. Their goal was to make applicable for a more centralized and urban society the divine laws, which had been given to a very decentralized, agrarian society.

Loyalty to the one God and the belief that obedience from the heart meant blessing and divine favor were the driving forces of their endeavor. Similarly, the community at Qumran (which persisted from about 160 BCE to 68 CE) sought to enact the law in “perfection of way” as God’s elect within Israel, through whose purity all Israel would benefit in God’s new order.

During this period a number of authors, perhaps representing a sizable number of Jews, no longer concerned themselves with the hope of Israel per se but rather took a more individualistic approach to the problem. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, a work of Diaspora Judaism, probably from Alexandria, speaks much of God’s election of and deliverance of Israel in the past, but the real hope for the future is the immortality in God’s presence granted to those individual Jews who remain faithful to God’s Torah amid the pressures to assimilate. *Fourth Maccabees*, written by a Jewish author likely in the region of Syria or Cilicia, similarly speaks not of the hope of a nation but of the hope of individuals as they continue steadfast in the ways of Torah. Although these are both Diaspora writings, the fluid connections between Diaspora and Palestinian Jews (through the pilgrimage of the former to the temple or through connections forged by family or commercial ties) suggest that such thought would also have been found among Palestinian Jews.⁹

Summary. We see in the period prior to and during the ministry of Jesus and the composition of the Gospels a number of different avenues for attaining Israel’s hope. What will provide for the well-being of myself, my family,

⁹Second Maccabees bears eloquent witness to the way in which a Jew would have been able to keep both the hope of the righteous individual (e.g., in the promise of immortality articulated by the martyrs in 2 Macc 6–7) and the hope of the nation (e.g., in the conviction that keeping Torah would lead to national peace and prosperity; 2 Macc 3:1; 4:13-17; 6:12-17; 7:37-38) in view.

my nation? What will make for a world where all is in order with God, where promises do not go unfulfilled and where virtue does not go unrewarded? What will make life meaningful? Some sought the answers to these questions in some measure of accommodation to the Gentile culture; some sought them in a restored Davidic kingdom, renewed through political and military action; some set their hearts on the covenant, on the hidden kingdom, or on the future kingdom of God’s own founding. This was not only a world of divergent hopes but also a world where people reacted strongly against what they perceived to be a threat to their hope and thus their well-being. When Christians appeared to challenge—even to reject or subvert—the hope held out by Roman power, those who set their hope and security in Roman power (the majority of the Gentile Mediterranean world together with many Jewish elites) responded actively to protect their hope and their interests. Seen from this light, the central landmarks of the “world behind the Gospels” (Hellenization, the Hellenization crisis, the Maccabean Revolt, the rise of Rome, Roman imperial ideology, and so forth) emerge not merely as dry facts but as lasting influences that motivated real behavior and real responses to new situations. Keeping these backgrounds in mind will also help us understand why some opposed, some misunderstood, and some warmly welcomed Jesus and the movement that spread in his name, proclaiming Jesus as a very distinctive embodiment of hope.

KEY PLAYERS AND PLOTS IN THE WORLD OF THE GOSPELS AND THEIR READERS

Luke begins his account of the story of Jesus’ birth and public appearance with two passages connecting Jesus’ story with the story of the Roman Empire.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be

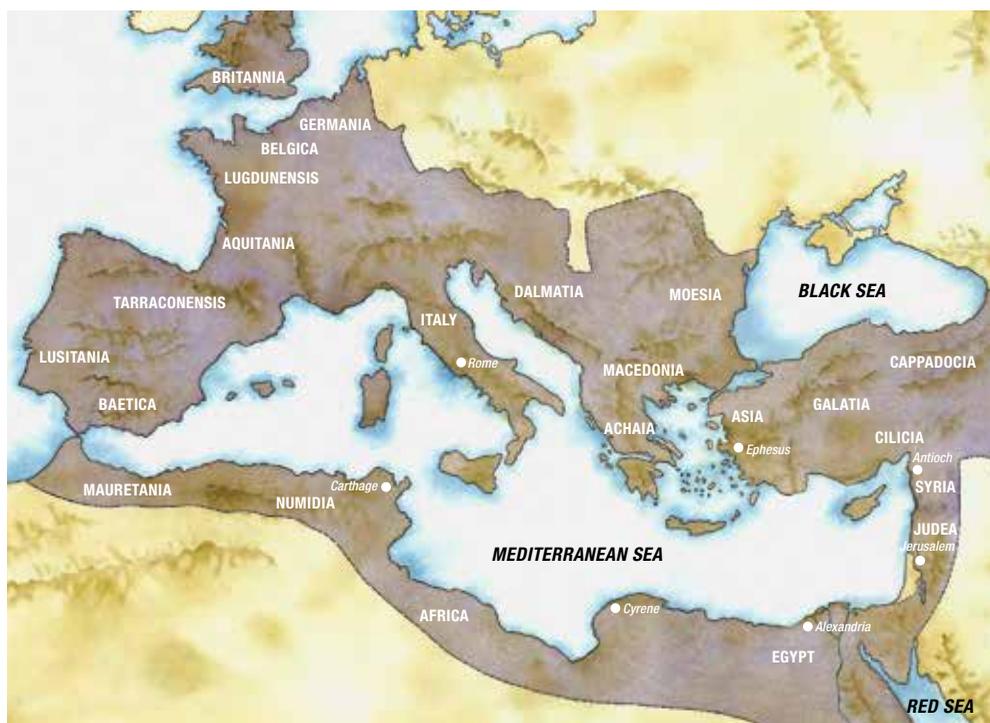
registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. (Lk 2:1-2 NRSV)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (Lk 3:1-2 NRSV)

Even though Jesus' story outlasted the story of the Roman Empire, Luke does not let us forget that those stories are intertwined. Indeed, the narratives of all four Gospels and Acts are populated with emperors, proconsuls, prefects or procurators, Herods, high priests, and rabbis as well as a number of special-interest groups within Judaism such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and revolutionary activists. Some acquaintance with these figures, families,

and groups is required for a fuller appreciation of the Gospels and of the place of the Jesus movement within Judaism. I have tried to limit this introduction as much as possible to those details of the first-century landscape that are important to reading the Gospels and, to a lesser extent, to appreciating the circumstances of the first readers of the Gospels. Once again, these pages are intended merely to provide a *beginning* for the reader, who is urged to delve more deeply into each topic treated here using the resources listed at the end of the chapter.

The Roman Empire and its emperors. The Roman republic operated on the basis of shared power among the senatorial class (Roman males with an annual income of one million sesterces or more, mainly from their immense farmlands). Ambition and competition were central Roman values, but those who held on to more power than was their due or for longer than proper for one man were opposed. Thus



The Roman Empire and the Mediterranean world

the norm was for two senators to hold the office of consul each year and for many senators to have the opportunity to hold this office over the course of their public lives. Toward the end of the republic personalities emerged that sought to dominate the whole, each backed by a substantial faction. Julius Caesar, Sextus Pompeius, and Marcus Licinius Crassus were three such persons who settled on an uneasy compromise—the first triumvirate (“rule of three men”). Not satisfied with sharing the *imperium*, these three leaders led the Roman republic and its provinces into a bloody civil war, which ended in 46 BCE.

Julius Caesar emerged as the supreme commander, but his lack of sensitivity to Rome’s hatred of anything approaching monarchy led to his assassination in 44 BCE. This led to a second civil war waged by Caesar’s supporters, Octavian and Marc Antony, against Caesar’s assassins, Brutus and Cassius, and all their allies. After defeating the assassins, Octavian and Marc Antony, together with one Marcus Lepidus, formed a second triumvirate. Once more, shared rule proved impossible. Lepidus retired peacefully, but Octavian and Antony plunged the republic into another, vicious civil war. These civil wars, the result of factionalism within the empire, ravaged the resources of the whole Mediterranean world from Italy to Egypt. People lived with insecurity. The internal divisions meant increased threat from outside as well as pillaging and destruction inside.

Then in 31 BCE it was all over. Marc Antony, painted as the betrayer of Rome who sought to establish a monarchical rule over the Mediterranean with his illicit lover, Cleopatra VII of Egypt, was defeated at the battle of Actium by Octavian and his forces. Octavian had personally indebted large segments of the population to himself as his clients—even the veterans of Antony’s army, whom he settled honorably in new colonies formed throughout Macedonia. In gratitude and in the hope that universal allegiance to Octavian would forestall

any future civil wars and the incredible loss of property, security, and life that accompanied them, the senate and people of Rome gave Octavian the *imperium*, the right to command the legions of the empire,¹⁰ and made him perpetual consul. Octavian thus concentrated all power in his hands through constitutional, “Roman” means, unlike his adoptive father, Julius Caesar (who had sought the title “Dictator in Perpetuity”). He was given the title “Augustus,” which designated him both as “pious” and as “worthy of reverence,” and named *Pontifex Maximus*, the high priest of the official religious life of the Greco-Roman world (see fig. 2.6).



Figure 2.6. Head of Augustus from a larger-than-life seated statue of the emperor, discovered in the Augusteum at Herculaneum. (*Naples Museum*)

The provinces were glad to accept Augustus’s rule. He brought security and stability to their agrarian and urban existence—for many, for the first time in their lives! What the Mediterranean

¹⁰It is from the Latin *imperator*, “commander of the legions,” that we derive the English title for Augustus and his successors, “emperor.”

needed and wanted was a strong ruler and a clear line of succession. Poets lauded Augustus as the bringer of salvation and good news. (Luke uses the same terms to speak of the significance of Jesus' birth.) Virgil hymned the birth of an heir apparent as the coming of a golden age. This was the atmosphere in which the Roman Empire began (although, constitutionally, it had not ceased to be a republic). While court poets and propagandists did their part to stir up these emotions, we must remember that they were only reinforcing what the people, local elites, and Roman senate had already decided—the strong, unchallenged power of Augustus was the future of the people of the Mediterranean.

Since the rise of Augustus to this position of supreme leadership brought peace, security, and prosperity to the provinces again, he was hailed in the provinces as nothing less than a god. As one ancient author put it, “since he provided gifts worthy of the gods, he was deemed worthy of the honor due the gods.”¹¹ The line between human beings and deities was not impossible to cross, especially for people in the eastern half of the Mediterranean. Heracles and Asclepius both became divine by virtue of their benefactions toward humanity. If virtue or skill or prowess could lead to deification, what less was deserved by the bringer of world peace and order? Emperor worship was proposed and promoted by people in the provinces of the empire, who responded to Augustus as to a benefactor. The gifts of lasting peace and a return to security were so great, however, that only the honor due a god could be deemed sufficient return for his favor (see fig. 2.7).

Roman imperial ideology centered not only on the person of the emperor but also on the city of Rome, which was worshiped alongside the emperor as *Roma Aeterna* (see fig. 2.8). Rome was the city destined by the gods to bring their order to the world and to rule forever. She was the bringer of peace, wealth, and security



Figure 2.7. The temple of Roma and Augustus from Pola, modern Croatia. Such temples were erected throughout the Roman Empire during and following Augustus's reign (31 BCE–14 CE). (Courtesy of Carole Raddato, followinghadrianphotography.com)

to the world. The emperor was the patron of the whole world, whose favor meant well-being for an entire province. To participate in the cults of Rome and the emperors was to show loyalty to the agents of the gods and gratitude to the givers of good. Wherever one traveled in the eastern Mediterranean (outside Judea), one would find plentiful local manifestations of this ideology in temples, festivals, and coins, all promoted by provincial officials or assemblies. We will also find resistance to this ideology within the New Testament in varying degrees, from Paul, who is willing to see Rome as a temporary expedient for the spread of the gospel,

¹¹Nicolaus of Damascus, *Life of Augustus* 1.

to John the Revelator, who sees Rome as the arrogant enemy of God. Both, however, see Rome as temporary, and that was enough of a political statement to make the Christians' neighbors uncomfortable.



Figure 2.8. A cult image of the goddess Roma.
(Capitoline Museum, Rome)

Augustus organized the provinces of the Roman Empire into two different classes: senatorial and imperial. The stable provinces that were threatened neither from barbarians without nor rebellion within were placed under senatorial administration, with a proconsul being appointed by the senate (with the emperor's approval) for short terms of one or two years. More difficult provinces were placed

under imperial administration, and in these were stationed the legions of the Roman army. In this way Augustus (and his successors) maintained direct control of the army, preventing some ambitious senator from stirring up another civil uprising. Imperial provinces were also governed by members of the senatorial class directly answerable to Augustus, but Judea and Egypt employed prefects or procurators drawn from the second tier of Roman society (the "equestrians" rather than the senators) for the administration of the imperial affairs. The Judean prefect worked under the imperial legate of Syria, who often had to help with military support. The Egyptian prefect was directly answerable to the emperor, who kept Egypt pretty much as a personal territory. As the supplier of grain to most of the western provinces, Egypt was the most strategic holding: in the emperor's hands, it again strengthened his position. Not all territories within the Roman Empire were made into provinces governed by Romans. Many smaller kingdoms had willingly entered into an uneven partnership with Rome, making themselves clients and allies. These retained their native monarchies, as long as there were no signs of uprising. Judea began as such a client kingdom under the last Hasmoneans and later under Herod the Great and his family.

Augustus held the reins of empire from 31 BCE to 14 CE. The heir was neither a child nor a grandchild of his blood, and his personal family story is really quite tragic. Tiberius, the elder son of Augustus's wife Livia by an earlier marriage, succeeded to the cluster of offices and powers that distinguished Augustus as constitutional emperor. Tiberius continued to exercise an effective rule until about 29 CE, when he moved from Rome to the island of Capri. His prefect of Rome, Sejanus, an ambitious equestrian, became Tiberius's only link to the affairs of state, and Sejanus used this position to destroy his personal enemies, stock key positions with his friends, and prepare to

seize the *imperium* for himself. The plot was discovered, and Sejanus was beheaded. He had been the personal patron of Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea.

Tiberius left the *imperium* to his nephew Caligula in 37 CE. Caligula seems to have started out well, but after a severe fever he took on the behaviors for which he is remembered today, including excessive depravity, capricious cruelty, and extravagant promotion of his own worship, even in Rome (where living emperors were *not* worshiped). His importance for students of the New Testament comes mainly from his attempt to install a cult statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple, as he had in many other temples around the world. Faced with the ultimate desecration of their holy place with the erection of a graven image of a false god, the Jews made it clear to the governor of Syria that they would rather be slaughtered en masse than tolerate this sacrilege. Only the governor's cautious delays and Caligula's timely assassination prevented disaster. Caligula's encouragement of emperor worship also provided anti-Jewish Gentiles in Egypt with an opportunity to violate the synagogues of the Alexandrian Jews with busts of the emperor. Those who removed the statues could then be prosecuted for sacrilege (attacking the sacred image of the emperor). This was but the prelude to the tumultuous anti-Jewish riots that broke out late in Caligula's reign in both Alexandria and Caesarea Maritima.

Caligula had become too unstable a leader for the empire and was assassinated by members of the emperor's personal bodyguard, the Praetorians, in 41 CE. As they did not want to go back to field duty in the disease-infested marshes of Germany or the parched camps of Syria, they conscripted his uncle Claudius to succeed him. Claudius restored some measure of security to the beleaguered Jewish populations in Egypt and Caesarea. He also intersects with the New Testament story in his expulsion of many Jews from Rome in 49 CE. The Roman

historian Suetonius records that this was the consequence of a riot stirred up by one "Chrestus" (a common slave name), which many scholars believe to have been his misunderstanding of the messianic title "Christus." It is indeed plausible that we catch here a glimpse of a violent disturbance within the Roman Jewish community over the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ. It was this exile that caused Prisca and Aquila to relocate to Corinth shortly before Paul's arrival in 50 CE (see Acts 18:1-2).

Claudius named Nero, his stepson by his second wife, Agrippina, his successor. Nero's rule was stable from 54 to 61 CE, when he lived under the guidance of his tutors, the general Burrhus and the senator-philosopher Seneca. After the death of the former and forced suicide of the latter, however, Nero's true character emerged. His behaviors scandalized the senatorial families, particularly his penchant for singing and acting on stage (which was then considered a low-class profession). His desire to refashion Rome after his own tastes led him, it is believed, to burn down most of the old city to make way for his new Rome (and, particularly, his "Golden House," an excessively expansive palace). He found a convenient group of scapegoats for the fire in the Roman Christians. This was the first time that Christians were hunted and executed simply for being Christians: it was a local persecution and did not become an official policy of the empire until the late second and early third centuries CE. The barbaric and burlesque nature of the executions, of course, made an impression on Christians worldwide, disclosing a new and demonic side to the imperial rule and changing the way the emperor was viewed in many Christian circles (most dramatically seen in Revelation). This incident also revealed the marginal status of Christians in an urban center. If they could be singled out and scapegoated without even the semblance of due process, they clearly did not have many friends and supporters among their neighbors.

Already they must have come to be seen as a potentially subversive group, and indeed their proclamation of the eternal kingdom of God supplanting the kingdoms of the world may have very easily fed into the charge of hastening that coming through arson. That Christians could have been believed capable of burning the capital of the empire is itself a significant indicator of popular sentiments against them.

Nero's leadership was finally rejected, and he committed suicide to avoid a more degrading exit from the world, leaving no successor. The year 68–69 CE marked the return of chaos to the Roman world. Another series of civil wars erupted as four different "emperors" were named in different quadrants of the Mediterranean. All eyes were on Rome, waiting to see the outcome. The Spanish legions declared Galba, their general, emperor in 68 CE. He marched on Rome with his legionaries and ruled for six months before being murdered by the supporters of the senator Otho, who had been a friend to Nero. While Otho was being confirmed as emperor by the Senate, the legions in Germany declared their general, Vitellius, emperor and proceeded to march on Rome. Otho resisted with the legions at his disposal but lost to Vitellius's superior generalship and forces. At the same time the Syrian and Alexandrian legions declared their general, Vespasian, emperor. Vespasian had been engaged in suppressing the Jewish Revolt that broke out in 66 CE. Leaving his son, Titus, to finish up in Judea, he too marched on Rome with a significant portion of his army. Vespasian emerged victorious from this turmoil, and the deadly wound that threatened the very life of the empire was healed after only one year.

After Rome and the provinces had been reminded of the ills of civil war, they were quite ready to support Vespasian wholeheartedly, all the more because the general had two strong sons, already adult and proven, to succeed him. Thus began the Flavian dynasty, hailed as the

family that restored Rome after its near-fatal wound. Vespasian was succeeded first by his older son, Titus (79–81 CE), who personally oversaw the siege of Jerusalem and destruction of its temple in 70 CE (see fig. 2.9), and then by his younger son, Domitian (81–96 CE), whose policies are important as a background for the revelation to John (see fig. 2.10).

Assessment of Domitian is very difficult, for the major sources for his rule (written by Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger) were written by



Figure 2.9. Three coins minted to commemorate the Flavian dynasty's pacification of the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE. The first coin is a bronze sestertius of Vespasian, the reverse of which shows a personified Judea mourning beneath a palm tree with a Roman soldier looking on. The inscription reads "Judea Taken" or "Judea Secured" (Courtesy of Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG, Auction 64, Lot 1140). The second is a silver denarius of Vespasian, with the reverse featuring Judea sitting in the shadow of a Roman trophy, showing the helmet, cuirass, swords, and shield of the Roman legionnaire. The third is a sestertius of Titus, with a reverse featuring winged Victory inscribing words on a Roman shield hanging on the iconic date palm of Judea. Such shields often bore abbreviated inscriptions such as "Vic[tory over the] Dac[ians]." She stands with her left foot on a ball, representing the globe that remains under Rome's foot because of her victories. (Courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, cngcoins.com)

ROMAN EMPERORS DURING THE FIRST CENTURY CE

Name	Relationship to Previous Emperor	Dates
Augustus (Octavian)	adopted heir of Julius Caesar	31 BCE–14 CE
Tiberius	stepson and adopted heir	14–37 CE
Caligula	nephew and adopted heir	37–41 CE
Claudius	uncle	41–54 CE
Nero	stepson and adopted heir	54–68 CE
Galba	none	68–69 CE
Otho	none	69 CE
Vitellius	none	69 CE
Vespasian	none	69–79 CE
Titus	son	79–81 CE
Domitian	brother	81–96 CE
Nerva	none, legal successor	96–98 CE
Trajan	adopted heir	98–117 CE

clients of the new dynasty of Nerva (96–98 CE) and his adopted son Trajan (98–117 CE). These authors used Domitian as a foil for the glorious rule of Trajan. Domitian appears to have made himself very unpopular with the senatorial class, but this might speak very well of him if we consider, for example, how he curtailed their privileges for the sake of the prosperity of provincials. The provinces appear to have benefited from his policies, and the marked increase in imperial cult activity (especially in Asia Minor, in the very cities to which John the Seer ministered) is the result of local appreciation of Domitian

rather than the enforcing of self-deifying policies from the emperor himself. There is also no solid evidence of an empire-wide persecution of Christians under Domitian. Quite the opposite: even the most anti-imperial author, John, can only point to one martyr by name from his period. This does not mean that Christians had it easy during his reign. Local people still stirred up trouble, and the imperial cult was a growing affront to Christian convictions about the lordship of Christ (and vice versa!). However, Domitian was probably not personally responsible for these developments.

Domitian was murdered by conspirators and left no heir. An old senator, Nerva, acceded to the *imperium* and adopted as his son a strong general from Spain named Trajan, under whom the empire reached its greatest size and under whom Christians were for the first time legally prosecuted. An especially poignant testimony to these proceedings is to be found in the correspondence of Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 10.96), senatorial governor of Bithynia and Pontus in or around 110–112 CE,



Figure 2.10. A silver denarius of Domitian celebrating his suppression of a rebellion in Germany, which appears on the reverse, personified as a mourning Germania. (Courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, cngcoins.com)



Roman and Herodian Palestine

and in the terse response of Trajan (*Ep.* 10.97), which set policy for the second century.

Judea under Roman rule. The Herodian family.

The Herodian family emerged from obscurity as the Hasmonean dynasty came to an end. Because of the civil unrest fomented by Hasmonean rivals, Julius Caesar made Antipater, an Idumean and a proven administrator, procurator of Judea and Idumea. After his death his sons Herod and Phasael became joint “tetrarchs,” rulers of parts rather than the whole of a province or ethnic group. Phasael was killed when the last Hasmonean, Mattathias Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II and nephew of Hyrcanus II, gained the support of the Parthians to the east and invaded Judea. Clipping his uncle Hyrcanus’s ears to disqualify him from ever holding high priestly office again, Antigonus established himself in that position and attempted to take back the secular power that had been stripped from his uncle by Pompey. Herod fled to Rome for help. Faced with the choice between a loyal vassal in charge of Judea and a Parthian presence at their eastern border, the Roman consuls Octavian and Marc Antony appointed Herod “king of the Judeans” and supported his recapture of Jerusalem. Thus Herod became the king of the Jews, holding sway from 37 BCE to 4 BCE.

Herod’s most celebrated achievements were architectural. He constructed entire cities, with the most astounding being Caesarea Maritima (“Caesarea by the Sea”) with its artificial harbor, a tremendous feat of engineering. He is also known for promoting Hellenistic culture throughout his realm with the construction of stadia, theaters, and hippodromes, typical venues for Greek forms of entertainment, even in Jerusalem.¹² Herod’s most famous building project, of course, involved the expansion and beautification of the second temple. Begun

under his direction, this project was not completed until 63 CE (see Jn 2:20), a few years before it was destroyed.

Herod did much to bring order to the province and wiped out many bands of brigands. For all his accomplishments, however, he was hated by many of his subjects. First, he was by descent partly an Idumean—an Edomite—and the scriptural tradition bears witness to a long and bitter rivalry between Judeans and Edomites going back to Jacob and Esau themselves. Second, he took his kingdom by force of arms, even attacking Jerusalem itself. Third, he was insufferably generous to Gentile subjects as well as Jewish ones. While he spent vast sums of money on the Jerusalem temple, he also erected temples to pagan gods in his predominantly Gentile cities (for example, he erected temples to Augustus and Rome in Caesarea Maritima, Samaria, and near Panion, which would later be called Caesarea Philippi). He also underwrote the cost for constructing pagan temples or offering lavish sacrifices to the Greek gods in the Gentile cities in Syria and Greece. For Herod, these were acts that established diplomatic relations and made Judea less of a second-class player in the Roman Empire. For his subjects, however, these were acts of idolatry and sacrilege.

During the last few years of Herod’s thirty-three-year reign, he was plagued by suspicion and intrigue among his successive wives and their several sons. He executed three of his own sons on suspicion of conspiracy and reduced another (Herod Philip, Herodias’s first husband) to private life. Someone who thus ravaged his own house would have had no scruples about killing a few dozen children in Bethlehem if he suspected a pretender to the throne (Mt 2:16-18).

In 4 BCE Herod died (see fig. 2.11), and his kingdom was divided between three surviving sons. Although the Judeans petitioned Rome to restore the temple hierarchy (that is, internal rule by the high priest rather than the family of

¹²See Josephus, *Ant.* 15.8.1, for a splendid testimony to this phenomenon.



Figure 2.11. Remnants of Herod's mausoleum, discovered along the slope of his fortress-palace at Herodion, along with the reconstructed sarcophagus. (*Israel Museum*)

Herod), Augustus essentially upheld Herod's will. Archelaus became ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (4 BCE–6 CE); Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (4 BCE–39 CE); and Philip became tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis (4 BCE–34 CE). Archelaus was a brutal ruler, quelling distur-

bances with excessive violence (see the comment in Mt 2:22). His policy only exacerbated unrest, culminating in a joint delegation of Judeans and Samaritans to Rome to request his removal. Augustus deposed Archelaus and exiled him to Gaul (modern France). Judea and Samaria became a Roman province administered by Roman prefects until the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt in 66 CE, with a brief return to rule by a Jewish king from 41 to 44 CE.

Philip ruled a territory that was primarily Gentile (Greek and Syrian), located mainly to the north and west of the Decapolis, which also supported a large Gentile population (hence the presence of the herds of swine made available for the Gadarene demoniac's many unwanted guests in Mt 8:28–9:1; Mk 5:1–20; Lk 8:26–39). The Decapolis remained under the direct administration of the Roman governor of Syria. Philip renovated and expanded Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi, cities figuring at prominent junctures in the story of Jesus (see, e.g., Mk 8:22–30).

Herod Antipas is the most important member of the family for the Gospel narratives. He served Roman interests well and remained a patron for both Jews and Gentiles in his territory. Like his father and his brother Philip, Antipas also gave significant attention to building projects. Sepphoris, just a few miles north of Nazareth, and Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee are two cities especially indebted to him for their growth. The latter was a full-fledged Greek city with a Greek constitution.¹³ He divorced the daughter of King Aretas of the Nabateans in favor of Herodias, the former wife of Herod Philip (not the tetrarch in the north but the private citizen in the family). This was a flagrant offense to Jewish law and was openly denounced as such by John the Baptist. Antipas finally imprisoned and executed John for this attack since it provided a

¹³See H. W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, SNTSMS 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

potentially hazardous focal point for rallying his enemies. It is possible that Jesus' pronouncement on adultery was heard as an implicit criticism of both Herodias and Antipas for their dissolutions of their first marriages (Mk 10:11-12). Antipas plays a large part in the Lukan passion narrative, where Pilate uses Jesus as an opportunity to show deference to Antipas and so repair their poor relationship (both had offered each other affronts in the past).

Antipas maintained a peaceful province for over forty years. When Herodias's brother Agrippa I, who had been educated at Rome and had become a close friend of Caligula and Claudius, was installed in 37 CE as Philip's successor with the title "king" instead of tetrarch, Herodias persuaded Antipas to seek a similar elevation of title for himself. His appeal was not without justification, for he had served Augustus and Tiberius with complete loyalty. Agrippa I, however, made Antipas look like a potential revolutionary, informing Gaius of Antipas's fortifications and large stores in the armories. Gaius sentenced Antipas to exile in Gaul. Herodias, as Agrippa's sister, was offered amnesty but chose exile with her husband instead.

Herod Agrippa I obtained the territories of the exiled Antipas. His friendship with Caligula proved providential in averting Caligula's plan to provide the Jewish temple with a statue of himself. We can only imagine how this episode impressed itself into the minds of Jews (both non-Christian and Christian). It evoked all the associations of Antiochus IV's desecration of the temple by instituting pagan rites, defiling the place where God promised to meet Israel and accept its sacrifices. Jesus' apocalyptic discourse (Mk 13) might well have come to mind during this crisis, with the possibility of a new "desolating sacrilege" imposing itself "where it ought not to stand" (Mk 13:14). When Claudius received the imperial office, he added Judea and Samaria to Agrippa I's kingdom, making him "king of the Judeans" after thirty-five years of Roman prefects. He gov-

erned a kingdom the size of Herod the Great's. He catered to the sensibilities of his Judean subjects, refusing, for example, the regal privilege of sitting down while he read the Torah selection at the Feast of Tabernacles. Outside Jewish areas, he continued the policy of Herod the Great and Herod Antipas, being a Gentile to Gentiles as well as a Jew to Jews. He appears only once in the New Testament, where he is credited with executing James the son of Zebedee and imprisoning Peter for later execution (Acts 12:1-4). Luke ascribes this to a desire to "please the Judeans," who may have thus come to regard him as a protector of the covenant. According to both Luke and Josephus, Agrippa I died a horrible death after failing to refuse acclamation as a god by his Gentile subjects in Phoenicia (Acts 12:20-23; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.8.2).

Agrippa II, the young son of Agrippa I, did not succeed at once to his father's kingdom. Judea was given back to procurators and remained so perpetually. Agrippa received the small kingdom of Chalcis after the death of his uncle, Herod of Chalcis, and finally the more Gentile portions of Agrippa I's kingdom. He became important to Roman administration of Judea and Samaria as an adviser in Jewish affairs (as in his appearance at Paul's trial in Acts 26) and enjoyed the oversight of the temple worship. He is remembered in Josephus's account of the Jewish War for valiantly trying to dissuade Jerusalem from revolution against Rome (*J.W.* 2.16.2-5). He finally died in 92 CE, and his territories were incorporated into the Roman province of Syria.

The high priestly office and its incumbents. During the period after the return from exile the high priest was the head of Israel. While there was a governor appointed to ensure that the interests of the foreign, dominating power were served, the high priest was the chief authority for internal affairs. He presided over the Sanhedrin, or council. He also performed the most important of the priestly duties, including

leading the sacrifices on the high festal days and performing the rites for the Day of Atonement, for which he was uniquely qualified (see Lev 16). The office of the high priesthood suffered during the radical Hellenization of Jerusalem in 175–164 BCE. The office came to be auctioned off to the person with the most affluent supporters (including Menelaus, who had no pedigree for the office) and used to diminish, not promote, Torah observance. Members of the Hasmonean family filled the office from 161 BCE until 37 BCE, when Herod executed the last Hasmonean incumbent. The Hasmonean family had provided stability for the office but also provoked critique. In response to Hasmonean control of the office, for example, the Teacher of Righteousness moved to the community of Qumran and gave it its distinctive shape and hopes. The Pharisees, too, from time to time expressed displeasure at the arrangement. The Psalms of Solomon, often thought to have emerged from Pharisaic circles, show disgust with the Jewish “corrupters” of the temple.

Along with kingship, Herod the Great received the right to appoint the high priest. This was always done with an eye toward political concerns. For example, Herod wanted to marry

a certain Mariamne but could not marry the daughter of a rather insignificant noble, so he made her father the high priest. After Herod, Archelaus received the authority to confer the office. On Archelaus’s removal Quirinius, the legate of Syria, appointed Annas ben-Seth to the high priesthood. Annas’s family was to dominate the high priesthood during the period of Jesus’ life and of the early church. Annas himself served from 6 to 15 CE, and his son-in-law Joseph Caiaphas served from 18 to 36 CE. As head of the family Annas continued to exercise much influence after his official term in office was ended (thus explaining the otherwise impossible “high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas” in Lk 3:2). Their names are familiar to all who have read the passion narratives. From 6 to 66 CE the high priesthood was passed between four or five of the wealthiest families whose members followed the Sadducean interpretation of the faith and were distinctly pro-Roman. Where a number of high priests follow in rapid succession, we may suspect bribery of the appointing governor. The last high priest was a commoner appointed by the rebels in Jerusalem during the Great Revolt (see fig. 2.12).

Roman procurators. Roman rule was in principle tolerant of native customs and to a

HEROD AND HIS MAJOR HEIRS

- **Antipater** (d. 43 BCE), father of Herod the Great
- **Herod the Great** (king of Judea, 37–4 BCE)
- **Archelaus** (ethnarch of Judea, 4 BCE–6 CE), son of Herod the Great by Malthace
- **Herod Antipas** (tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, 4 BCE–39 CE), son of Herod the Great by Malthace and second husband of Herodias
- **Philip** (tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, 4 BCE–33 CE), son of Herod the Great by Cleopatra (not the queen)
- **Herod Philip** (private citizen), son of Herod the Great by Mariamne II, half-brother to Herod Antipas, Herodias’s first husband, father of Salome
- **Herod Agrippa I** (king of Judea, 41–44 CE), grandson of Herod the Great through Mariamne I (brother-in-law to Herod Antipas through his sister, Herodias)
- **Herod Agrippa II** (ethnarch of Chalcis and various regions north of Judea after 50 CE), son of Agrippa I, husband to Berenice (Acts 25:13)

large extent the rights of local government to regulate internal affairs. This principle is seen at work in the Sanhedrin's arrest, trial, and condemnation of Jesus (an act of self-governance). Indeed, in the Fourth Gospel the high priest and his council closely regulate internal affairs and forestall disturbances of the peace so Roman authorities would not take matters in their own hands with more disastrous consequences (Jn 11:48-50). Their limits are also seen in that this judicial body must receive confirmation of the sentence from the Roman prefect, since the right to execute capital punishment was reserved for Roman authorities.

Both Julius Caesar and Augustus had confirmed the rights of Jews throughout the empire to observe their ancestral laws without hindrance.¹⁴ This would have included their right to assemble regularly for worship, to organize their common life, to create meat markets where the proper animals were sold after being slaughtered in the proper way, and to send large sums of money to Jerusalem annually (the collection and transportation of the temple tax). Jews were exempt from military service on account of the sanctity of the sabbath (the observance of which would hinder military discipline) and from appearance in law courts on the sabbath. Jews were not expected to participate in the imperial cult; emperors were satisfied with sacrifices offered in the Jerusalem temple *on behalf of* the emperor rather than *to* the emperor as a sign of the nation's goodwill and loyalty. The Roman governors of Judea were not to interfere in the religious life of that region (although the Romans' "safekeeping" of the high priestly vestments when they were not in use was a potent reminder of the dependence of that freedom of religion on Roman goodwill).

As Judea was an imperial province, Roman legions were stationed therein. It is quite natural then that soldiers and their officers would be encountered in the Gospels and Acts (e.g., the centurions in Lk 7:1-10 and Acts 10:1-48) and regarded as suitably well-known



Figure 2.12. The minting of native silver coinage signaled Judea's intention to regain its political independence. This shekel was minted in the first year of the Jewish Revolt (66 CE). The obverse depicts a chalice with the inscription "Shekel of Israel." (The date is above the cup.) The reverse shows three pomegranates surrounded by the inscription "Jerusalem Is Holy," showing the connection between "holiness," "belonging to God," and the ideology of revolt. (Courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group, cngcoins.com)

realities for use as teaching illustrations (as in Mt 5:41). On rare occasions Roman soldiers were openly antagonistic of Judeans; more often they were just an unwelcome reminder of foreign domination and the might of Rome. Rome relied heavily on collaborators—from the local indigenous elites who correctly understood that the best way to remain in power was to defer to Roman power to nonelites (e.g., tax farmers) who found in the Roman administration opportunities for advancement they did not find in other occupations.

Judea was not considered a pacified province. There were several rebellions against Roman rule during this period, always put down with ruthless efficiency. Varus, for example, executed over two thousand revolutionaries by crucifixion shortly after the death of Herod the Great. The ethos of Roman government placed a high value on maintaining order and promoting the value of submissiveness to authority (the statements in Rom 13:1-7 and 1 Pet 2:13-17 would have met with

¹⁴Miriam Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 411-30; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 56.

approval), and consequently Roman authorities showed a distinct impatience with resistance and insurgents. Crucifixion proved a valuable and much-used tool to communicate these values to the Judean population. Rome's contributions to Judean society were extolled by some Jews, whereas those who focused on the heavy-handed administration of justice, the burden of taxation, and the occasional indiscretions by governors or their soldiers rejected the legitimacy of Roman rule.

The first twenty years of the direct government of prefects appear to have passed without incident and without the prefects causing significant offense to their Jewish subjects. The prefecture of Pontius Pilate, governor from 26 to 36 CE, marks a turn for the worse. His administration began inauspiciously, as he twice affronted Jewish sensibilities. Seeking to honor Emperor Tiberius in typically Roman ways, he twice managed to violate the sanctity of Jerusalem. First, he brought the imperial standards, bearing the image of Tiberius, into the city under cover of night. A riot ensued the next day, and he was forced to remove them. On another occasion he set up dedicatory shields to Tiberius in Herod's palace (the governor's residence in Jerusalem) bearing no image but an inscription saying who had dedicated them and to whom they were dedicated. This second part of the inscription no doubt included the divine titles (found, for example, on imperial coinage), which would have been offensive to most Jews, particularly when set within the city devoted to the exclusive worship of the one God. Once more, he was forced (this time by Tiberius himself) to remove them (see fig. 2.13).

Three other incidents involving Pilate deserve to be mentioned. Seeking to make a positive contribution to the life of Jerusalem, especially its temple, Pilate set out to construct an aqueduct. To accomplish his goal, however, he appropriated funds from the temple treasury, thus violating the sanctity of the

temple and the funds dedicated to it. Protesters were beaten and dispersed by Pilate's soldiers. Luke tells of another occasion when Pilate slaughtered a number of Galilean pilgrims within the temple precincts, mingling "their blood with their sacrifices" (Lk 13:1). Perhaps these Galileans became a focus for unrest in the city and posed a threat to order. Pilate's measures, however, reflect his heavy-handedness and his disregard for the temple. The final straw came when Pilate intervened in a movement growing in Samaria. A self-styled prophet gathered a large following, promising to reveal where the sacred vessels of the Mosaic tabernacle were hidden and thus show himself to be the "prophet like Moses" promised in Deuteronomy 18, a pattern of messianic expectation that enjoyed special currency among the Samaritans but also the early church (see, e.g., Acts 3:22-26). Pilate dispersed the gathering with a detachment of cavalry, killing many. The Samaritans filed a complaint with the legate of Syria, who sent Pilate back to Rome to answer for his actions.

From 37 to 41 CE Roman prefects continued to be appointed, followed by the return of a Jewish monarch, Herod Agrippa I, in 41-44 CE. The relative peace under these local rulers was upset only by Gaius Caligula's attempt to install his statue in the Jerusalem temple. After the death of Agrippa I the administration of Judea was handed back to procurators. Under these procurators we observe a distinct rise in "military messianism" and armed opposition to Roman rule. Two of these procurators are known from the pages of Acts: Antonius Felix (52-59/60 CE) and Porcius Festus (59/60-62 CE). Felix crucified so many brigands and suspected revolutionaries that he stirred up widespread resentment and a new wave of terrorist resistance activity—the *sicarii* or "daggersmen," who struck down their targets (usually collaborators) and then disappeared back into the crowd. Festus also had to suppress a revolutionary movement in the wilderness. All this

activity points to the extremely volatile nature of Judea during this period. Roman rule was viewed increasingly as unacceptable and incompatible with allegiance to God. Also noteworthy is the intentional imitation of biblical



Figure 2.13. A partial inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate in connection with the dedication of a shrine to the emperor Tiberius in Caesarea Maritima. This is the only archaeological reference to Pilate. (*Israel Museum*)

patterns by the would-be messiah-kings. The Jewish tradition itself, it seemed, cried out to many people for a rejection of the Roman yoke.

In addition to overly harsh and repressive measures against potential dissidents, several other incidents contributed to anti-Roman sentiment. During the procuratorship of Cu-

manus (48–52 CE), Samaritans had killed a number of Jewish pilgrims from Galilee. Cumanus dismissed the Jews' petition for justice, with the result that a band of Zealots tried to take matters into their own hands. Cumanus violently suppressed them, further alienating the Judean populace. Eventually the matter came before Claudius, who recognized that Cumanus's negligence resulted in the multiplication of lost lives and removed him.

A more serious situation erupted in Caesarea Maritima. The Jewish and Greek citizens of this city disputed the civic rights of the former, and rioting ensued. Felix intervened, siding hard with the Greeks. When the matter was referred to Nero, he too ruled in favor of the Greeks, denying the Jewish claim to be equal citizens. After this ruling the Greek citizens took every opportunity to insult and cajole the Jewish population of Caesarea, going so far as to desecrate a synagogue by sacrificing birds outside the door to purify the place of the Jewish plague, as it were. The Jews sought redress from Gessius Florus, procurator from 64 to 67 CE, who, even after accepting a large bribe from the Jewish elders, disregarded their petition. Further, he raided the temple treasury on the charge that Judea was in arrears in their taxes, thus committing sacrilege. Josephus accuses him of trying to provoke a Jewish revolt as a means of covering his own criminal tracks. When moving from Caesarea to Jerusalem he instructed his soldiers to return no Jew's salutations when they arrived at Jerusalem. The Jews, finding their salutations scorned, began to

NOTEWORTHY ROMAN GOVERNORS DURING THE FIRST CENTURY CE

- **Pontius Pilate** 26–36 CE
- **Cuspius Fadus** 44–46 CE
- **Tiberius Julius Alexander** 46–48 CE
- **Ventidius Cumanus** 48–52 CE
- **Antonius Felix** 52–60 CE
- **Porcius Festus** 60–62 CE
- **Lucius Albinus** 62–64 CE
- **Gessius Florus** 64–66 CE
- **Flavius Silva** 73–?? CE

accuse Florus. The soldiers responded to these words by slaughtering any Jews they could reach. In response to this final straw it was not a Zealot, but the captain of the temple, who declared war by suspending the sacrifices offered on behalf of the emperor.

The Jewish Revolt and its aftermath: Judaism without a temple. The Zealots emerged as leaders during this time, stirring up the population of Judea into a full-scale revolution against Roman rule in a futile fight for independence. The Jewish heritage spoke at numerous points about how God could give victory to a faithful army, no matter how small it was and no matter how vast the enemy hosts (1 Sam 14:6; 1 Macc 3:18-22; 4:6-11). The Zealots rallied the people with an ideology of “no king but God” and with a messianic fervor for the restoration of the Jewish state. Despite the Jews’ preparations and dedication, however, the legions of Vespasian quickly regained control of Galilee and most of Judea. After Nero’s suicide Vespasian withdrew in order to wait for confirmation of his orders from the new emperor—and eventually *became* the new emperor after the civil wars of 68–69 CE. This delay gave the factions in Jerusalem time to lose sight of their common enemy and to begin to make war on one another. Vespasian dispatched his son Titus to finish the retaking of Jerusalem. The city made preparations for the siege but was divided into three factions, each preying on the others as the siege was pressed and famine set in. Starvation and pestilence did most of Titus’s work for him. In 70 CE he took the city, destroyed its walls, and razed its temple. Titus returned to Rome in victory, leaving his general Flavius Silva to clean up the last pockets of resistance, the most famous being the fortress of Masada (see figs. 2.14 and 2.15).

The destruction of the temple had a devastating impact on the Jewish people and posed a formidable challenge to the Jewish religion, which had now, for the second time, lost its

center. The second temple had functioned as the place where God met Israel and the divine-human relationship could be repaired and enacted for almost six hundred years (with the brief disturbance of 167–164 BCE). So momentous were these events that Luke regarded



Figure 2.14. The fortress of Masada, first a Hasmonean and later a Herodian border defense. The fortress was well fortified and armed, and well stocked with food and water; Judean revolutionaries held out here for three full years after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. (Andrew Shiva, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)



Figure 2.15. The mountain fortress of Masada. The Roman army, no doubt along with many Jewish prisoners of war, laboriously constructed a ramp against the side of the mountain atop a natural debris tongue so that it could bring its siege ladders and battering ram against the walled palisades at the top. (Wikimedia Commons)

them as the fulfillment of Jesus' predictions concerning the woes that would precede his return (compare Lk 21:20-24 with Mt 24:15-18 and Mk 13:14-23 in their respective contexts).

Two apocalypses—4 Ezra (= 2 Esdras 3–14) and 2 Baruch—attest to the theological and pastoral challenges posed by Rome's destruction of Jerusalem. Fourth Ezra wrestles with the fact that an idolatrous and impious nation would be allowed to destroy God's holy place while going unpunished itself. What will give meaning and hope to life as a Jew in these sadly changed circumstances? Both apocalypses look to the keeping of the covenant, the Torah, as the way forward. Finally, the definition of Israel's hope as dedication to walking in line with the Torah and thus keeping faith with God emerged as the winning answer to the ongoing question. Even though Jewish sages (the rabbis) moved away from apocalypticism, the direction they were going was finding enormous support among apocalypticists.

Under the leadership of Yohanan ben-Zakkai and the rabbis that met in Jamnia, Judaism began to take the shape familiar to us today—a Judaism without sacrifices. There was ample theological preparation for this in the Psalms, which had already begun to speak of acts of contrition as more valuable than sin offerings, prayers as the equivalent of the offering of incense, and acts of praise as an appropriate form of a thanksgiving offering (e.g., Ps 50:23; 51:16-17; 141:2). The sect at Qumran, alienated from the temple during the Hasmonean and Roman periods on account of their perception that it was being run counter to God's appointed calendar and practices, had already adopted this as a working principle: the people of the covenant at Qumran would "atone for the guilty rebellion and for sins of unfaithfulness . . . without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of sacrifice. Prayer rightly offered shall be as an acceptable fragrance of righteousness, and perfection of way as a delectable free-will offering" (1QS 9.4-6).

The keeping of Torah thus became the center of Judaism. Repentance, prayer, acts of charity, and study of the Torah took the place of the temple sacrifices. The synagogue, already a well-established institution throughout Judea and the Diaspora, became the sacred space in which to meet God. After the destruction of the temple the Pharisaic party gained the ascendancy. Their vision of the covenant, as developed by generations of rabbis, became for the first time normative for Judaism. Consequently for the first time one could speak of "heretical" Judaism. The new form of Judaism could not be as tolerant of diversity as pre-70 CE Judaism, and for the first time we find discussion of grounds for the expulsion of heretics from the synagogues. As a result of Judaism's need to consolidate and reformulate its essence, the churches found their tethers to the synagogue severed. What were once two movements within the larger whole of Judaism gradually became two independent entities, moving in their own directions.

TORAH, TEMPLE, AND TRADITION: THE COMMON FOCAL POINTS OF JEWS

The way of Torah: One holy people for one holy God. First-century Judaism was a diverse and variegated phenomenon. The basic, unifying principle that held the different expressions of Judaism together was commitment to the one God through the keeping of the Torah, the covenant made with God at Sinai and mediated through Moses.¹⁵ At the same time this shared

¹⁵This is not meant to be taken as a statement about the authorship of the Pentateuch, nor an ascription of all the legal material in the Pentateuch to Moses himself. One noteworthy development concerning the traditions of the giving of the Torah involved the emergence of angelology. Most Jews appear to have held the belief that the holy God dealt with the impure, unholy world through intermediaries—superhuman spiritual beings that served God (or in the case of demons and Satan, opposed God). Torah itself was believed to have been given by God *through* angels (Jub. 1.27–2.1 and following; Gal 3:19-20; Heb 2:1-4). For New Testament authors this became a useful way to set God's intention in Torah over against God's intention in his direct,

principle became a point of division as soon as the questions, How should we keep the Torah? or, What does it mean to keep this particular commandment? arose. Issues concerning the application of Torah distinguished Sadducees from Pharisees, the inhabitants of Qumran from the followers of Jesus, and even followers of Jesus from one another (for example, in the situation that emerges behind the writing of Galatians). All agreed that Torah was to be fulfilled; there were many disagreements over how it was to be fulfilled in daily, community life.

The importance of keeping Torah as the fundamental expression of Judaism cannot be overstated. During the Hellenization crisis Jews endured torture and execution rather than acquiesce to eating foods such as pork, proscribed by Torah, or fail to inscribe their children into the covenant through circumcision. The way of Torah was the way to walk in God's favor, bringing blessing for both individual and nation. Transgression of the covenant meant provocation of God's honor by those who should most uphold that honor, and thus danger for the individual and the nation. The way of Torah was the way of devotion to the one God and the way of survival under the watchful eyes of the God who blesses the loyal and chastens the disloyal.

The centrality of Torah and its relationship to walking with the one God is best expressed in the Shema, the closest thing to a creed in early Judaism. Taken from Scripture (Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:38-41), this liturgical piece was recited twice daily by most Jews, keeping forever in the forefront of their minds the one God and God's prescribed way. The Shema places the doing of the Torah at the center of the life of the individual, the family, and the community. It gives specific directions for mnemonic devices that would help the Jew to keep the obligation to follow Torah ever in

the center of his or her identity. The garments of the males were indeed fringed with tassels, whose sole purpose was to remind the wearer—and the onlooker—of the distinctive way of life that set the Jew apart from all other peoples. Males also wore the phylactery, a small box containing a tiny parchment on which the Shema was written, bound to the right forearm or forehead. Several of these parchments have been found at Qumran, written in an astoundingly small print. (A sample specimen measures only two inches square.) These reminded the wearer that every intention, ambition, and action must be in line with the commandments of God. The mezuzah was an ornament on the doorpost of a Jewish home, consisting of a piece of decorative enamel containing or covering a small parchment with the Shema written on it. This was yet another visible reminder that the home was to be a place where the law of God was observed and taught.

The temple and its sacrifices. During most of the first century the temple was the focal point of Jews throughout the world. This was the place where God promised to meet Israel, hear its prayers, and accept its sacrifices. Many Jews would make pilgrimages to the temple from their homes throughout the Diaspora and throughout Palestine on occasions of high festivals. The temple provided not only a symbol of the connection of all Jews with their ancestral land but also an occasion for renewing those connections. As long as the temple cult ran smoothly, according to God's directions, a ready means of access to God (however limited) was at hand. The well-being of the people could be secured and transgressions against God's law covered so they would not jeopardize the covenantal relationship between a sinful people and its holy God. Thus Torah and temple were not separated in the minds of most Jews—even where a Jewish group was highly critical of the temple, such as the Qumran community, it still could not envision a covenant

unmediated oath (whether to Abraham, as in Galatians, or to and through Christ as "priest for ever" in Hebrews).

without a temple. Rather, the two were inseparably linked. The Torah prescribed and regulated what happened in the temple; the temple provided for the interaction between, and maintained the relationship of, the people and their covenant God.

The temple to which New Testament authors refer is the Herodian temple, the glorious result of Herod the Great's renovations and expansions of the second temple, which was itself built to replace the Solomonic temple after its destruction in 587 BCE. The temple complex sits atop a raised platform on Mount Moriah, essentially an elevated mound. The temple proper was surrounded by a large enclosure, the Court of All Nations (commonly called "the Court of the Gentiles"), which was itself enclosed by vast stretches of columned porches where teachers and students would gather in the shadow of the temple to study the Torah. Inside the Court of the Gentiles was to be found the Court of Women, into which all Israelites

could come. It was forbidden for non-Jews to cross from the Court of the Gentiles into the interior courts. Inscriptions over the gate to the Court of Women prescribed the death penalty for desecration by a Gentile (see fig. 3.4). Still closer to the temple itself was the Court of Israelites, where males of thirteen years or more alone could enter. Beyond this place only the priests could move. In the Court of the Priests were found the altar and, finally, the massive temple building, a visually striking monument to the greatness of Israel and the one God. Its marble exterior and gold-plate decorations made it glorious to behold and visible from afar. Within this building were two chambers, the holy place and the holy of holies. Into the latter only the high priest could enter, and that only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Even though the Jew knew God to be everywhere, God was specially present in the holy of holies.

The temple was administered and maintained by a cadre of priests and Levites. The

THE SHEMA

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9 RSV)

And if you will obey my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, . . . that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be full. Take heed lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, and the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and he shut up the heavens, so that there be no rain, and the land yield no fruit, and you perish quickly off the good land

which the LORD gives you. (Deut 11:13-17 RSV)

Make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and . . . put upon the tassel of each corner a cord of blue; and it shall be to you a tassel to look upon and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to go after wantonly. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God. (Num 15:38-41 RSV)

priests attended to the regular sacrifices: animal sacrifices, which were constant; offering of incense at the times of prayer, such as we find Zechariah doing at the opening of Luke's Gospel; the grain and cereal offerings. The Levites provided support services from the singing of the psalms to the provision of wood for the altar. The expenses of the temple and the livelihood of the priests came from the portions allotted them from the sacrifices, freewill offerings, the half-shekel temple tax from Jews around the world, the monetary redemption of the firstborn, and the offerings of the firstfruits. The general tithe supported the Levites, who in turn gave a tenth to the priests.

For both Jews and Gentiles in the ancient world, sacrifice was the primary vehicle for communication with deity, and it was believed to be an effective means of doing business, as it were, with the patrons above. In Israel there were several kinds of occasional offerings—sacrifices made as the need arose. These included thank offerings, which represented the appropriate display of gratitude to God for a specific gift; sin offerings, which represented the appropriate restitution to God's provoked honor, acknowledging the offense and making it good; and votive offerings, sacrifices made in fulfillment of vows undertaken (e.g., sacrifices promised to God, should desired benefits eventuate). Certain sacrifices were also offered on a regular basis. Of note is the daily offering, the *tamid*: one lamb in the morning and a second in the midafternoon. Both were accompanied by an offering of incense, grain and wine, choral singing, and a prayer service for the people who assembled. This twice-daily burnt offering represented the nation's unswerving loyalty to God, their divine patron, a continual acknowledgment of dependence on God. The daily sacrifice was doubled on sabbaths and multiplied on new moons and festivals. Another regular sacrifice since the accession of Augustus was the daily offering on behalf of the emperor, which was offered by the Jerusalem

leadership as a sign of loyalty in lieu of the more usual provincial demonstrations through the imperial cult.

A constant fact throughout Jewish history is the temple's vulnerability. First destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE, the temple was rebuilt between 538 and 515 BCE, only to be subjected to further desecration by Antiochus IV (167–166 BCE), Pompey the Great (63 BCE), and nearly by Caligula (40 CE), and finally destroyed by the legions of Rome under the command of Titus (70 CE; see fig. 2.16). Its impressive appearance, being fashioned from enormous blocks of stone and towering over its surroundings, could not help but inspire awe—even among Jesus' disciples on their visit for his final Passover (see Mk 13:1). Jesus had to remind them, however, of the lessons of history that were destined to repeat themselves (Mk 13:2). Ultimately, Judaism had to understand how the covenant with God could continue to function without the temple: the Christian movement and the rabbinic movement were the two principal forms in which this survival became possible.

The liturgical year: The rhythm of life. The Jewish year was given a rhythm and sense of sacredness from the close observance of the fasts and festivals that made up the liturgical calendar. Many of these observances are specifically prescribed in Torah. Others, such as Purim, Hanukkah, and the Fast for the Destruction of the Temple, were added to the calendar to commemorate newer developments. We will look at these festivals in their order of occurrence. The annual cycle of celebrations also kept particular traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures and events in Jewish history in the forefront of Jewish consciousness. These traditions are of central importance for understanding the New Testament as well, whose authors assume a high level of familiarity with them and develop Christian identity and theology in constant relation to them.

The most basic and regular observance was the sabbath. Hallowing the sabbath brought to remembrance two essential aspects of the Jewish tradition. First, the sabbath calls to mind God's creation of the heavens and the earth, after which God rested—hence the observance of the seventh day of the week as a day of rest and witness to what God has done (Gen 2:1-3; Ex 20:8-11). This was also a reminder of the uniqueness of the God of Israel, the true Creator God who stands apart from the false gods of the nations. Second, the sabbath provided a reminder of the rest that God gave to the descendants of Jacob when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into a land of their own (Deut 5:12-15). The Jews' obligation to rest on the sabbath was a perpetual reminder of God's *gift* of rest, a privilege that had not been theirs in Egypt.

In a world without weekends a day of rest was a practice distinctive to the Jews. It was one of their hallmarks in the eyes of outsiders and often occasioned sharp criticism. Jews might choose to die rather than defend themselves when attacked on the sabbath (where military action would be regarded as work and thus a violation of the sabbath; see 1 Macc 2:29-38). For the Jew this was an expression of piety; for the Greek author Plutarch it is disdained as cowardice and laziness. Different groups might argue about how the sabbath was to be kept. Pharisees actually sought to relax the rules somewhat, while the people of Qumran were much more rigid. For the majority of Jews the sabbath was chiefly a day of joy—a time to celebrate God and Torah at the synagogue, and to enjoy family and friends around the best meal of the week.

The three cardinal festival days, days on which all male Israelites were to appear in Jerusalem, were linked to the agricultural cycle (see the discussion of these festivals in Lev 23). The Feast of Passover (Pesach) marked the beginning of the wheat and barley harvest. The Feast of Pentecost, fifty days later (hence the name,



Figure 2.16. The Arch of Titus, a monument erected in Rome to celebrate the achievements of Vespasian's oldest son, emperor 79–81 CE. Prominent among the decorations is a relief sculpture of the treasures of the Jerusalem temple (including the iconic menorah, the table of the showbread, and the ceremonial trumpets) being carried away by Roman soldiers, with Jewish captives in their train. (Photos by author)

derived from the Greek word for “fifty”), celebrated the grain harvest. The Feast of Tabernacles in the early fall marked the end of the olive and grape harvest. By the first century the religious significance of these festivals dominated their celebration, particularly as Jews in Judea and the Diaspora came to inhabit an increasingly urbanized, less agrarian, environment.

Passover celebrated the foundational event in the story of Israel—the deliverance of the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt. This was the beginning of their story as a nation and the central redemptive act of God on their behalf in which God also committed God’s self to

them: “out of Egypt have I brought my son” (Hos 11:1). Bound up with Passover are the themes of God’s election of Israel as God’s special possession and God’s commitment to deliver Israel from all its oppressors. The God who once delivered Israel from Egypt and who repeated that liberation by making a way in the wilderness for the returnees from the Babylonian exile would again bring deliverance to Israel from Gentile domination. Facets of the exodus story were often reenacted by would-be messiahs, who called their followers out into the wilderness and promised a new parting of the Jordan or new conquest of their ancestral

THE “EIGHTEEN” BENEDECTIONS

Blessed are You, O Lord, our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, the great, mighty, and revered God, God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth, our Shield and the Shield of our fathers, our confidence from generation to generation. Blessed are you, O Lord, the Shield of Abraham!

You are mighty, bringing low the proud; strong, judging the unmerciful; eternal, raising the dead, making the wind to blow and sending down rain. You sustain the living and give life to the dead; in the twinkling of an eye you make salvation to spring forth for us. Blessed are you, O Lord, who gives life to the dead!

Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned against you; blot out and cause our transgressions to pass from your sight, for great is your mercy. Blessed are you, O Lord, who forgives abundantly!

Heal us, O Lord our God, from the pain of our heart; make weariness and sighing to pass

away from us; cause healing for our wounds to rise up. Blessed are you, O Lord, who heal the sick among your people Israel!

Bless for us, O Lord, this year for our welfare, with every kind of produce, and bring near speedily the year of the end of our redemption; give dew and rain upon the face of the earth and satisfy the world from the treasuries of your goodness, and give a blessing upon the work of your hands. Blessed are you, O Lord, who bless the years!

Blow the great horn for our liberation and lift a banner to gather our exiles. Blessed are you, O Lord, who gathers the dispersed of your people Israel!

Restore our judges as at the first and our counselors as at the beginning, and reign over us—you alone! Blessed are you, O Lord, who loves justice!

Be merciful, O Lord our God, in your great mercy toward your people Israel, and toward your city Jerusalem, and toward Zion, the

place where your glory abides, and toward your glory, and toward your temple and your habitation, and toward the kingdom of the house of David, your righteous anointed one. Blessed are you, O God, God of David, the Builder of Jerusalem!

Hear, O Lord our God, the sound of our prayer and have mercy on us, for you are a gracious and merciful God. Blessed are you, O Lord, who hears prayer!

Accept us, O Lord our God, and dwell in Zion; and may your servants serve you in Jerusalem. Blessed are you, O Lord, whom we serve in reverent fear!

We give thanks to you, the Lord our God and God of our fathers, for all the good things—the lovingkindness and the mercy—which you have wrought and done with us and with our fathers before us: and if we said, “Our feet slip,” your lovingkindness, O Lord, held us upright. Blessed are you, O Lord, unto whom it is good to give thanks!

land, and Passover was often an occasion for the stirring of nationalistic zeal and the hopes for revolution.

Pentecost was associated with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai “on the third new moon after the people had gone forth from Egypt” (Ex 19:1). While the timing is not exact, the agricultural festival of Shavuot, or Pentecost, was close and available for this religious overlay. The giving of the Spirit at the festival of Pentecost in Acts 2 thus carries a spiritual message for the reader familiar with the associations of the festival.

The Jewish New Year, Rosh ha-Shanah, occurs prior to Sukkoth in the fall, with the end of the dry season and the coming of the first rains. This marks the time for plowing and seeding, and thus the start of another agricultural cycle. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, fell nine days after the New Year. Until 70 CE it was celebrated with the ritual prescribed in Leviticus 16 (a ritual that is an important resource for interpreting the significance of Jesus’ death and ascension in Heb 7:1–10:18). It was a day of fasting and repentance, the day when the high priest entered the holy of holies to offer the blood from the sin offering in God’s very presence. It was an essential day in the life of Israel, the day on which the covenant was repaired from all breaches, individual and collective, and God’s holiness “covered” and contained anew by the blood, and thus prevented from breaking out to consume sinners.

The Festival of Booths, or Sukkoth, came to be associated with Israel’s wandering the wilderness, when both God and Israel dwelled in tents, and celebrated God’s provision for them there. A harvest festival was a natural setting to remember not only God’s annual provision but also God’s special provisions for Israel as the Hebrews traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land. Just as the exodus and Sinai traditions were memorialized in Passover and Pentecost, the wilderness and conquest traditions were enshrined in the autumn harvest festival. This autumn festival retained much of its agricultural

significance, being the occasion on which the people sought God’s gift of rains for the coming season. The Day of Atonement was strategically placed just a few days before this festival so the people could approach God with confidence that their sins would not provoke God’s anger and prevent the coming of the necessary rains. The Shema itself twice daily reminded Jews that even the gift of rain, grain, and thus daily bread depended on fidelity to the covenant.

As an example of how knowledge of a festival can enhance the reader’s appreciation of the significance of the gospel proclamation, we may consider Sukkoth as the backdrop for John 7:2, 37–39. On the first seven days of this festival the priest poured out a libation of water, symbolizing the people’s dependence on God for the rains and thus for life itself. On the eighth day, the climax of the festival, on which no libation was performed, Jesus is portrayed as standing up and shouting to the masses assembled in the temple: “If anyone thirsts, let whoever believes in me come to me and drink. As the Scripture says, ‘out of that one’s heart shall flow rivers of water’” (Jn 7:37–39). Jesus is thus presented as the answer to the petitions of the previous seven days’ libations, indeed as an eschatological fulfillment since the water is not merely the annual rain but the life-giving Spirit.

Hanukkah, called the Feast of Dedication in John’s Gospel, celebrated the reconsecration of the temple and its altar on the twenty-fifth of Chislel, 164 BCE, when Judas and his brothers put an end to the pagan rituals in Jerusalem, purified the temple, rebuilt the altar, and restored the proper sacrifices. The miracle of the single flask of oil lasting eight days is a rather minor thing compared to the miracle of Judas’s little army driving out the Seleucid forces. The festival appears to have taken hold during the early years of the Hasmonean dynasty (whose kings, of course, would avidly promote a festival that reminded all their subjects of the ruling family’s acts of their behalf) and is commended to Jews in the Diaspora by the letters

prefacing 2 Maccabees (see 2 Macc 1:1–2:18). This festival kept in remembrance the dangers of foreign domination, the heroism of the martyrs who died rather than sacrifice fidelity to the covenant with God, and the remarkable successes of the Jewish revolutionaries who routed superior Gentile forces. It also spoke eloquently of God’s continuing fidelity to God’s holy place.

Purim was a rowdy festival celebrating the deliverance of the Jews under Persian domination by God through Esther and Mordecai. The book of Esther was read in its entirety, a good time was generally had by all, so much so that a later rabbinic *halakha* states that the Jew is to drink until he can no longer distinguish between the sentences “Blessed be Mordecai” and “Cursed be Haman” (Babylonian Talmud Megillah 7b). The feast, particularly through the annual reading of Esther, was an occasion to remember the tensions that existed between Gentiles and Jews, the vulnerable position of Jews living under foreign rule and subject to anti-Jewish manipulation of the system, but also God’s providential care for God’s people and even the triumph of the latter over their (Gentile) enemies.

The sabbaths and cycles of festivals kept Jews keenly aware of their identity, their her-

itage, and their hopes. Together with a commitment to follow the way of Torah and to participate in the temple service (in person where practicable but always at least through contributions for the sacrifices performed on behalf of all Israel), these provided a foundational body of traditions that bound Israelites together. Teachers such as Jesus, James, and Paul were able to build on these traditions as they gave expression to the new invasions of God’s benevolence in human history.

The synagogue. While the temple served as the formal and symbolic center for Jewish religious life, going to the temple was in fact a rare privilege for the majority of Jews. When Diaspora became a reality for significant Jewish populations, Jews began to meet together on the sabbath in order to enjoy regular interaction around their sacred Scriptures. The place in which they met came to be known as a “prayer house” (*proseuchē*) or “assembly” (*synagogē*; see fig. 2.17). The synagogue functioned also as a sort of local court, regulating internal Jewish affairs. The synagogue rose to a place of importance within Palestine as well, every village having a designated place for



Figure 2.17. A capital from a pillar from the late Roman period Jewish synagogue in Corinth. The carvings feature menorahs, palm branches, and etrogs (a citrus fruit used in connection with the Feast of Booths). Synagogue decorations across the Mediterranean often feature such decorative connections with the temple and its cult. (Photo by author)

prayer and for the reading and study of Scripture, since even in Palestine Jews would rarely be able to travel to the temple more frequently than the three prescribed feasts.

The synagogue service began with an invocation—a recitation of Psalm 95 or some other invitation to attend to God. It continued with the recitation of the Shema and the reading of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments), thus contributing to keeping the commandments in the forefront of the communal consciousness. It also included prayer in the form of the *She-moneh Esre*, the “Eighteen Benedictions,” so called because each petition ended with a benediction (“Blessed are You, O God”) celebrating some facet of God’s character or activity, making these prayers also a window into Jewish theology. The enumeration of “eighteen” benedictions represents the expanded form of the litany as it existed during the second century. Their form at the turn of the era is believed to have included eleven petitions, and these give us an important taste of Jewish weekly prayer from the time of Jesus. These prayers cultivate an awareness that God is merciful toward his people’s iniquities (pardoning them) and infirmities (healing them). God also provides for them in life (through the provision of food and safety) and in death (through the hope of the resurrection). The prayers also reinforce the conviction that the God of the universe is also in some special sense the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the defender of their descendants, Israel. The prayers orient the worshipers’ hopes in a decidedly nationalistic direction, nurturing a longing for the land of Israel, the glorification of Jerusalem, the restoration of theocracy and indigenous leadership (as opposed to foreign domination), and the regathering of the Jews living outside Palestine.

The service continued with the reading of a portion of Torah (the whole Pentateuch being covered in sequence in one year in some lectionaries, in three years in others), a reading from the Prophets or Writings selected on the

basis of thematic connection with the reading from the Torah (and thus called *haftarah*), and a “word of exhortation” interpreting and applying the readings. The service concluded with a benediction of the people. The singing of selected psalms could be expected to have been a part of the service.

The synagogue attracted a number of Gentiles, some merely curious, others committed to join in the worship of the one God and, perhaps, some basic requirements (the so-called Noachic laws imposed by God on all humanity generally, requiring abstinence from idolatry, murder, fornication, consumption of blood, and the like), still others becoming proselytes, taking on the whole yoke of Torah (the laws specially imposed by God on Israel). It was particularly among the second group that Jewish-Christian missionaries had marked success, offering full connection with the people of God without the burdens of circumcision and dietary laws. The synagogue also provided a pattern for the organization of the Christian “assembly” (*ekklesia*), although the Greco-Roman voluntary organizations known as *collegia* also exercised an important influence in this regard. The synagogue’s contribution to its members of a sense of connectedness with one another, with other synagogues, and with the mother community in Judea is also reflected in the early church’s sense of the same.

Personal prayer. We do not have access to the personal prayers of the average Jewish person. Prayer at morning and evening appears to have been the norm. Just how closely this was followed we can only guess, but Jews of all social levels appear to have been closely attached to their distinctive faith and disposed to its practice. The recitation of the Shema was part of this prayer, and eventually the Eighteen Benedictions came to be a daily prayer (though this was more likely a second-century development). We may assume that other formal

prayers such as the Psalms were used by individuals to express their longings and praises to God. The Psalms bear eloquent witness to what was expected of both a faithful God and the faithful petitioner, nurturing the individual Jew's expectations for his or her interaction with God and how God could be asked to intervene in certain situations. They also provided models for fresh, ad hoc prayers as well.

New prayers were composed and committed to writing by a number of Jews whose works have survived. For example, the Prayer of Manasseh is a beautiful penitential psalm providing a vehicle for sorrow at one's sins and for the affirmation of God's forgiving character and determination to manifest God's mercy through the forgiveness even of blatant and extreme sinners. The Additions to Daniel, the book of Baruch, and several additional psalms (such as were found at Qumran and also in the Syriac version of the Scriptures) bear witness to the liturgical creativity of pious Jews. The ad hoc prayers preserved in larger narratives such as Tobit, the four books of the Maccabees, Judith, and the Greek Additions to Esther presuppose that Jews were accustomed to praying as the need arose, offering spontaneous (if somewhat formulaic) prayers from the heart for guidance, deliverance, or forgiveness. Matthew's Jesus attributes "vain repetition" to Gentile, never Jewish, forms of prayer.

Thus while God was to be found in the temple in a special way, Jews around the Mediterranean also knew God to be close at hand wherever God's people were, ready to hear their petitions and to deliver them from every danger.

THE DIVERSITY WITHIN JUDAISM

If there was agreement concerning the essential foci of the Jewish way of life, there were also certainly differences—even debates and divisions—concerning the proper expression of one's commitment to those essentials. It must also be remembered that before 70 CE and the rise of so-called rabbinic Judaism, this was a

debate without a referee. Only after the rise of the Second Sanhedrin at Jamnia in the last decades of the first century could there be some decisive determination of what was "normative" and what was "heretical."

Pharisees. Among the sects encountered in first-century Judaism the Pharisees emerge as the most prominent in the New Testament (not only in the Gospels but, indirectly, in the letters of Paul the Pharisee) and in the reformulation of Judaism after the destruction of the temple. Rabbinic literature tends to uphold Pharisaic positions with regard to the application of Torah and overturn Sadducean positions, suggesting that they saw themselves as the students and heirs of the former rather than the latter.

The Pharisees, whose origins are to be found at least in the early Hasmonean period if not before,¹⁶ sought ways of adapting the old commandments of Torah, fitted for an agrarian economy and concerns, to an ever-changing world. Drawn mainly (though not exclusively) from laypeople, the Pharisees were driven by a vision for the whole people of Israel as a "kingdom of priests" for God, just as Exodus 19:5-6 declared Israel should be. They thus sought to apply the whole law to all of life, including priestly codes. This led them to take great care for ritual purity, the washing of hands and vessels, the tithing of all the produce of the land, and keeping the sabbath according to their interpretations of what constituted work. Many of these details emerge in the Gospels as points of conflict between the Pharisees and other Jewish teachers, including Jesus (e.g., Mt 23; Mk 7:1-23). For them, this was the way to live before God, fulfilling the requirements of the daily call to every Jew (the Shema).

The Pharisees considered the traditional interpretation and application of Torah to hold

¹⁶See Louis Finklestein, "The Pharisaic Leadership of the Great Synagogue (ca. 400–170 BCE)," in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2, *The Hellenistic Age*, ed. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 245-77.

equal authority with the written Torah itself. In other words, former judgments concerning how to apply Torah in given situations came to have the force of Torah itself. For this reason the “traditions of the elders” were extremely important in their understanding of walking in line with God’s law (Mk 7:3-5; Gal 1:14; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6). This was a point of conflict with Jesus, who found that the clear teaching of the written Torah could be contravened by appealing to a tradition about Torah’s application (e.g., in Mk 7:8-13). For Jesus, the divine law could never be circumvented or subordinated on the basis of a teaching developed by human beings.

The Pharisees’ distinctive (and rather far-reaching) manner of obeying the Torah led to the erection of social boundaries and distinctions between themselves and other Jews. If they were committed to eating only produce that had been properly tithed (no cutting corners even on mint, cumin, and dill; Mt 23:23), they could not eat with just anybody, lest they partake of food that had not been properly tithed (thus consuming God’s portion and violating the Torah). If they were to maintain ritual purity, they could not eat in a house whose members did not observe the same purity rules for handling foods and dishes. They thus had table fellowship only with those of like mind, their “associates” (*haberim*), regarding the “people of the land” (the masses) as sinners (cf. Jn 7:49: “this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed”). Such practices give credence to the theory that the name “Pharisees” derives from the Hebrew for “separate ones” (*perushim*). At the same time, they were known for having great authority among the people, assiduously teaching their neighbors a better way to keep the covenant and striving to increase holiness throughout the land.

Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead and eternal rewards and punishment (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.14; *Ant.* 18.1.3), and appear to have been comfortable with the develop-

ments in beliefs about angels and spiritual beings that had developed during the Second Temple period. This gave them common ground with the early Jewish Christians over against, say, the Sadducees (something Paul could exploit to his advantage; see Acts 23:6-10). They also held to a high view of divine providence. God’s will and purpose guide the course of history. At the same time, they allowed for human freedom in response to God (see Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.14). As one rabbi put it, “all is foreseen in heaven except the fear of heaven.” Modern scholars rightly caution us to beware of painting the Pharisees as hypocrites, concerned only with appearances, or as legalists who replace devotion to God with minute rules. Both Jesus and Pharisaic sages criticize those who pursue religion for the sake of appearances or who lose sight of the one legitimate reason to keep Torah, namely, the love of God.

Ancient sources also mention scribes, often in connection with the Pharisees. Scribes were trained interpreters of Torah, akin to jurists and lawyers who devote themselves to understanding the law and the principles for determining lawful and unlawful actions in innumerable circumstances based on a limited body of legislation. The scribes might belong to one party or another, or to none, but in practice it would appear that many were deeply influenced by the Pharisaic principles of interpretation, such that Matthew’s Jesus can virtually equate the two (Mt 23).

Sadducees. The Sadducees, who also emerged as a clearly defined group by the mid-Hasmonean period but whose roots may go back significantly further, have left no known firsthand sources for their own beliefs and hopes. Instead, our sources are written mainly by those who disagreed with them (e.g., the Pharisees and the early Christians), so that we know more about what they did *not* stand for than what they embraced. Sadducees appear to have

occupied the upper levels of the aristocracy or to have concerned themselves mainly with influencing the Jewish ruling classes (see Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6). The high priestly family of Annas was Sadducean in its orientation. They looked to the Torah as authoritative and all other texts (whether the Prophets and Writings or the traditions of legal interpretation) as commentary rather than as possessing the same authority as the Torah. As might be expected, they are remembered in rabbinic literature to have debated with the Pharisees on many fine points of Torah's application; for example, certain causes of impurity, the beginning and endpoints of the sabbath, and the conduct of the temple service.

The Sadducees are most celebrated for their rejection of the hope of the resurrection from the dead, the survival of the soul, and rewards and punishments beyond this life (see Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.14; *Ant.* 18.1.4). In addition to this they appear to have rejected the extravagant developments in angelology and demonology of the Hellenistic period, perhaps in keeping with their view that God has left moral determination to a person's free will (thus not to the coercive power of a holy spirit or an evil spirit). Their beliefs correlate well with an empowered group that regarded itself as the master of its own fortune and had no need of postmortem compensators for inequities during this life. The Sadducees, whose power base was the temple cult, did not survive as a viable movement within Judaism after 70 CE.

Essenes, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. A wealth of sources attest to the beliefs and practices of the Essenes, though these sources often conflict in some details. To the classical sources (see Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.2-13; *Ant.* 18.1.2, 5; Philo, *Hypothetica* 11.1-18; *That Every Good Person Is Free* 12-13 [§§91-75]) the extensive literature called the Dead Sea Scrolls (found near the community at Qumran) can now be added. The majority of scholars acknowledge that this

community has some relationship with the Essene movement and many would openly identify it as an Essene center. Again, the emergence of this sect is bound to the story of the Hellenizing crisis and rise of the Hasmonean dynasty, largely in protest.

The vision of the Qumran community was "perfection of way," walking fully and completely in line with the covenant stipulations laid out by God. The sect arrived at the right understanding of the Torah through the "Teacher of Righteousness," a mysterious figure who emerged sometime after a group had formed but before it found its distinctive direction. The Teacher appears to have been a Zadokite priest who clashed with an early Hasmonean high priest (called the Wicked Priest throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls) and who therefore left Jerusalem. The Teacher settled in Qumran and began to prepare for God's intervention by ordering the community after God's law, correctly interpreted. The community was to "prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness and make straight in the desert a path for our God," and the "path" was the correct and meticulous observance of Torah and the community rule (IQS 8:14-16). Study of the Torah in community and throughout the watches of the night in small groups was central to the life of the sect's members (see fig. 2.18).

The sect was highly apocalyptic, deterministic, and sectarian. It was sectarian in that its members alone joined themselves to the "covenant," while the rest of Israel floundered in "error of way." The secrets of the sect, including the correct way of doing Torah, were carefully reserved for the fully initiated, and it was part of the member's duty to keep this knowledge from the outsider. The sect was deterministic in that the lot of every human being was held to have been determined by God long ago. God destined some to be "children of light," giving them the "spirit of truth," and others to be "children of darkness," giving them over to the "spirit of error" or "deceit." This corresponds to the classical sources' description of the Essenes

as given to a high view of providence, with little or no room for human freedom. At the same time, however, the member of the sect is enjoined to strive against the spirit of error and to follow the spirit of truth within. There was a correspondingly strong doctrine of election as well, which resulted in a surprising combination of an awareness of God's unmerited favor and a commitment to a highly legalistic expression of piety. Determinism and stark dualism (dividing humanity into children of light and of darkness) were already features of apocalypticism. The sect also shared in apocalyptic Judaism's interest in the activities of the angels around God's throne, who impinge on community life (in whose worship of God, for example, the community joins), and in the expectation of God's imminent intervention in human affairs to cast down the "lawless" and raise the sect's members to leadership over Israel.

There appear to have been two kinds of commitment to the Essene way of life. Some members of the group continued to live in towns and even raise families. Others withdrew into a sort of proto-monastery, holding all property in common and maintaining a celibate lifestyle. The Essenes pursued simplicity of life in terms of food and clothing, and held to an extremely rigorous application of Torah. For example, when Jesus asks, "Which of you, having a sheep which fell into a pit, would not lift it out on the sabbath" (Mt 12:11), any Essene in the audience would have ruined his point by saying, "I wouldn't!" (see CD 11:13). The lifestyle of those at Qumran was especially rigorous. They lived as if in a perpetual state of readiness for holy war, with God present among them in the camp, following the purity codes for the camp of Israel during holy war. For example, Deuteronomy prescribes that in times of war, when God moves with the encamped army of Israel, the men will go outside the camp, dig a hole for themselves before they defecate, and then fill the hole with the dirt (Deut 23:12-14). This practice was followed at Qumran.

Their observance of the law was so strict that the sect member did not even defecate on the sabbath, since digging the required hole would constitute work. They would probably not have agreed with Jesus' statement that "the sabbath was made for people, not people for the sabbath" (Mk 2:27). They also pursued a high degree of ritual purity, performing ritual purifications before prayer and before the daily community meal. The Qumran facility is equipped with several *mikva'oth* for these purificatory immersions. The community's diligence in observing



Figure 2.18. The study room from the compound at Qumran. Members of the sect took turns throughout the four watches of the night praying and studying the Torah and other sacred writings in this area. (Photo by author)

the Torah was believed to atone for the sins of Israel, being accounted as sacrificial offerings in God's sight (1QS 9.4-6).

The Qumran community, as classical sources will also say of the Essenes, had extensive and formal procedures for receiving new members. The person contemplating joining the group underwent a one-year novice period, then, after making an initial commitment, underwent a further two-year probationary period before taking the binding oath

that he will practice piety towards God and observe justice towards other people; do

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

In 1947 a cache of texts stored in clay jars was discovered in an elevated cave near the Dead Sea. In the years that followed, texts and artifacts were found in ten other caves in the area, while archaeological interest in the nearby settlement at Qumran, a long-neglected site, was renewed. Many of the Dead Sea Scrolls originated at Qumran; others were brought to the community for safekeeping and, eventually, hiding at the time of the Jewish Revolt. Some were found in an excellent state of preservation; many were found in such fragmentary condition and so thoroughly mixed up with other fragments of other texts that it took decades to fit the puzzle pieces (from hundreds of different puzzles!) together. The sect that produced and preserved these scrolls was devoted to the study of Torah, the searching out of the wisdom of the ancients, the

preservation of learning, and the production of new expressions of piety and wisdom.

The Qumran literature falls into three categories. First, there are many manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures—at least fragments of every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther and Nehemiah, and substantially complete copies of many books. Together they provide the earliest manuscript evidence for the Old Testament, antedating other manuscripts by more than a thousand years. These discoveries have given new life to textual criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures. In a few places, textual critics have determined that the variant reading preserved in the Qumran manuscripts is the more original (see, for example, the newly inserted paragraph after 1 Sam 10:27 in the NRSV). In other places the discoveries have not changed the determination of the original

text but have given increased weight to previously known variants. For example, the Septuagint version of Jeremiah 10:1-10 does not include Jeremiah 10:6-8, 10. A manuscript of Jeremiah from Qumran agrees with the Septuagint in these omissions over against the Masoretic Text.

The Qumran scrolls have reopened the question of the boundaries of the canon during the later Second Temple period. Was the number of psalms fixed at 150? The inclusion of several additional psalms in the Qumran Psalms scrolls provides possible evidence to the contrary. Did all Jews agree on the number of books that were canonical? The Qumran community regarded Jubilees, an expansive paraphrase of Genesis 1 through Exodus 14, as an authoritative text and used it alongside the Pentateuch itself. Jubilees was especially important as support for the community's practice of calculating sabbaths and festivals according to the solar calendar, as opposed to the lunar calendar followed in the Jerusalem temple (see Jub. 6.32-38). Similarly, the community preserved a text called the Temple Scroll, a reinterpretation and systematization of the Pentateuchal law code. They may have regarded this scroll as authoritative and binding alongside the Pentateuch, perhaps in a manner similar to the Pharisaic regard for the "traditions of the elders."

The second category includes books that were not included by most Jews in the Bible but also were not the peculiar products and



Figure 2.19. A fragmentary copy of the Community Rule (1QSa), the document that appears to have regulated the life of the community at Qumran, covering everything from the process of examining and assimilating new members to community officials' roles and responsibilities to discipline within the sect. (*Jordan Museum*)

property of the Qumran sect. Several apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works were found among the scrolls, including Tobit, Ben Sira, the Letter of Jeremiah, 1 Enoch, Genesis Apocryphon, Aramaic Testament of Levi, and the apocryphal psalms. Many of these works had been known prior to the discovery of the scrolls and had been widely read by Second Temple-period Jews in Judea and the Diaspora.

The third and most celebrated category includes the scrolls that represent the literary compositions of the sect itself and, in some cases, its eminent leader, the “Teacher of Righteousness.” Distinctive among these are the Rules, books outlining topics that would come to be associated with church discipline: the procedures for joining the sect, the duties of various officials and the members of the sect in general, disciplinary actions to be taken on certain violations, and summaries of the history and the teaching of the sect. The two main rules, the

Community Rule (1QS; see fig. 2.19) and the Damascus Document (CD), differ in a number of respects and may represent the community’s practice at different stages in its history or reflect the differences in practice between the mother group at Qumran and the members of the sect that continued to live in the villages and cities of Judea.

Another distinctive genre is the commentary, or *peshet* (plural, *pesharim*). The interpreter provides a brief excerpt from the biblical text, then segues into a discussion of the meaning of that passage with the phrase “its interpretation is” (*peshro*). The members of the sect read the Hebrew prophets (among which the Psalms were included) as predictions of what would transpire in the life of their sect’s founder (the Teacher of Righteousness) or in the history of the sect. This hermeneutic shares much in common with the early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.

The sect also produced a great variety of liturgical material,

attesting to the major role played by worship within the community. Thanksgiving Hymns speak of the blessings God has given by allowing the worshiper to know the right way to walk in God’s commandments and to be joined to the community of God’s holy ones. Songs for the Sabbath Sacrifice speak of the mystical communion of the earthly sectarians with the angelic hosts as they all gather together before the throne of God to worship.

Finally, the sect produced texts that bore witness to its expectations for the future and especially for the way in which God would bring the world back into its proper order. The War Scroll is a blueprint for the end-time conflict between the children of light and the armies of darkness. The Messianic Rule is a community rule for the restored Israel, in which the Messiah of Israel (a kingly figure) and the Messiah of Aaron (a priestly figure) would preside over the community.

wrong to none whether on his own initiative or another person’s orders; hate evildoers and help the just; keep faith with all people, especially authorities (since no one achieves dominion except by the will of God); not to abuse any authority conferred on him, nor outshine his subjects by dress or decoration; always to love the truth and expose liars; to keep his hands free from theft and his soul pure from impious gain; to conceal nothing from his fellow-Essenes, but to reveal their secrets to none, even though he be tortured to death; to transmit their rules exactly as he received them, and to preserve the books of the sect and the names of the angels. (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.7)

Such an oath shows not only sectarian concerns but also the broad commitment to the moral and righteous life among this sect. The group held property in common, with the possible exception of a few personal items.¹⁷ They pursued a self-sufficient lifestyle through tending their own crops and herds, producing their own utensils, clothing, and tents.

The community was rigidly structured. There was a body of priests, Levites, and many gradations of members below them, with each member sitting in his proper place and

¹⁷Philo reports this to have been true even among those Essenes living in towns (see *That Every Good Person Is Free* 85-87).

deferring to those of more advanced standing than himself. To say that communal meals and assemblies proceeded “decently and in order” would be a gross understatement. Discipline within the community was strict. Speaking out of turn or spitting in the assembly met with reduced rations for a period of time. More serious offenses could mean banishment from the group for a set period and might easily result in starvation unless the group took the member back in time. (After all, how could they violate their oath and eat with the impure?)

The discovery and study of the Scrolls has encouraged much study of the connections between the Qumran community and the early church. Earlier overstatements of these connections, such as the fantasy that the Dead Sea Scrolls actually told the story of conflicts within the early church, have (largely) given way to more sober judgments concerning the Scrolls’ place in the emergence of the sect in the Hasmonean period. In Qumran, as in the early church, we have the opportunity to observe how a Jewish sect distinguished itself from the rest of Israel, crafted rites of passage into the community, organized into a community that could sustain itself and provide for the relief of all its members, theorized about the struggles of attaining virtue and pleasing God in this life, drew inspiration from a variety of texts (not all of which would be considered Scripture by outsiders), and read their own story through the lens of sacred Scripture (and vice versa).

Samaritans. Ancient prejudices against the Samaritans run deep and have colored the picture of the inhabitants of the region recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Samaritans considered themselves to be descendants of the people of the northern kingdom, the nine and a half tribes that split from Judah and Benjamin after Solomon’s death. According to 2 Kings 17:24-41 (a tradition kept alive in Josephus, *Ant.* 10.183-185), however, the original inhabitants were deported to Assyria and

Gentiles were settled in their territory, making the Samaritans the descendants of non-Jews and not part of Israel. The most likely scenario is that *some* inhabitants of the northern kingdom were deported and *some* foreigners were settled there, but there was in all probability considerable continuity in the population and religious practice of the region. It was bitter rivalry—and the mutual tendency to deny the other the status of being “Israel”—that accounts for the view of Samaritans as Gentiles or half-blooded Israelites (though *some* assimilation of foreign settlers is plausible).

The northern kingdom had its own sanctuaries—one at Bethel (the sanctity of which is supported even in a number of patriarchal stories) and another at Dan in the north. This is a trend actively opposed by the Deuteronomistic editors of the Hebrew Scriptures (including the author of 2 Kings!), who balance these stories with affirmations of God’s exclusive choice of Mount Zion in Jerusalem for cultic encounter with the deity. These prejudices were made worse after the return of the Judean exiles from Babylonia, who regarded the Samaritans as a half-breed race, neither truly Jew nor Gentile. Near the end of his compilation of his life’s teaching of wisdom, Yeshua Ben Sira adds an almost random attack on Judea’s neighbors: “Two nations my soul detests, and the third is not even a people: Those who live in Seir, and the Philistines, and the foolish people that live in Shechem” (Sir 50:25-26). The Samaritans fare worse in Ben Sira’s estimation than even Israel’s longstanding foes the Philistines and the Edomites.

By the time of Alexander the Great the Samaritans had established their own temple to the God of Israel on Mount Gerizim. Relations with Judea could not have been improved when the Samaritans voluntarily renamed their sanctuary for “Zeus the friend of strangers,” completely avoiding any trouble under Antiochus IV (see 2 Macc 6:2). During the Hasmonean

period John Hyrcanus actually attacked and destroyed Samaria and its temple, a campaign that brought him popularity in Judea but that no doubt renewed anti-Judean sentiments among the Samaritans. It is therefore not surprising that Samaritans are portrayed consistently as a marginal group in the Gospels, that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (as the author of the Fourth Gospel comments; see Jn 4:9 RSV), and that Samaritans are not friendly toward Galileans heading for the rival temple in Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-56).

The Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch, the sum total of their Scriptures. In some cases the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch may represent a more original reading; in some places it has been altered to prescribe more explicitly that true worship happens on Gerizim. Worship at Gerizim rather than Jerusalem was a major point of contention between Judeans and Samaritans (see Jn 4:20). Samaritans offered the sacrifices prescribed by Moses at their temple and survive as a religious entity in that region to this day. Not only does Jesus encounter Samaritans throughout his ministry (with both positive and negative results), but Samaria is a region of very early Christian missionary work and success. Their distinctive beliefs (particularly their expectation of a “prophet like Moses” as their messianic figure, based on Deut 18:18) may have contributed to the shaping of early Christian theology (see, for example, the use of this motif in Peter’s sermon in Acts 3:22-26). Unfortunately, the lack of first-century Samaritan texts makes the study of this influence difficult.¹⁸

Other Jewish movements. Josephus mentions a “fourth sect of the Jewish philosophy,” one that we have already encountered in earlier dis-

cussions of Jews who sought to secure Israel’s fortunes by throwing off the yoke of the foreign power through violent revolution. This tendency culminated in the formation of the Zealot party shortly before the Revolt but was an important strain even before the formal organization of this party. The label “Zealot” has come to be applied more loosely to all the attempts to recover the hope of Israel by force of arms, and need not be exclusive of other groups—both individual Pharisees and an Essene are named by Josephus as prominent revolutionaries of the period. (Indeed Josephus himself, a Pharisee and a member of a priestly family, was a general in the revolutionary army in Galilee in 67 CE.) Zealots (both in the broad sense and specialized sense) were not merely freedom fighters. They were Jews expressing their religious convictions: “No lord but God” (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.6). The Jewish tradition was rich with models for their activity: Phineas expressing zeal for God by killing the accommodating Israelite and his Gentile concubine; Joshua driving the Gentiles out of the land God had promised to Israel; Mattathias killing the apostate Israelite and the Syrian officer who invited the pagan sacrifice; Judas and his brothers driving out the overwhelming Seleucid forces, since God fought with them.

Most of the movements that aimed at overthrowing Roman power in Palestine consciously reenacted scriptural patterns, affirming that God was again, by means of a new leader whom God raised up, delivering Israel from bondage or renewing their complete possession of the Promised Land. In 45–46 CE Theudas gathered a crowd and led them to the Jordan River, where he promised to lead them across after he divided the river by his command. The parallel with Joshua’s crossing of the Jordan and the revolutionary implications of bringing in a mob of Israelites for a new (re)conquest of Judea were probably not lost on the procurator Cuspius Fadus, who met the crowd at the river with his troops and slew many, including

¹⁸See further R. J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews: The Origins of the Samaritans Reconsidered* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975); Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans: A Profile* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

GNOSTICISM, THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY, AND THE HERMETICA

Gnosticism refers broadly to a variety of religious traditions that held to some common core beliefs. The essence of a person (the soul, as it were) comes from the divine realm but has fallen from the perfect, immaterial realm through the levels of the material creation, becoming enmeshed and trapped in matter (the body). By means of correct knowledge (*gnōsis*) about their nature as spiritual beings and about the process by which the soul will ascend through the heavenly spheres, humans can be freed from the prison house of the body and of material creation, and ascend again to join with the deity. The Gnostic's goal was thus personal liberation and reunion with the divine. Associated with some Gnostic groups is the belief that the material world was not created by the supreme God but by a lesser divinity called the Demiurge. This figure is responsible for the evils that beset humankind, having brought the material creation with its lures and entrapments into being.

The problem with reconstructing Gnosticism is that the forms in which it is best and most distinctively known postdate the rise of Christianity, only coming to flourish in the second and third centuries CE. Even non-Christian Gnostic texts quite often show the strong influence of Jewish thought (for example, dependence on the creation and fall stories of Gen 1–3). Scholars therefore take different views on the development of Gnosticism. Some assert that a pagan Gnosticism flourished during the first century and later was combined first with Jewish

and then Christian elements. Others suggest that proto-Gnostic (often merely Platonic) motifs were common in the first century (e.g., the belief in the soul's heavenly origin and return, the devaluing of the material world as corruptible and transitory), but that Gnosticism really only took root in history as heretical forms of Judaism and Christianity. It is certainly possible that Paul and other New Testament authors had to counter at least incipient tendencies in this direction, although we must always be wary of reading second- and third-century Gnostic systems of belief back into the minds of the first-century deviants these authors combat.

The study of Gnosticism takes us to two bodies of literature. The first corpus is the Nag Hammadi Library, a collection of fifty-two texts on twelve scrolls discovered in Egypt (the most celebrated of which is the Gospel of Thomas, which has played an important role in many recent quests for the historical Jesus). The collectors of these texts were Christian, and the majority of the texts reflect a variant form of second-century Christianity (or, less kindly, a Christian heresy) rather than an independent religious movement. Another collection of literature often associated with Gnosticism is the *Hermetica*, so named because it relates the revelations of Hermes Trismegistus (“thrice great”), a Greek name for the Egyptian god Thoth.

A particularly important text within this corpus is the *Poimandres*, a discourse of self-disclosure by the heavenly Mind, who shows

the way human beings may ascend again to God. This text is a Gnostic exposition of the creation and fall stories in Genesis; it offers many parallels with the presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. In both, a heavenly being reveals himself to a human disciple, teaches the disciple about human beings' fallen state, the “life” and “light” that come from God, the way that salvageable souls share God's essential nature, and the way to restoration. The heavenly revealer figure finally commissions the disciple to proclaim the message to others, some of whom will hear and follow, but others will scoff. The revealer also speaks in lengthy discourses, while the role of the disciple is merely to ask questions, a form reminiscent of Johannine style (but also of other self-disclosure statements by divinities across the Mediterranean).

Which way does the influence flow? Did John's Gospel influence the author of *Poimandres* or the reverse? There may also be no direct influence, with both John and *Poimandres* offering parallel but independent concepts, for the differences between the two texts are just as striking. In the person of Jesus, divine *logos* or reason has actually become flesh, shared earthly life with humanity for a considerable amount of time, and even experienced death before returning to the Father. The early church would struggle to preserve the reality of the incarnation and passion of Jesus against docetic and Gnostic tendencies to deny that the revealer actually took on corrupt flesh or genuinely experienced suffering.

The Poimandres suggests ways in which Gnosticism could connect with ethics. First, the revealer says that he remains “far removed from the person who is foolish, evil, deceptive, full of envy and covetousness, murderous, and impious,” turning such people over to the avenging daemon that drives the person further and further into the delusions of the sense world, and thus to greater punishment. With such statements the Gnostic teacher promotes virtue and dissuades from vice. Similarly, the revealer discusses the spheres through which the

soul passes after death and what the soul sheds at each stage: in the first sphere, mutability; in the second, evil scheming; in the third, lust and its deceitfulness; in the fourth, arrogance; in the fifth, overreaching and rashness; in the sixth, covetousness and injustice; in the seventh, falsehood. Such an itinerary might lead the Gnostic to divest him- or herself of these things while alive so that he or she might be the better equipped to journey to the heavens after death, or even enjoy mystical union with the divine during life. On the other hand, the belief that the soul

would be divested of such things after death was also taken by some Gnostics as a license for self-indulgence in this present life.

For further reading:

- Brakke, David. *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Jonas, Hans. *The Gnostic Religion*. 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon, 1963.
- Perkins, Pheme. *Gnosticism and the New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
- Robinson, James M., ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.

Theudas.¹⁹ During the procuratorship of Felix an Egyptian Jew gathered a large following on the Mount of Olives and promised they would see the walls of Jerusalem fall, after which he would lead them in a march on Jerusalem to take the city. Felix, of course, attacked the crowd with his troops, killing several hundred (though not capturing the leader; see Acts 21:38).²⁰ Small wonder, then, that when, a decade before, Jesus had staged a grand entrance into Jerusalem and occupied the court of the temple for several days with a large crowd of adherents, authorities began to fear a coup under this messiah figure.

Other short-lived movements arose throughout the first centuries BCE and CE. John the Baptist provides an example of a spontaneous, nonviolent religious movement that could arise within Judaism around a central figure and that Judaism as such could tolerate. John, like leaders with more military and political aspirations, enacted scriptural paradigms. He centered his movement on the banks of the Jordan and made the wilderness

his field of ministry. The wilderness represented the place for meeting God and recalled the time of Israel’s formation as a people following God out of Egypt. While the desert, with its overtones of deliverance and conquest, was a common launching place for revolutionary movements, John’s goal was to awaken repentance for violations of God’s law and to renew widespread commitment to walking in justice. He gained a sufficient following to be noticed by Josephus (see *Ant.* 18.5.2).²¹ According to Josephus it was his influence with the people that led Antipas to remove him before John could lead an insurrection. Antipas read John as a potential revolutionary, and John’s sharp criticism of Antipas’s own violation of Torah (marrying his sister-in-law, Herodias) may have been seen by Antipas as a prelude to rallying the people to revolt. So popular was John that when Antipas’s army was destroyed in an ill-advised war seven years later, people interpreted this as God’s punishment for the execution of the righteous prophet.

¹⁹See Josephus, *Ant.* 20.5.1. This may be the same Theudas referred to in Acts 5:36.

²⁰See Josephus, *Ant.* 20.8.6.

²¹While Josephus’s paragraph on Jesus (*Ant.* 18.3.3) shows strong signs of later Christian editing, his account of John the Baptist does not and may be taken as an independent witness.

GRECO-ROMAN RELIGION

In the ancient world, religion was not just one compartmentalized part of life alongside and separable from other parts of life such as family, business, civic life, and diplomacy. Rather, religion enveloped and embraced all aspects of life. Traditional Greek and Roman religion sought the preservation of the status quo in the family, city, and state (or, if the situation was unstable, a return to stability). Participation in the rituals that surrounded family meals, social gatherings, civic festivals, and agricultural rites showed a person's solidarity with the larger society, symbolizing a willingness to do his or her part to secure social and civic harmony, agricultural productivity, and political stability. These were cultic expressions of loyalty and commitment to ever-widening social units: family, city, province, empire.²² It was therefore impossible to be religiously deviant without such deviance having political and social ramifications. The person who *added* mystery cults to participation in traditional religion was not the deviant but rather the person who *shied away* from participation in traditional forms of religion in favor of exclusive participation elsewhere.

Forms of traditional religious expression centered on sacrifices of various kinds. Public sacrifices were first and foremost an inducement to the gods to continue to provide their benefactions of peace, stability, and agricultural prosperity. The way people related to those in power in the human sphere was transferred to the way they related to the divinities, the ultimate powers. Thus the gods were revered as the ultimate patrons, often approached through the priests, who acted as

brokers or mediators.²³ The people therefore sought to show themselves as faithful and worthy recipients of favors, both by acknowledging former benefits with gratitude and by courting the continued favor of the gods. Sacrifices were only secondarily acts of appeasement for offenses.

Acts provides us with several opportunities to see the piety of the Greco-Roman world—and the importance of the gods for civic life. For example, Paul in Athens is shown to describe the city as full of temples and sacred shrines (see fig. 2.20). So pious are the Athenians that they even erected an altar to “an unknown god” (Acts 17:22-23), perhaps to acknowledge benefits received from a deity whose priests had not claimed credit for the timely favors on the god's behalf (hence the source remained unknown) or, more probably, to acknowledge any favors that had been granted from one or more deities not revealed in Greek tradition. In Ephesus, Paul's success among the Ephesians is seen to detract from the worship of Ephesus's patron deity, Artemis (transformed in the East into a mother goddess and goddess of fertility). The city's pride and reputation as well as the economic interests of the silversmith's guild that flourished making sacred souvenirs of the place are all drawn up into what a modern person might regard as an essentially religious conflict (Acts 19:23-41). This episode shows us, rather, the embeddedness of economics and civics in religion in the ancient world.

Families and individuals could also interact with the divine through sacrifice. The libations and offerings of incense and produce made within the home represented the family's connections with the gods of hearth and home (and, in Italy, with the guardian spirits of the ancestors) and continual courting of their favor. Votive offerings were also common in

²²The phenomenon of imperial cult—the worship of the emperors and the goddess Roma Aeterna—has already been discussed (see also fig. 2.22). This was a prominent feature of public religious life in the eastern Mediterranean and one closely connected with the veneration of traditional deities.

²³The Latin word for priest—*pontifex*, or “bridge builder”—is telling in this regard.



Figure 2.20. A well-preserved, monumental Greek temple in Paestum, Italy. Numerous such temples were found in every major city. Sacrifices were performed on altars located in front of the temples, with the worshipers gathered respectfully outside the god's house. (Photo by author)

Greco-Roman religion (as also in ancient Israelite religion). Individuals promised a particular sacrifice or gift in return for some favor sought from a god; paying the vow then became a witness to the benevolence of the deity.

Other religious practices bear witness to the beliefs and attitudes of this period. The fate of individuals and nations was believed to have been written in the stars, with the result that astrology was an important facet of religion. This underlying conviction of determinism also stands behind the reading of omens, divination, and the consultation of oracles—whether at the level of the state inquiring about auspicious times for beginning a war or at the level of individuals inquiring about conception, business ventures, or marriage. At the same time the widespread use of magic suggests that divine forces could be manipulated to do one's own will (rather than always the reverse). Incantations, amulets, and spells were frequently used to catch the affections of another person, harm a rival, or gain vengeance on an offender.

Domestic and traditional forms of religious expression did not satisfy all inhabitants of the

Greco-Roman world. Many sought a more personal connection with a divinity. Many longed for some assurance of deliverance from the powers of fate and of death. Many desired religious experiences that would involve their minds, imaginations, and emotions far more fully than the pious rites of the civic temples. In response to these needs, more exotic and experiential cults took deep root in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. Most of these fall under the category of "mystery religions." Some of these were built around myths indigenous to these regions, for example, the cult of Attis and Cybele (Asia Minor) or the Orphic, Dionysian, and Eleusinian mysteries (formed around traditional Greek divinities and their stories). The cult of Isis (Egypt) and Mithras (Persia), however, also gained immense popularity in the Greek and Roman world.

Common to most of these mystery religions was the promise of sharing in the eternal life of the deity. It is not surprising that a myth of a figure who dies and rises again stands at the core of many of these mysteries, nor that several of the myths originally had their home

in fertility cults (e.g., the myth of Demeter and Kore in the Eleusinian mysteries, or Attis and Cybele in the Asian mysteries). The annual cycle of growth, harvest, death, and replanting mirrored in many ways the individual's cycle of birth, growth, death, and (hope for a) renewal of life beyond death. A person would be initiated into a mystery cult through an elaborate ritual, sometimes through several stages of induction. At each stage the officiants would reveal to the initiate more of the cult myth and its significance for the eternal destiny of the individual. In most cults some ritual was pro-

resurrected Jesus would appeal to people familiar with such mystery cults, and how baptism could develop far beyond a rite of purification to a dying with Christ in the hope of rising with Christ for eternity.

Greco-Roman religion was, on account of its polytheistic nature, tolerant of foreign divinities. Attempts were made to correlate Egyptian, Greek, and Roman deities so that the gods of non-Greek peoples could be identified with known Greek and Roman gods and incorporated into the pantheon. A person could call on whatever god he or she wished as long as a place was made for the other gods. To deny the gods, however, whether in favor of none (like the Epicureans) or in favor of one's own ancestral/tribal divinity alone (like the Jews) was to deny the order of society, or to assert that society's order was somehow perverse (for example, in the charge that it goes after false gods). Such an attitude toward the traditional deities was labeled "atheism" (*atheotēs*) by Greek and Roman authorities and supporters of traditional religion. So seriously did the society view this as a dangerous attitude that it was punishable with death. In 95 CE, near the end of his reign, the emperor Domitian executed several high-ranking Roman citizens on this charge. Dio Cassius connects their fate to their taking up of Jewish practices and beliefs (*Roman History* 67.14.2).

The Christian gospel, therefore, was also very much a sociopolitical proclamation, an aberration, a dissenting voice. Even though it generally called for obedience to political authorities, it nevertheless threatened the sociopolitical order by calling its religious foundations into question as well as by calling it a temporary arrangement awaiting replacement by the order (the "kingdom") of the one and only God. The Christian gospel presented a grave affront to Roma Aeterna and to all who found security and peace under her wings. By withdrawing from all settings where another god would be venerated, the Christians appeared antisocial.



Figure 2.21. A second-century-CE representation of Mithras slaying the bull, the central element of the myth of the mystery cult bearing his name. (*Israel Museum*)

vided so the initiate could identify with or participate in the dying and rebirth of the central figure of the myth (e.g., Attis or Osiris). The most famous of these rites belonged to the cult of Mithras (see fig. 2.21), identified with the sun god Helios (whose rhythm of setting and rising again well suits the cult's goals), and was called the *taurobolium*. The initiate entered a pit over which was placed a slatted roof. A bull was slaughtered on the roof, and the initiate was ritually purified by the downpour of blood, partaking of the bull's strength and vitality. It is easy to see how the gospel of the crucified and

They neither participated (any longer) in the festivals nor came out for supper to their non-Christian friends' homes or accepted invitations to parties at the idol's table. This led to suspicion and antipathy on the part of those whose company was spurned.

Religious activity was not the vehicle for moral education in the Greco-Roman world (as it is so prominently in the modern world). There were a number of pollution taboos connected with entering sacred shrines, for example the avoidance of murder or incest prior to entering a sanctuary. These fell far short, however, of connecting personal morality with religious behavior. Moreover, these pollution taboos included many morally neutral acts (e.g., childbirth, contact with a corpse). One telling example of the lack of concern with personal morality is the prohibition of intercourse with one's spouse for one day before coming to the temple, or intercourse with someone other than one's spouse for three days. The latter is seen as more polluting, but the concern of the taboo is not to reinforce sexual morality generally—such as a general prohibition of extramarital intercourse would. Sexual morality and other areas of conduct were mandated not by religion but by practical and social deterrence.²⁴ The sad fact of infanticide in the Greco-Roman world (usually by exposing unwanted children) attests to the absence of a strong basis for morality, such as the inviolable sanctity of human life that the Judeo-Christian tradition brought to the Greco-Roman world and eventually to Roman legislation after Constantine.

GRECO-ROMAN PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS

It was left to philosophers and families to draw out the implications of the will of the gods for personal morality and to inculcate moral behavior. The philosophers would often seek to derive moral principles from the gods, urging

²⁴A. A. Bell Jr., *Exploring the New Testament World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 222-23.



Figure 2.22. The interior of the sacred precincts of Vespasian in the forum of Pompeii. A small altar sits before the small temple that housed the cult image of the emperor. The altar features a typical sacrificial scene involving a tripod bearing fire, over which incense, grain, or wine is being offered by the priest, and a bull being prepared for sacrifice. (Photos by author)

people to imitate the gods, but in doing so they had to be selective in the points of imitation. Seneca, for example, frequently urged those who would give benefactions to others to imitate the gods, who give good gifts to both the good and the bad because it is in their nature to be generous, not because they are looking for a return on their investment.²⁵ However, it would not do to imitate the gods' sexual

²⁵See Seneca, *Ben.* 1.1.9; 3.15.4; 4.26.1; 4.28.1.

exploits, as related in Homer and ancient myth. For such stories philosophers invented the allegorical method of interpretation, turning a story of a god's descent to have illicit intercourse with a mortal, for example, into a story about the superior faculty of reason mastering the inferior drives of the body (or sometimes into a warning about the dangers of the reverse, when the passions overcome the mind, with monstrous consequences).

Greco-Roman philosophy should not, therefore, be viewed as distinct from religion; most often it took religion as the starting point for (or at least reinforcement of) the way of life

promoted by the philosopher. Greco-Roman philosophy combined a concern for metaphysics and physics (inquiries into the ultimate nature of the reality humans inhabit) with a concern for ethics (the proper manner in which to live in this reality). The latter especially takes us into points of contact with the early Christian movement, whose leaders employed many topics, argumentative strategies, and forms found in Greco-Roman ethics to promote the distinctive way of life of the Christian "philosophy."

Platonism. Plato, a disciple of Socrates and founder of an academy in Athens (see fig. 2.23),



Figure 2.23. A mosaic from a villa in Pompeii depicting Plato's Academy. (Naples Archaeological Museum)

left a strong mark on the ancient world with his teaching about the true nature of reality. He held that all visible, material objects were the shadows and copies of pure, invisible, ideal forms. For example, there is an endless variety of tables, but all are recognized as tables because there exists the ideal form of “table,” which the mind apprehends apart from the senses. For Plato it was the ideal form that was truly real and eternal. Plato’s thought exercised a strong influence on Jewish thought as the latter came into increasing contact with the Greek world in the process of Hellenization. The writings of Philo provide perhaps the high-water mark of this tide of influence, but the influence is apparent also in the Wisdom of Solomon and the concept of a heavenly temple, the ideal, immaterial form that provided the model for the earthly temple (Wis 9:8; see also Heb 8:1-5).

In Jewish thinking Plato’s essentially timeless view of reality is combined with spatial and historical dimensions. The visible, earthly realm is viewed as temporary; the invisible, heavenly realm is eternal. The author of 4 Maccabees, the author of Hebrews, and Paul share this mindset, allowing them to draw the conclusion that only the invisible is worth striving for and is worth any price in terms of temporary, visible realities.²⁶

Plato’s works also contributed greatly to the formation of ethics, as did the works of Plato’s most celebrated student, Aristotle. It is in this literature that the cardinal virtues of the Greek world are discussed, refined, and promoted. Basic Platonic definitions of virtues, such as justice entailing giving to each what is due him or her and piety entailing justice toward the gods, have shaped Greek culture to such a degree that their imprint can be seen across a wide spectrum of literature from all Hellenized cultures, including the texts of the New Testament (Mk 12:17; Rom 13:7). Platonic

commonplaces such as the superiority of suffering unjustly (suffering even though one has not committed some crime so as to deserve it) to suffering justly, or the idea that those who injure the innocent really harm themselves, also emerge in Jewish and Christian literature (see, for example, 4 Macc 9:7-9; 1 Pet 3:17; 4:14-16). The definition of courage as the endurance of hardship in the quest for a greater good became a staple of Jewish and Christian literature, where persevering in the group’s way of life often involves hardship (see 2 Cor 4:16-18; Heb 12:2).

Stoicism. The Stoics (see fig. 2.24) were especially concerned with discovering the means to live a meaningful, virtuous life. Stoicism appears to have developed in response to an awareness of human powerlessness in the face of history, death, and the slings and arrows of fate and other people. The Stoic way of life sought to attain, therefore, (1) self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), such that contentment was found mainly in a person’s moral character; (2) freedom, such that one’s moral faculty could operate without constraint and one’s knowledge of what was virtuous or advantageous remained untainted by popular opinion; and (3) apathy, in the sense of being undisturbed and unmoved by the violent movements of the lower nature (the *pathē*—the emotions, desires, and inclinations).

Stoics divided experience into two categories. “Some things are under our control,” such as desire or moral virtue, while “other things are not under our control,” such as reputation, wealth, and physical well-being (Epictetus, *Ench.* 1). The wise person (the ideal Stoic) placed no value on the things not under his or her control and sought the good solely in cultivating the things properly his or her own—the things that nothing external could affect. This was the essential path to freedom and self-sufficiency. Paul has drunk deeply of this ethos, with a Christian twist: whatever condition

²⁶See 4 Macc 15:2-3, 8, 26-28; 2 Cor 4:16-18; Heb 8:1-5; 11:16; 13:14.



Figure 2.24. The reconstructed Stoa of Attalus in the Athenian agora. Stoics were so named because their founder, Zeno of Citium, expounded his teachings in a similar colonnade in the agora known as the Stoa Poikilē (the Painted Colonnade). (Photo by author)

befell his body or reputation, all that really mattered to him was gaining Christ and being faithful to God. This enabled Paul, however, to remain essentially free, as the Stoic would define freedom. No external necessity or compulsion could deter him from acting in accordance with his own moral purpose.

A common topic for Stoics was the proper hierarchy within the human being, such that the individual was led by reason and not thrown off the moral course by the pull of the passions. The passions are all those forces (e.g., fear, lust, pleasure, and pain) that can pervert or derail a person's commitment to virtue. They include emotions, yearnings, and physical sensations. Where the passions exercised influence,

virtue and the self-respect that accompanies it were threatened. The Stoics therefore aimed at the eradication of the passions, although the more moderate voices would call only for the mastery or moderation of the passions. It was in this form that the topic entered the Jewish thought world, since God had planted the passions and inclinations within the human being. What was desired, then, was the proper subordination of the passions to reason, a goal effected for the Jewish philosopher through diligent following of the Torah (see 4 Macc 1:1–3:18; Let. Aris. 221–227; Philo, *Leg.* 3.116–117). This in turn became an important background to Paul and other early Christian leaders for whom the mastery of “the passions

and desires of the flesh” remains an essential goal (see Gal 5:16-25; Titus 2:12; 3:3; Jas 1:14-15; 1 Pet 2:11; 4:1-3). For Paul, however, this goal is achieved by following neither the moral faculty nor the Jewish law but the Holy Spirit.

The Stoics sought to do all things “according to Nature,” meaning, according to the purpose and goal for which something exists. Humans, as creatures gifted with reason, are meant to live as reason dictates, not as their baser passions dictate. Cooperation among human beings is more natural and beneficial than hindering one another. The unity of humanity is more natural and beneficial than divisions according to nationality or ethnicity. Just as God permeates the universe with order, so the life of the individual is to be permeated with rational order. There is a transformation of this in Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians to abstain from fornication because “the body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord” (1 Cor 6:13 RSV). Sin is against the nature of things in that it violates the purpose and goal of human life, which is properly directed to the Lord, holiness, and divine service.

This perception of the highest “law of nature” led to a critique of ethnic laws, customs, and the unwritten laws of public opinion. For Stoics all that was required was to live according to reason and to pursue virtue. It was one form of slavery to be concerned with the latest fashion trends. It was another form of slavery to be concerned with traditions and rules that did not proceed from reason but held force only through long use among a given people. This was an unnecessary burden and a dangerous distraction from the real business of being human. Again, Paul drinks deep from this well. The law of God and the law of Moses are no longer the same: circumcision and dietary rules can be ignored, even rejected, for the universal law of God speaks to Gentiles and Jews alike without giving privilege to one ethnic group. That higher law, once again, bears fruit in human lives by means of submission to the Spirit of God.

Cynics. The Cynics, whose origins are to be traced to Diogenes of Sinope (a contemporary of Plato), were an intentionally odd lot. They sought freedom from both convention and compulsion. They often deliberately violated the norms of decent people, showing by their lives that the codes and norms that regulated the actions and pursuits of the majority were not absolutes; they were not even necessary and were the equivalent of slavery. Cynics were known for complete frankness of speech, even an obnoxious style of reviling people for their dependence on reputation or property or for their slavery to human conventions. Cynics especially sought to attain freedom from the bondage of public opinion, often pursuing a shameless way of life as an antidote to that poison.

In pure Cynic teaching, the goal was simplicity of life—to be dependent on as few things as possible. Thus many Cynics were homeless and without goods except perhaps for a cloak, a walking stick, and a small sack for the absolute bare minimum of essentials (a cup, a knife, the food for the day). For them nothing natural was shameful. They were known, for example, for copulating, defecating, or urinating in quite public places. Like the Stoics they also believed that virtue was the only prerequisite for true happiness; any “happiness” that depended on external circumstances was perilously insecure. The Cynic lifestyle attracted many would-be philosophers—people bored with life and seeking the name of a philosopher without the discipline required. It was easy to don the right outfit, to revile people in the marketplace, and to flout time-honored customs. Such people were satirized by Lucian, for example, as people who just couldn’t make an honest living and so turned to pseudo-philosophy, setting themselves up as teachers and feeding on the gullible masses. It was important to Paul that he not be seen as such a huckster (2 Cor 2:17). Jesus appears to have instructed his disciples to avoid the classic

Cynic garb of a double tunic, staff, and knapsack, and to wear sandals, whereas the Cynics tended to go barefoot (Mk 6:7-9).

Epicureans. Stoics and Epicureans appear together as part of Paul's audience on Mars Hill (the Areopagus) in Athens in Acts 17:18. The Epicurean school exercised a palpable influence on the first-century world and was often viewed by the dominant culture in the same way as Christians. That two so very different groups could achieve the same reputation is instructive, for it highlights even more clearly the boundaries of what was acceptable in the Greco-Roman world and how Christians stepped over the line.

Epicurus taught, in complete opposition to Plato, that reality is completely material. The gods may indeed exist, but in a state of absolute imperturbability (*ataraxia*, the Epicurean ideal). Therefore the gods take no thought for human activity, neither rewarding nor punishing, for they are completely untroubled by the activity of mortals. Death is merely the dissolution of the atoms (Epicurus's term) that constitute our whole being. No part of a human being survives death, and therefore there is no need to be anxious about the other side of death. Epicurus sought to free people, as he saw it, from fear of the gods and death, focusing them on what was truly their concern—a pleasant life in this world, free from pain, anxiety, and frustration.

Epicurus sought to help people experience pleasure and to facilitate their endurance of necessary pain. Pleasure is not to be understood hedonistically here, for Epicurus himself taught that a person cannot live pleasantly without also being committed to just, prudent, and honorable actions. Overindulgence in any pleasure inevitably led to pain, and so moderation was the mark of the wise person. Mental pleasure was superior to physical pleasure, and the highest pleasure of all was friendship. In order to secure and perpetuate this highest

pleasure Epicureans often withdrew from public life (the source of much perturbation) and lived a communal existence, even holding all property in common, practicing the idea of friendship commended by Aristotle. A catchy little quatrain encapsulates the distinctive Epicurean ethos:

Nothing to fear in God,
Nothing to feel in death;
Good is easily enjoyed,
Pain is easily endured.²⁷

Outsiders reacted with suspicion to Epicureans.²⁸ Their view of the gods made prayer and sacrifice meaningless activities, and so this philosophy was tantamount to atheism. Gods who did not care were as good as gods who were not there. The tendency to withdraw from public life and form tight-knit, exclusive communities appeared to be a betrayal of civic unity and a renunciation of civic duty. Thus they generally were not looked well on for the same two reasons that Christians and Jews became the brunt of popular hatred: denial of the gods and withdrawal from investment in the welfare of the whole community. Fortunately for the Epicureans they tended to be wealthy and well-connected, and so did not come under fire as did their less well-connected counterparts.

JEW IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

By the first century CE many more Jews lived outside Palestine than within its borders.²⁹ This phenomenon, known as the Diaspora (the Greek word for “dispersal”), traces its roots to the conquest of Israel's northern kingdom by

²⁷Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 204-5.

²⁸See especially the attacks of Plutarch on Epicureanism in the essays *That Epicurus Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* and *Reply to Colotes*.

²⁹See further David A. deSilva, “Jews in the Diaspora,” in *The World of the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee M. McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 272-90, and the annotated bibliography there (288-90).

the Assyrians in 721 BCE and of Judea by the Babylonians, culminating in the destruction of the temple, in 587 BCE. Massive, forced relocations of the Jewish population accompanied these conquests. In connection with the Babylonian advance on Judea, moreover, a large number of Jews voluntarily relocated to Egypt in order to flee the impending disaster. While some of the Jews opted to return to their homeland when it became safe and advantageous to do so, many more chose to remain in the land of their “exile,” where they had put down roots. The Jewish communities in Babylon and Egypt remained the strongest and most populous Diaspora communities through the first century CE.

Further actions of Gentile leaders in Palestine resulted in more deportations. When Ptolemy I gained control of Palestine, he took tens of thousands of Jews to Egypt as slaves or conscripts for his armies. Freed by Ptolemy’s son, most of the Jewish deportees nevertheless continued to live in Egypt as soldiers or farmers. After Antiochus III wrested control of Palestine from the Ptolemies in 198 BCE, he conscripted thousands of Jews to serve as soldiers in Syria and Asia Minor. Pompey the Great took thousands of Jews back to Rome as captives in 63 BCE, augmenting an already significant Jewish presence in Rome. During these centuries many Jews also migrated voluntarily, seeking the opportunities afforded by the great cities of the Hellenistic world, or working as merchants and seafarers along the trade routes that connected Palestine to the rest of the world. Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Rome itself became major centers of the Diaspora. By the first century, it could be said that “they have reached every town, and it is hard to find a place in the world whither this race has not penetrated” (Strabo, as quoted in Josephus, *Ant.* 14.115).

The roots of the “dispersal” were located in the covenant curses of Deuteronomy and in an understanding of the Assyrian and Babylonian

invasions and their aftermaths as punishment for Israel’s infidelity to the covenant (Lev 26:33; Deut 28:64; Bar 2:13-14, 29; 3:8, 10; Tob 14:4). Jews, particularly in Judea, could look on diaspora as a calamity crying for remedy and often looked forward to the regathering of the “exiles” of Israel in God’s future interventions on behalf of God’s people (Deut 30:3; Bar 4:36-37; 5:5-6; Sir 36:13, 16; Tob 13:5; 14:5; Pss. Sol. 8.28; 11.1-4; 17.44). Jews actually living in diaspora, however, might view their situation very differently. Philo of Alexandria celebrates diaspora as Jerusalem’s colonization of the known world—a stunning perspective for the member of a thoroughly colonized people to take (see Philo, *Legat.* 281-282). Josephus regards it as the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham to make his descendants like the sand by the sea or the stars in the sky (*Ant.* 4.114-116). Nevertheless, Diaspora Jews tended to hold Israel in special regard as their motherland, remaining connected practically through pilgrimages and the collection of the temple tax (if not actual repatriation, though some clearly did; see Acts 6:9), or simply ideologically through identification of Jerusalem as their “metropolis” (“mother city”; Philo, *Flacc.* 45-46).

Jews, especially those in the Diaspora, were faced with many challenges. They lived as a minority group in the midst of and in daily proximity to the members of a dominant, Gentile culture—one that frequently made the Jew who remained aloof from the dominant culture feel inferior or unwelcome. How could a Jew both thrive in a Gentile’s world *and* remain faithful to his or her Jewish heritage and identity? When these goals came into conflict, which would he or she choose? Individual Jews worked out an astounding variety of responses to these challenges.

Some Jews restricted their social life to the Jewish community, avoiding traffic with non-Jews as far as possible. Others, however, enjoyed daily interactions with non-Jews through commerce and even entertainment (e.g.,

through attending the theaters and games). Still others sought to participate fully in the Gentile community, seeking a gymnasium education and even abandoning their distinctive way of life, eliminating all that separated them from their non-Jewish neighbors. Again, some Jews did not even learn the Greek language. More often Jews ably conversed in Greek and were acquainted with the basics of Greco-Roman culture; many took Greek (or Latin) names and showed signs of being influenced by Greco-Roman culture in their own artistic and literary expression. For example, one of the Jewish catacombs in Rome is decorated not only with symbols from the Jerusalem cultic festivals but also with human and animal figures from Greek mythology. Still other Jews attained a high level of facility in Greek composition, literature, philosophy, rhetoric, and ethics. Jews such as Philo of Alexandria, the author of *Wisdom of Solomon*, and Josephus show an astounding degree of Hellenization in terms of their linguistic and cultural fluency. Once again we see that Hellenization was not simply an antithetical alternative to remaining a Jew. Rather, Jews became Hellenized in a variety of ways, to a variety of degrees, to a variety of ends.³⁰

Diaspora Jews committed to preserving their distinctive identity and way of life had several supports for their efforts. To a large extent these supports (both social and ideological) provided ample reinforcement for the minority group, helping millions of Jews resist the centrifugal force of assimilation. The synagogue, the regular gathering of Jews for worship around the reading of their sacred Scriptures according to their ancestral customs, allowed Jews to renew their bonds as a community and remain in touch with the essential elements of their heritage. The rational worship of the one

God in the synagogue served not only to help Jews remain Jews but also attracted their Gentile neighbors to this oriental cult much as other Gentiles were attracted to the worship of the Egyptian Isis or Persian Mithras. The bond of kinship, reinforced wherever Jews were reminded of their common descent from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve patriarchs, helped to foster a sense of solidarity and mutual support in the midst of other peoples (Gentiles) who were not kin. The observance of Torah was a cornerstone for preserving Jewish identity, and a better code for maintaining distinctiveness could not have been devised. Torah's promotion of distinctive practices such as sabbath observance and circumcision set the Jews apart from other people quite visibly and physically. The prohibition against all participation in idolatry kept observant Jews from many places and settings where Gentiles were most at home. The regulations concerning foods and purity, moreover, pushed Jews toward forming their own markets and eating within their own communities (see *Let. Aris.* 139, 142). So effective were these practices in the maintenance of Jewish distinctiveness that every Gentile author indulging in anti-Jewish slander mentions these in particular.

Gentile responses to Jews. Gentiles had ample opportunity to observe Jewish behavior, whether in connection with some Gentile ruler's initiatives in Palestine or in their own cities most anywhere in the eastern Mediterranean. Positively, there were some Gentiles who admired the Jewish way of life. Jewish commitment to monotheism seemed to have much in common with the rational teachings of many philosophical schools concerning the oneness of God. Jewish dietary practices and sexual ethics could be viewed as a form of asceticism, aimed at bringing the passions of the body under the control of reason and developing the virtue of temperance. In many ways, then, Judaism could be seen as another school

³⁰For a fuller discussion of the degrees, areas, and trajectories of Hellenization, see Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 92-101.

of philosophy. Some Gentiles were attracted enough to this way of life to attend synagogue worship and become patrons of the Jewish community through their support of this institution. Some (more often women, who would not need to submit to surgical modification of their anatomy, i.e., circumcision) even went so far as to become full converts. This phenomenon also contributed, however, to the more general animosity felt toward Jews: under the influence of the Jewish philosophy, good Gentiles who *had* honored the traditional gods and *had* participated fully in society began to act impiously toward the gods and avoid many of their former associations.

Negatively, we find many literary monuments to ancient anti-Judaism, usually posed as criticism of Jewish behavior as irreligious or antisocial. These two charges were often connected. Linking the Jews' social behavior with their theology, rhetorician Apollonius Molon of Rhodes (early first century BCE) wrote that "the Jews do not accept people who have other views about God" (quoted in Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.258). Ironically, Jews were often regarded as atheists on account of their denial of the existence of all gods save one. Greeks and Romans understood piety toward the gods as a reflection of loyalty to the city and a marker of reliability. The person who knew how to pay proper respect to the gods would know his or her duty in a civic crisis, would be a reliable partner in business, and would not foment division in the city. The Jews did not participate in the worship of these gods and were thus never free from suspicion and slander. Their devotion to the one God allegedly reflected their concern for the one people, the Jews, and their lack of concern for the public welfare (cf. 3 Macc 3:3-7; Esther 13:4-5 LXX). The connection between acceptance of a city's divinities and participation in civic life emerges rather strikingly in the tense and tumultuous circumstances surrounding the attempts of Jews to gain the right of equal citizenship (*isopoliteia*) with the Greek

citizens of Alexandria, Caesarea, and other Hellenistic cities. In Alexandria, Antioch, and the cities of Ionia the cry of the Greek citizens was "If they are citizens, why do they not worship the same gods as us?" (see Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3.1 §§121-123; 12.3.2 §§125-126).

The other word that surfaces again and again in anti-Jewish polemics is *misoxenia*, or "hatred of foreigners." The dietary laws and restrictions on social intercourse practiced by Jews loyal to Torah, while an effective means of maintaining ethnic identity and cohesion, gave rise to anti-Jewish slander from outsiders. Correctly observing how Jews' dedication to their ancestral customs kept them visibly distinct and separate from other people groups, Hecataeus interpreted these customs and restrictions as misanthropic, xenophobic, and therefore "barbaric"—a backwards resistance to the universalizing and unifying ideals of Hellenism. Diodorus of Sicily (*Bib. Hist.* 34.1-4; 40.3.4), Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.5), Juvenal (*Sat.* 14.100-104), and Apion (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.121) all accuse the Jewish people of supporting their fellow Jews but showing no goodwill to those who are not of their race. The Jews' loyalty and solidarity was often perceived to be not with the larger *polis* but rather with the Jewish community within the city. This was not without exception, and we find evidence in Rome, for example, of Jews who were patrons of civic life and fully part of their city. More often, however, they were viewed by non-Jews in the cities as people with no sense of civic unity (cf. 3 Macc 3:4, 7).

While usually enjoying official grants of toleration,³¹ Jews were nevertheless frequently the objects of the dominant culture's hostility on account of these threatening differences. This could take the form of ridicule and denigration of the Jews' ancestral way of life. It was slandered as a foolish superstition rather than

³¹See Philo, *Legat.* 311-316; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.241-246, 256-261; 16.162-165.

an honorable philosophy. Plutarch, for example, criticizes the strict observance of the sabbath that led Jews to refuse to defend themselves on that day as a “cowardly excuse,” the result of being “fast bound in the toils of superstition as in one great net” (*Superstition* 8 [*Mor.* 169C]). Jewish abstinence from pork (the “most proper type of meat,” according to Plutarch) is the frequent target of contempt, ridicule, and misunderstanding.³² The Jewish author of the Letter of Aristeas also notes the “curiosity” that Gentiles have toward the Jewish law’s distinctions between clean and unclean foods, despite the fact of “creation being one” (Let. Aris. 128-29). While the ethnic, human law of the Jews regards eating pork as a “shameful” thing, nature passes no such judgment on the flesh of this animal. In observing his or her customs the Jew could be charged with injustice against nature, showing ingratitude by spurning its gifts (see 4 Macc 5:8-9).

Anti-Jewish sentiments did not result merely in such philosophical critique or popular ridicule. When authorities were willing to look the other way or were temporarily removed from their jurisdiction, hostility against Jews could take more violent forms. A particularly ghastly episode took place in Alexandria during the rule of Caligula, with anti-Jewish riots resulting in the dispossession of a large percentage of the population, physical assaults on Jews of all ages, genders, and social ranks, and even the brutal lynching of a great many Jews (the story is recounted in Philo, *Flacc.*).

Jewish responses to Gentile critique and hostility. Some Jews responded to their Gentile neighbors’ disdain by dissociating themselves from their Jewish heritage and customs. Wishing to be honored by the Gentile world,

and perhaps to achieve prominence in the Roman administration, some Jews went so far as to adopt the Greek way of life and put the Torah aside completely, adopting the view of them shared by their Gentile neighbors. Philo’s own nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander, apostatized and actually enjoyed a distinguished career in Roman public service as governor of Alexandria and, eventually, procurator of Judea. Such Jews may well have been persuaded by the Stoic critique of ethnic legal codes such as the Torah, namely, that it was the Torah of Moses, a human law like those given by Lycurgus or Zarathustra, and not the divine and absolute law, which was not to be found in any such civil code.³³ Apostates might thus have drawn on this Stoic concept of the law of nature as the one true law and all particular civil or ethnic codes as imperfect, burdensome shadows of it (traces of this argument appear in defenses *against* it in 4 Macc 5:18; Philo, *De vita Mosis* 1.31; *De confusione linguarum* 2).

The majority of Jews, however, remained steadfast to their way of life. Their fidelity was facilitated by the work of Jewish apologists who, far from being convinced by the critics, put their facility in Greek language and culture to use explaining and defending the reasonableness of the Jewish law and way of life. Some Jewish apologists sought to minimize the difference between the Jewish philosophy and Greek philosophy, presenting the Jewish tradition as essentially the same as the dominant culture. Others, however, asserted the supreme value of the Jewish way of life as the path to virtue, promoting it as far superior to any Gentile way of life. The works of Philo, the Letter of Aristeas, and 4 Maccabees all fall under this heading of apologetic, with 4 Maccabees being the most aggressive in its claims for the superiority of the Jewish “philosophy.”

³²Plutarch, *Table-Talk* 5.1 (*Mor.* 669E-F); Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.4.3; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.98-99; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.137. Important literary witness to ancient anti-Judaism include Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 34-35; 40.3-4; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.4-5.5; Strabo, *Geog.* 16.760-761; 3 Macc 3:3-7.

³³E. Bickermann, “The Maccabean Uprising: An Interpretation,” in *The Jewish Expression*, ed. Judah Goldin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 66-86.

Philo, 4 Maccabees, and Letter of Aristeas reinterpret the keeping of the Jewish Torah as the pursuit of virtue. Judaism becomes a philosophy that can hold its ground alongside or surpass any Greco-Roman philosophy. The Torah-observant life is promoted as the best and surest way to fulfill even the dominant cultural ideal of the virtuous person. Greeks organized their ethics around the four cardinal virtues of justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom. Jewish apologists would frequently turn to these topics to show that “one who lives subject to [the Torah] will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good, and courageous” (4 Macc 2:23 NRSV). In the face of Gentile ridicule the Jewish philosopher retorts:

You scoff at our philosophy as though living by it were irrational, but it teaches us self-control, so that we master all pleasures and desires, and it also trains us in courage, so that we endure any suffering willingly; it instructs us in justice, so that in all our dealings we act impartially, and it teaches us piety, so that with proper reverence we worship the only living God. (4 Macc 5:22-24 NRSV)

Such words address Jews who have absorbed the ethos of Hellenistic culture and need to be assured that their ancient ways are valuable in terms of that ethos.³⁴ A Jew in Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, or Caesarea could take such words to heart and know that the opinion so many Gentiles had of him or her was ill-founded: the Torah-driven life is not a barbaric superstition at all but rather a divinely given philosophy that trains its disciples in every virtue.

Apologists also help to translate Judaism into terms that outsiders can begin to appreciate more and more as they engage in discussion or debate with their Jewish neighbors. Indeed, the

philosophers Epictetus and Galen appear to have had respect for the Jewish way of life. While they might still have found it irrational, they could at least begin to appreciate that the Jew’s goal was not so dissimilar from the goals of other philosophical schools.³⁵ To engage in apologetic thus indicates that (1) the insider group has embraced the fundamental values of the society and must now demonstrate that its way of life measures up, and (2) the insider group believes that outsiders may be open to dialogue and that misunderstanding rather than malice lies at the root of Jew-Gentile tensions.

Another available response, however, reflects a more negative view of outsiders. This could take the slightly more constructive form of launching a countercritique of Gentile religion and wisdom, as in the Wisdom of Solomon or Letter of Jeremiah, insulating Jews against attraction to the practices they saw around them by pointing out the folly of idolatry or its very human origins. At the extreme we find indications of Jews completely rejecting and condemning non-Jews. A kind of anti-Gentilism emerges in certain texts as an equally effective insulation against the Gentiles’ censure of the Jewish way of life. For example, the author of 3 Maccabees frequently speaks of Gentiles as godless and depraved in their thinking (3 Macc 4:16; 5:12; 6:4-5, 9, 11). Apocalypses such as 4 Ezra also often take this approach. Gentiles are irredeemable. Their values and their opinions should not matter at all to the Jew since God will destroy them all anyway. This became a more prominent option after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, the suppression of Jewish rebellions in the Diaspora in 115–117 CE, and the final de-Judaizing of Jerusalem after the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–135 CE.³⁶

³⁴The purpose of apologetics is often assumed to be to convince outsiders of the value of the beliefs and practices of a religion or way of life. This may be an occasional side effect, but it is not the primary function. Rather, works of apologetics are primarily written for insiders, sustaining their commitment in the face of critique, ridicule, or contradiction from outside (and from questions and doubts inside).

³⁵See Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.22.4; Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 376.

³⁶See further David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 126-29, 147-55, 234-37, 258-62, 345-51, 400-410.

CHRISTIANS IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

If Jews faced significant pressure from their Gentile neighbors, Christians faced pressure on two fronts. First, the sources record that the Jesus movement stood in tension with the parent body, the Jewish subculture, from the outset. Not only was Jesus' own ministry marked by conflict with other Jewish groups and the eventual and successful termination of his life by the Jewish leaders in conjunction with the Roman authorities, but his Jewish-Christian followers remained vulnerable to the discipline of the Judean authorities in Palestine and the synagogue authorities throughout the Diaspora (see Mt 10:16-39; Jn 15:18-20; 16:1-2; Acts 1-8). Paul is a noteworthy example both of the persecutor of the "deviant" Jews who followed Jesus and of the recipient of community discipline at the hands of synagogue leaders after his encounter with the risen Jesus.³⁷ Paul accuses his rivals who are preaching circumcision in Galatia of being motivated by a desire to escape persecution (disciplinary measures) by the non-Christian Jewish community (Gal 6:12-13). The Christian proclamation about Jesus (which involved the deabsolutizing of the temple and Torah) and, more and more, the tendency for Jewish Christians to loosen their observance of certain regulations for the sake of having table fellowship and worshiping with Gentile Christians, led to strong attempts on the part of non-Christian Jews to "correct" the threatening behavior of their deviant sisters and brothers.

Matters were no better for Gentile Christians. Christianity's commitment to one God and rejection of all other deities led serious Christians to withdraw from participation in the cultic ceremonies that were a part of most political, business, and social enterprises in the Greco-Roman world (see 1 Cor 10:14-22; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; 1 Thess 1:9). As a result Christianity

inherited much of the suspicion and prejudice that arose against Jews in a world where loyalty to the gods was intimately connected with loyalty to ruler, city, authorities, friends, family, and associates. Along with this suspicion came reproach, rumor, and slander, which together made it disgraceful and often dangerous to be associated with the name "Christian" (an attested first-century designation for members of this group, as in Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16). The sources bear ample witness to the ways unofficial persecution and other attempts at deviancy control were used in an attempt to "rehabilitate" Christians (see 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14-3:5; 1 Pet 4:12-19).

Like Jews, Christians were prey to the charge of atheism and the censure of their religion. Tacitus speaks of Christianity as a "deadly superstition" (*Ann.* 15.44). Pliny the Younger calls Christian beliefs a "depraved and fanciful superstition" (*Ep.* 10.96). Christianity was regarded as a cult of foreign origin that did not support traditional values and social bonds, promoting rather the decay of society and erosion of its central values. The emergence of the group in Rome is regarded by Tacitus as just one more example of "things horrible or shameful" from around the world breaking out in the imperial capital.

Since avoiding all participation in idolatry meant withdrawal from many domestic, private, and public activities, Christians also inherited the charge of misanthropy, of abandoning their fellow citizens and their former friends and associates. Because of the economic and political disadvantages of such withdrawal, not to mention the suspicion and dislike it aroused, some Christians sought to rationalize continued participation in idolatry, which would allow them to maintain strategic relationships with important non-Christians. Christian leaders consistently countered this tendency, seeking to preserve the distinctive character and witness of the group. Their neighbors responded with ridicule, insult,

³⁷For the former, see Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-2; 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6; for the latter, see 2 Cor 11:24; Gal 5:11.

boycott, even physical abuse. Writing about the one confirmed imperially sanctioned persecution of Christians in Rome under Nero, Tacitus attributes the real cause for hounding out and punishing the Christians not to the genuine suspicion of arson but to *odium humani generis*, “the hatred of the human race.” The celebrated Latin phrase contains an ambiguity: did the human race hate the Christians, or were the Christians seen to hate the human race? It must be both at once. The tendency of Christian Gentiles, formerly seen to be loyal, pious members of the empire, to withdraw from associating with outsiders and their idols fueled the outsiders’ tendency to despise the Christians in return.

The Christians were further stigmatized as immoral criminals given to barbarous atrocities. Tacitus speaks of the Christians as a class of people “loathed for their vices,” as if these were well and widely known. Pliny the Younger, in his famous letter to Emperor Trajan concerning the legal handling of those denounced as “Christians” (110–111 CE), shows surprise that no evidence can be found for the crimes of which Christians were commonly accused. Suspicion of subversive activity in general led to suspicion of specific abominations. In the writings of second-century detractors Christian rituals were associated with infanticide, orgies, cannibalism, and oaths committing the members to political subversion.

While Christianity was recognized as a form of Judaism, its novelty (and therefore dubiousness) was also readily apparent to outsiders. That Christianity’s leader was (somewhat recently) shamefully executed as a criminal under a duly appointed Roman governor became well known, and Christians had to answer this readily available disqualification of their message. Christians thus inherited the basic prejudices and criticisms leveled at Jews by the less-enlightened majority of the Greco-Roman world, with one important distinction. Jews had always been given, as it were, to anti-

Roman values, but their way of life was ancient and enjoyed the official protection of imperial policy. Christianity, however, made formerly reliable Gentiles unreliable and subversive: it eroded the constituency of traditional Greco-Roman cults and created a new, exclusivist group. Toward the end of the first century it became increasingly apparent that the Jewish people did not claim this offshoot as their own. This made Christians increasingly vulnerable as they entered the second century.

Non-Christians’ ridicule and abuse was chiefly calculated to turn deviant Christians back to their proper place in the society, to shame them into returning to the values of piety, loyalty, and civic unity they had abandoned. Christian communities had to respond in a variety of ways. First, we find in the pages of the New Testament a great deal of attention being given to making the *ekklēsia*, the assembly of believers, a resource for strong, positive reinforcement of the individual’s attachment to the group and commitment to the new way of life. If the individual lost his or her roots in the Gentile society, those roots would be recovered in the family of God; if the individual lost honor and “place” in the Gentile society, these would be recovered in the esteem bestowed by the Christian community and the love and support experienced therein.

Second, Christian leaders sustained the commitment of believers by explaining the nature of the dishonor they now experienced as a small price for the greater honor they had before God, the honor that would be manifested on the day of Christ’s return. The pattern of Christ’s own life became increasingly important for this task, as portrayed in the Gospels and texts such as the letter to the Hebrews.

Third, Christian leaders sought increasingly to demonstrate that commitment to Christ did not mean subversion of the Roman order. Obedience to authorities (see Rom 13:1-7) and the careful avoidance of any crime (see 1 Pet 4:14-16) would, it was hoped, show the outsiders that

their suspicion and fear were unfounded. An alternative response, however, was to launch a counterattack such as we find in Revelation. In the Christian apocalypse Greco-Roman religions (both traditional cults and the imperial cult) are denounced as partnership with the primal source of chaos (Satan), and the Roman

political and economic system is symbolized as a whore, certainly not the divine Roma Aeterna. The constant was the need to maintain Christian identity and commitment in an unsupportive society; the variable was whether this would be done in a spirit of apologetics or polemics.

FOR FURTHER READING

Students desiring to grow in their appreciation of the message of the New Testament will intentionally read more comprehensive treatments of the first-century environment and will also read broadly in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish literature. The following are four excellent resources for the next leg of the journey:

- Bell, Albert A., Jr. *Exploring the New Testament World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998. Smaller than the others, this book provides a very readable and reliable guide to the same body of material. The topical bibliographies at the end of each chapter are extensive and invaluable.
- Evans, Craig A. *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. An extremely valuable bibliographic guide to the major literary corpora relevant to the New Testament environment.
- Evans, Craig A., and Stanley E. Porter, eds. *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. This 1,300-page resource contains approximately three hundred articles contributed by more than 150 scholars on the history, politics, religion, philosophy, literature (especially valuable are the articles on individual texts), economics, social institutions, and the cultural environment of Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, each with an up-to-date and thorough bibliography for further study. No more complete single-volume guide to early Christian backgrounds exists.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. This thorough and well-illustrated volume is the standard textbook on the subject and is written by an acknowledged authority. Every section concludes with a helpful bibliography of both primary (i.e., ancient) and secondary (i.e., scholarly) texts for more in-depth investigation.

These four resources offer comprehensive bibliographies. The following list offers a representative sample of other works students may find helpful to consult on particular aspects of the political history and sociocultural environment of early Christianity:

- Barclay, John M. G. *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.
- Berlin, Andrea M., and J. Andrew Overman, eds. *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Bruce, F. F. *New Testament History*. New York: Doubleday, 1971.
- Carter, Warren. *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006.
- Cohen, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Collins, John J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Collins, John J., and Daniel C. Harlow, eds. *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

- Davies, W. D., Louis Finkelstein, William Horbury, John Sturdy, and Steven T. Katz, eds. *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. 4 vols. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984–2006.
- deSilva, David A. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- . *Introducing the Apocrypha: Its Message, Context, and Significance*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018 (1st ed., 2002).
- . *The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James, and Jude: What Earliest Christianity Learned from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Feldman, Louis H. *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Feldman, Louis H., James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds. *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*. 3 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013.
- Grabbe, Lester L. *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*. 2 vols. New York: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Green, Joel B., and Lee M. McDonald, eds. *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Gruen, Erich S. *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Helyer, Larry R. *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Jeffers, James S. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Johnson, Luke T. *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009. Esp. pages 1-171.
- Klauck, Hans-Josef. *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.
- Kugel, James. *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Levine, Lee. *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period, 538 B.C.E.–70 C.E.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002.
- Meeks, Wayne A. *The Moral World of the First Christians*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.
- Newsome, James D. *Greeks, Romans, Jews: Currents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.
- Nickelsburg, George. *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- Price, Simon R. F. *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Richardson, Peter. *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.
- Sanders, Ed P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E.* Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.
- Schiffman, Lawrence H. *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*. ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian; A Study in Political Relations*. Leiden: Brill, 1976.
- Stone, Michael E., ed. *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
- Tcherikover, Victor. *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959.
- VanderKam, James. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Vermès, Géza. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. 7th ed. London: Penguin, 2011.
- Wilken, Robert. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984.

One of the best ways to enter into the world of the New Testament is to read other texts written from that period and before. There are many voices that still speak to us from the Greek and Roman periods, affording us important firsthand information about the ancient world. I usually direct my own students who want further exposure to the history, philosophy, ethics, and piety of the intertestamental and New Testament periods first to the following:

Greek and Latin authors.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. London: Penguin, 1955. This is a foundational book on the Greco-Roman conception of virtue and vice, especially as conceived within specific relationships (e.g., family, friendship, civic relationships).

(Pseudo-)Isocrates. *Ad Demonicum* and *Ad Nicoclem*. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928. These are collections of short pieces of advice, providing a pleasant introduction to the aims, ambitions, values, and practices of a Greek citizen.

Virgil. *Aeneid*. Available in numerous prose and poetic translations. This is the foundational myth of the Augustan Age and an excellent sourcebook in Roman imperial ideology and the Roman ethos.

Tacitus. *The Annals of Imperial Rome* and *The Histories*. London: Penguin, 1971, 1986. Tacitus is the primary source for historical information for the reigns of Augustus through the accession of Vespasian.

Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1957. Though regarded as less reliable than Tacitus, Suetonius remains a crucial source for the history of the Roman Empire from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

Pliny the Younger. *Letters*. 2 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pliny's collection of letters gives us a firsthand witness into the life of a successful Roman senator and the kinds of domestic and public situations and issues a Roman would face. *Letters* 10.95–96 contain the most important early evidence for how imperial Rome viewed and persecuted Christians at the start of the second century.

Seneca. *Moral Essays*. 3 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928–1935.

Epictetus. *Discourses and Enchiridion*. 2 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925, 1928.

Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. 2 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925.

Plutarch. *Moralia*. 15 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927–1976. Selected essays are also available. See Plutarch, *Essays* (London: Penguin, 1992); and Plutarch, *Selected Essays and Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

These last four authors provide important witnesses to the philosophical tradition of the classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, offering many points of contact with, and greatly illuminating, early Christian philosophy and ethics. Plutarch, in addition, writes across a broad range of topics, providing important and accessible windows into the New Testament environment. For example, his essay *On Inoffensive Self Praise* is essential reading for understanding how and why Paul writes about himself so much; his essay *On Fraternal Affection* expounds the ethics of brotherhood and sisterhood, illuminating what early Christian leaders were striving for as they applied these labels to Christians; his essay *On the Destiny of Rome* is a classic source on Roman imperial ideology.

Jewish authors.

The Old Testament Apocrypha (the NRSV, ESV, and CEB translations are readily available as part of study Bibles or ecumenical Bibles). Arguably the most important collection of texts to read after the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. See sidebar “The Old Testament Apocrypha” earlier in this chapter.

Select Old Testament pseudepigrapha (1 Enoch, Jubilees, Epistle of Aristeas, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Psalms of Solomon, 2 Baruch), available in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth,

2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), and H. F. D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984). Many of these texts have something of great value to offer in terms of the development of Old Testament traditions in the Second Temple period or beyond (developments picked up by New Testament authors), reflections on ethics prior to the time of Jesus, tensions within Israel and between Israel and foreign powers, the way Hellenistic- and Roman-period Jews made sense of their peculiar laws in terms of Greek philosophical and ethical values, and so forth.

Select Dead Sea Scrolls (see especially Community Rule, Damascus Document, Thanksgiving Scroll, and the commentaries on Habakkuk, Nahum, and the Psalms), available in Géza Vermès, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 7th ed. (New York: Penguin, 2012). This is literature arising within, and providing firsthand evidence about, an important early Jewish sect. The combination of an awareness of grace and election with an absolute diligence in regard to doing the works of the law seen in these texts has provided a stunning counterpoint in Pauline studies; they are also important witnesses to apocalypticism, biblical interpretation, and a host of other topics ancillary to Bible study. (See sidebar “The Dead Sea Scrolls” earlier in this chapter.)

Qumran biblical manuscripts, available in translation in M. Abegg Jr., P. Flint, and E. Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999). An excellent translated collection of actual biblical manuscripts as they existed in 68 CE and before, often very instructive to compare with Old Testament and apocryphal texts as we have them today in our modern translations.

Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. 6 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–1965, especially books 12–20. Written at the end of the first century, this remains an important history of the intertestamental and New Testament periods (up to the first Jewish Revolt). The earlier books are largely a retelling of the biblical narrative from Genesis through 2 Kings, but with some interesting additions and divergences that provide windows into how the biblical stories were being expanded and shaped by the first century (see also Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Apocalypse of Abraham, and other pseudepigrapha for more examples of the “rewritten Bible”).

Josephus. *The Jewish War*. London: Penguin, 1970. The firsthand history of the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE, its antecedents (going back to the reign of Herod), and its aftermath (through the stunning story of Masada, captured in 73 CE).

Josephus. *Against Apion*. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926. A work of apologetics showing what kind of prejudice existed against Jews in the Second Temple period and how these prejudices and calumnies were answered.

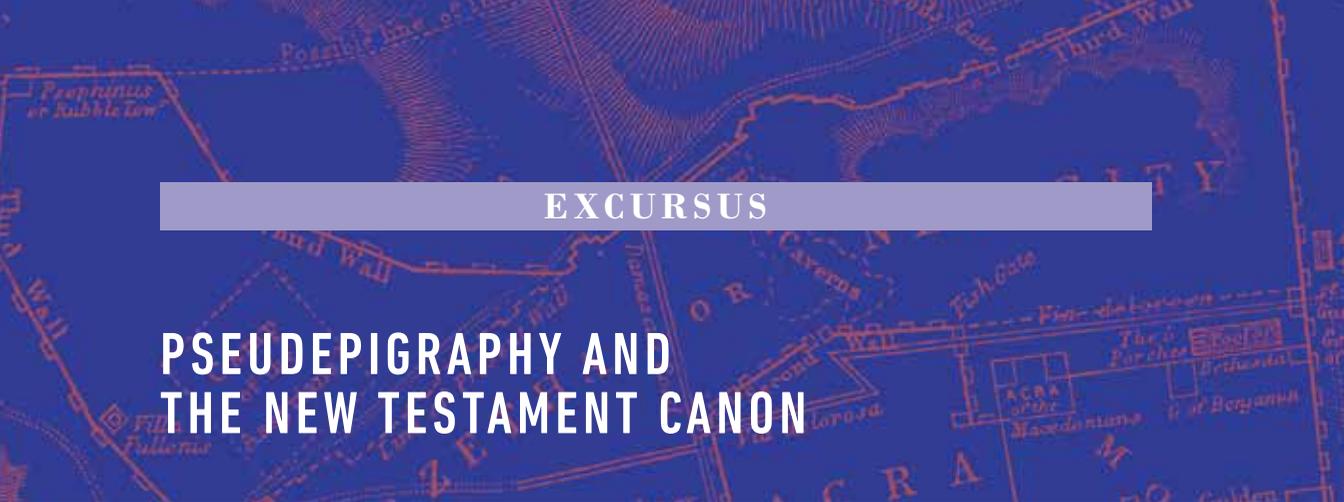
Philo. *In Flaccum (Against Flaccus)* and *Quod Omnis Prober Liber Sit (That Every Good Person Is Free)*. In *The Works of Philo*, ed. C. D. Yonge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993. Philo’s work in general is a testimony to how Greek philosophy, rhetoric, and hermeneutics could be put in the service of the Jewish way of life. *Against Flaccus* is a stirring account of the kind of unofficial, local pogrom that could flare up against the Jewish people; in *That Every Good Person Is Free* we find a common, philosophical definition of true slavery and freedom (being mastered by vice over against living virtuously).

Pirke Aboth (*Sayings of the Fathers*). Available in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles. Oxford: Clarendon, 1913. The most accessible tractate of the Mishnah, this collection of sayings gives a fine introduction to the values and ethos of early rabbinic Judaism.

Also helpful are the collections and selections from primary sources gathered in the following books:

Barrett, C. K. *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*. Rev. ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

Feldman, Louis H., and Meyer Reinhold, eds. *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.



EXCURSUS

PSEUDEPIGRAPHY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

PSEUDEPIGRAPHY refers to the practice of writing in the name of another person, ascribing one's own work to another. This was a fairly common practice in antiquity. As a rule Jewish apocalypses and testaments do not bear the name of their actual author but the name of a noteworthy figure from Israel's distant, sacred history to whom the work is attributed. Thus we have the Apocalypse of Abraham, written in the first person from the perspective of Abraham, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, each written as if taken down in dictation from Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and the rest. There are dozens of other works in which the text gives the explicit impression of having been written by someone other than its real author (1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, to name but a few). The practice is also well-known to Greeks and Romans. Early Christians—certainly throughout the second through fourth centuries and beyond—produced a host of pseudepigraphical literature, written in the name of a known apostle (such as the Apocalypse of Paul, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Apocryphon of John, the Correspondence of Paul and Seneca, and the like). While many of these represent what came to be classified as deviant or heretical interpretations of Christianity, some pseudepigraphical works could also be quite in line with emerging orthodoxy (e.g., the Epistle of Barnabas).

This practice naturally led scholars to consider whether some of the New Testament books were written pseudonymously. In current schol-

arship the possibility of pseudonymity is usually raised in connection with 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, James, 1–2 Peter, and Jude. This is a wholly different question from that of the authorship of the four Gospels, Acts, Hebrews, and 1–3 John, all of which are *anonymous*. When presented with a letter claiming to be from Paul but reflecting a writing style or theology discernibly different from the style or theology reflected in letters whose attribution to Paul is not disputed (especially the cardinal four: Romans, Galatians, and 1–2 Corinthians), the possibility that the letter was written by someone else in Paul's name is often thought to resolve these inconsistencies. Or where the situation and issues in a letter seem to reflect a later period in the development of the Christian movement than would have been possible during the purported author's lifetime, the possibility of pseudepigraphy again emerges as an expedient explanation.

Other (mostly conservative) scholars dispute the propriety of speaking of New Testament pseudepigraphy at all. Some oppose it on principle, claiming that the concept of pseudepigraphy is incompatible with a doctrine of Scripture that teaches that claims to authorship in the texts need to be "received as truth from God," all the more as apostolic authorship guarantees the inspiration and reliability of the individual books.¹ To such scholars

¹J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 184.

it appears ethically problematic for an author to exhort his readers to put away all deceit and to speak the truth to fellow Christians while pretending to write as the apostle Paul or Peter. The ethical problems rule pseudepigraphy out of court in principle.² Those, however, who are willing to grant that “the inspiration of the Scriptures is consistent with any kind of form of literary composition that was in keeping with the character and habits of the speaker or writer” would be willing also to include pseudonymous composition under this heading, if it could be shown that this was in fact an established and *accepted* convention.³

Opponents of canonical pseudepigraphy also cite the weighty evidence from the first through the fourth century suggesting that early Christians themselves rejected pseudepigraphical writings in principle, allowing no *known* pseudepigraphon to function authoritatively in the church (and thus excluding them from the emerging canon). Paul himself (or perhaps, most ironically, the pseudonymous author of 2 Thessalonians!) warns the church against letters written in Paul’s name but not bearing genuine apostolic teaching (2 Thess 2:2). The Muratorian Canon makes note of an Epistle to the Laodiceans and an Epistle to the Alexandrians, forged in Paul’s name by supporters of Marcion, and it affirms the Great Church’s rejection of these texts. The Acts of Paul and Thecla, accepted as authentic in some parts of the church, was written pseudonymously by a second-century bishop out of sincere motives and admiration for the apostle, but when he confessed the document’s origins, he was removed from his ecclesiastical position (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17).⁴

This raises a number of important questions about the practice of pseudepigraphy as it relates to New Testament texts.

What conclusions should we draw from the decisions made by the early church concerning documents known or discovered to be pseudepigraphic? In all of the first- through fourth-century discussions concerning authorship and the authority of particular texts, the contents were as much under scrutiny as the authorship, save for the case of Acts of Paul and Thecla. It is difficult to assess whether the first- and early second-century church would have found known pseudepigrapha to be problematic in and of themselves, or whether the practice of pseudepigraphy became contaminated in the minds of the leaders of the Great Church because of its all-too-frequent employment to propagate teachings deemed by them to be out of line with the apostolic gospel.⁵ The evidence can be explained either way, and it is not as clear cut as either side would have the unsuspecting reader believe.⁶

Did a pseudepigrapher seek to deceive his or her readers into thinking the text was actually written by somebody else (making it in fact unethical), or would ancient conventions of authorship make pseudepigraphy—in certain cases at least—a fully ethical practice? In a classic study Bruce Metzger examines the typical motivations for forgery among Greco-Roman authors.⁷ In several cases deception was clearly

²See Terry L. Wilder, “Pseudonymity and the New Testament,” in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Method and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 301, 303, 318.

³See Bruce M. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 21-22.

⁴William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), ccxiv-cxxv; Wilder, “Pseudonymity and the New Testament,” 304-7.

⁵See Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” 3-24, esp. 14-15.

⁶The reader always needs to be wary about how evidence is interpreted and whether it is used in a manner inconsistent with its original context. Terry Wilder, for example, stressing that the early church examined both authorship and content, weights the reading of the evidence far too much in favor of the position he advocates (“Pseudonymity and the New Testament,” 308). This is especially evident when, for example, he interprets a statement of W. Schneemelcher (which clearly shows attribution of “apostolicity” to be a function of the acceptability of the “content”) as a sign that the early church examined both criteria independently.

⁷Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” 5-11.

integral to the purpose for the forgery: when an author (1) sought financial gain by selling “newly discovered” works of Aristotle, for example, to ancient libraries, or (2) sought to bring a rival into disfavor by attributing words to him that would be damaging to him,⁸ or (3) sought to secure greater credence for his or her thoughts by assigning it to a venerated authority. Such works were often recognized as forgeries and maligned under that name.⁹

In other cases, however, deception and fraud were clearly not envisioned. For example, schoolroom exercises frequently involved writing a speech in the style of a particular orator as a means of practicing composition and argumentation skills. In other cases an author would ascribe his or her work to another out of love and respect, and out of a sense of authorship or “proprietary ownership” that differs markedly from our modern notions. Iamblichus (*De vita Pythagorica* 158, 198), for example, records the policy of the disciples of Pythagoras, writing their own works under the name of Pythagoras. Since they attribute to him all that they have learned, they do not deem it proper to claim their writings as their own but, as it were, their teacher’s. Porphyry appears to have accepted these texts as in some sense authentic, even though not actually written by Pythagoras or even authorized by him.¹⁰

In discussions of potential candidates for pseudepigrapha in the New Testament, some authors regard them more as deceptive works that use the name of a revered figure in order to make the content authoritative. Others, however, assert that the disciples of Paul or

Peter acted in line with the disciples of Pythagoras, assiduously avoiding taking credit for the teaching of the master. Which of the two would be the case depends, of course, on the specific presentation made by the text. In the cases of 2 Timothy and Titus, for example, the decision to include so many personal details and fabricate a plausible historical setting for the content makes it hard to avoid the conclusion that a pseudonymous author would have intended for the letter to be seen as Paul’s own and not as pseudepigraphic.¹¹ The general nature of Ephesians, however, would give it a better claim to be the benign work of a modest disciple, if it is indeed judged to be pseudonymous.

There is another related matter to consider here. A pseudepigraphon written shortly after Paul’s death to those who knew Paul would stand a good chance of being recognized as a pseudonymous work by its first readers. Only as readers became further removed from its production and first appearance—as the text was passed around from place to place and down through a few generations—would the fact of pseudepigraphy be lost and its attribution to the apostle be taken at face value. The passing of a generation or two could make a great difference in the readers’ awareness of whether a text was pseudonymous or authentic. Since it was grouped with the Writings and not the Prophets, the first readers of Daniel apparently understood the work to be a recent composition and not a prophecy composed by the historical Daniel. But by the first century CE Daniel was spoken of as the author of that book without qualification. Thus a writing not intended or likely to deceive in 167 BCE came to be “deceptive,” but not in a way that could be deemed unethical.¹²

⁸By contrast, however, Cicero admits to writing a letter pseudonymously on behalf of his friend Atticus in order to win favor for Atticus from the letter’s recipient, Caelius (*Letters to Atticus* 6.6; Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 7-8). Would Atticus have considered this to have been unethical on Cicero’s part, or would he have been grateful for his friend’s initiative, looking out for Atticus’s best interests?

⁹Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁰Wilder, “Pseudonymity in the New Testament,” 299.

¹¹See L. R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 24, 55.

¹²Similarly, the author of Jude clearly does not see through the pseudonym of 1 Enoch, which he quotes as if the words indeed came from Enoch (see Jude 14-15; 1 En. 1.9). It is,

Is pseudepigraphy the best solution to questions of authorship when internal data (e.g., style, vocabulary, theology, situation) conflict with what can be known about the purported author? This is, to me, the most important question. Many of the arguments advanced in favor of pseudepigraphy presume that modern interpreters can know the probable limits of what Paul or another first-century apostle could have or could not have written or thought. Frequently these interpreters can be rightly accused of placing undue limitations “on Paul’s ability and versatility as a writer and theologian” and failing to account adequately for “the changed epistolary situation” in each disputed letter.¹³ Which information should be privileged? Do the undisputed Pauline letters determine the scope and range of Paul’s expression and thought, or do the disputed Pauline letters open up new windows into the Pauline mission and its complexities?

How broadly should the interpreter conceive of “authorship”? The answer to this will greatly affect how much force arguments for pseudepigraphy will carry. What contribution was made by those named as cosenders (e.g., Timothy, Silvanus, or Titus)? Might a particular letter represent a fairly free framing of the author’s thoughts by a trusted associate or secretary?¹⁴ Might certain circumstances con-

however, difficult to know to what extent readers in any period would have “seen through” the pseudonym and still accepted the document as valuable, even binding and authoritative, as the Qumran community did in regard to 1 Enoch from its earliest stages.

¹³Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 46.

¹⁴The contribution of a secretary (whether a professional assistant or one of Paul’s coworkers and associates) could indeed be considerable, both at the level of content and especially at the level of vocabulary and style. E. Randolph Richards has shown that ancient secretaries did not merely “take dictation” but often would take notes as the sender described what it is he or she wished to communicate, and then exercised considerable freedom in framing the letter (*The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, WUNT 42 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991]). The sender would then check over and correct the letter to make sure it correctly captured his or her meaning, thus authorizing it. It is certain that Paul

strain Paul or Peter to communicate intended contents to a colleague, who would then write in the apostle’s name?¹⁵ This practice was certainly not unknown in the ancient world.¹⁶ If authenticity can cover all such circumstances, arguments based on vocabulary and style will have no force, and arguments based on perceived theological discrepancy will lose considerable force, except in cases where a contradiction with an author’s previous work is clear and unmistakable.

Deutero-Pauline literature could be seen as a development of this collaborative process between Paul and his coworkers.¹⁷ Yet it is not clear *why* an early Christian leader at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second would feel compelled to write in another’s name. Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Hermas, for example, all wrote in their own names. These authors use apostolic traditions to (1) lend authority to their message and (2) explore the applicability of those traditions to a

used a writing assistant for several of his letters. Tertullian emerges as the hand through which Paul wrote Romans (Rom 16:22). In many letters Paul calls attention to a change of handwriting that signifies his personal authentication of the contents (the “Pauline signature” in 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; see Richards, *Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 190). Changes in secretary—or Paul’s writing in his own idiom—could well account for the variations in style and diction that often lead scholars to posit deutero-Pauline authorship (see *ibid.*, 169–201).

¹⁵Metzger observes that Tertullian saw no problem with the last option as still falling within the scope of “authenticity” (“Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” 14). Richard Bauckham provides a similarly broad definition of authenticity, including a letter written by someone else but authorized by the named “author” (“Pseudo-Apostolic Letters,” *JBL* 107 [1988]: 469–94, esp. 470–71). See also Wilder, “Pseudonymity and the New Testament,” 296–97. John Calvin would apparently also have endorsed as “authentic” a letter written by an apostle’s associate but approved by the named author (*ibid.*, 310).

¹⁶Cicero, pressed by other tasks, invites his longtime friend Atticus on more than one occasion to write letters to people in Cicero’s name, trusting Atticus to represent Cicero appropriately and to serve Cicero’s interests in the correspondence (*Letters to Atticus* 3.1.5; 11.5; Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 8).

¹⁷E.g., Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina 17 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 8.

new situation. In their case there was no perceived need for pseudonymity as a tool to gain credence or authority for their texts. There would be even less need if the author had been a known coworker of Paul (and thus an heir to his mantle). The interpreter therefore also needs to consider the motive for pseudonymity. What would be gained by writing in Peter's name rather than citing Petrine traditions as authority for what was written in the later author's own name? It is possible that there would be a gain (e.g., to develop a body of Petrine traditions that could become the basis for such appeals, had the historical Peter left nothing in writing); in other cases it is not clear what the real author could have gained, unless it would be to claim apostolic authority for innovative interpretations (i.e., the motive behind so many pseudonymous works set aside by the early church and *not* included in the New Testament).

As we consider the texts most commonly judged to be pseudonymous (Ephesians, Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, James, Jude, and 2 Peter), we will frequently avoid trying to provide hard and fast answers. The evidence in several cases defies a clear ruling, and it would do injustice to a century of scholarship to pretend that probabilities truly stack in favor of one side rather than the other. Instead the reader is invited to engage this multifaceted debate, weigh the evidence and explanations, consider the ramifications of each position, and make some initial hypotheses on his or her own. It is important to remember two points throughout: (1) people of profound intellect and deep faith commitments have held to positions on either side, and (2) neither side is free from the pressures of a certain "faith com-

munity" pushing them toward one position or the other, whether it is a scholarly community that now holds certain truths to be self-evident¹⁸ or a conservative circle that is ideologically predisposed to defend the claims made by a text at face value.

Ultimately the question is of great importance for the reconstruction of the history of first-century Christianity. It makes a difference whether the Pastoral Epistles are taken as sources for Pauline Christianity in the 60s or the 90s, or whether James and Jude are understood to reflect Jewish Christianity in the 50s or in the 80s. It is also important for the study of a particular figure's "theology." The reconstruction of Paul's theology will be different if we include Ephesians and Colossians in the research base for such a project. The question is of less importance, however, for our appreciation of the meaning and contribution of these texts to discipleship and ministry in the modern context, for whether written by the named author or not, they stand in the New Testament canon as texts recognized by the ante-Nicene Church to bear authentic witness to the apostolic message and invite our full attention from that standpoint.¹⁹

¹⁸So noted by Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians*, AB 34B (Garden City, NY: 1994), 111; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 55.

¹⁹On the other hand, Barth has demonstrated the tendency to depreciate texts that are considered inauthentic and to regard them as examples of how not to do theology, or of being taken over too much by the very religion one opposes (Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 114-15). Debates about authorship have in many circles effectively relegated the deuter-Pauline epistles and other texts deemed pseudepigraphic to the margins of theological and ethical inquiry.

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