

## CHAPTER 6

### Jewish History Underground: 586-198 B.C.E.

From 586 B.C.E. to the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt against the Syrian Seleucids in 167 B.C.E. – with the exception of the Jewish military colony at Elephantine on Egypt's southern border – there are no Jewish military exploits to record; there was no independent Jewish state. A dilemma confronts the military historian. Should he or she omit the intervening centuries and pick up on the story with the Maccabean rebellion, as the authors of *Battles of the Bible* have done, or should the writer examine the changes that took place in Jewish thought and practice in this long period in order to provide a context in which subsequent military activities occurred? The developments of this long period do have a very direct bearing on the three rebellions against Rome, which at the beginning were to be a central theme of this narrative but which sadly are now beyond what I am able to cover.

The following subjects are covered in this chapter:

1. Babylonian Exile – 586 - 539 B.C.E.
2. The Jewish Military Colony at Elephantine – Sixth Century (?)–Fourth Century B.C.E. (?)
3. The Persian Era – 539-332 B.C.E.
4. Messianism – no fixed date can be determined
5. The Hellenistic Era – Fourth Century B.C.E.- Fourth Century C.E.

The Babylonian Exile, which might have led to the end of Judaism, instead bolstered the institutions it was meant to weaken or destroy. Coverage of the Elephantine community in southern Egypt carries forward the military theme of this work, while the Persian era is notable for permitting the foundations of Judaism to be put firmly into place, establishing institutions which exist to the present day. Discussion of Messianic is indispensable to understanding the three wars against Rome, and, finally, Hellenistic culture dominated the area of the Mediterranean for many centuries, and must be considered because the Jews were an integral part of it, even when they rebelled against it.

Historical materials for these periods of Jewish history are relatively scarce, except for the many papyri found at Elephantine relating to the Jewish military colony there. Although one of my professors referred to this long period of Jewish existence as a "black hole," we cannot deny that it contained significant developments. What occurred in the Persian era, among other developments, was the

transformation of Judaism into a religion based on Law, or *Khalakhah*. The word *Khalakhah* is derived from the Hebrew verb *khalakh*, meaning "to walk," and refers to the concept of walking entirely within, and never straying from, the boundaries of Jewish law based upon the Five Books of Moses and their derivative decrees. These were elaborated and collected in the Talmud several centuries after the 586-198 B.C.E. interlude and are commonly referred to as the 613 Commandments.<sup>1</sup> The process of this transformation that Judaism underwent is seen in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

From 586 to 198 B.C.E. and beyond, Judea, as the country had come to be called, was not independent, but was part of a larger empire. At first it was the Babylonian; then the Persian, then Alexander's empire, then the Egyptian Ptolemaic, and, finally, the Syrian Seleucid Empire. Judea freed itself from the Seleucid Empire in a struggle lasting from 167 to 142. This struggle and victory are commemorated annually in the celebration of Chanukah. The understanding of these developments in Judaism is vital to the understanding of the later rebellions against Rome.

#### 1. Babylonian Exile: 586 – 539 B.C.E.

The Babylonian Exile, traditionally believed to have lasted seventy years, actually lasted approximately forty-seven years.<sup>2</sup> An entire book in the *Tanakh*, the Book of Lamentations, chanted in the synagogue each year on the Ninth of Av (in mid-Summer), both memorializes and mourns the Babylonians' destruction of the First Temple as well as the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple.

The 137<sup>th</sup> Psalm expresses the profound grief of the Jewish exiles, but also a seldom-acknowledged thirst for revenge. The part of the psalm that expresses revenge is usually omitted, so I will quote it fully here:

By the rivers of Babylon  
There we sat

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<sup>1</sup> The number 613 was obtained by adding to the 365 days of the year the 248 known parts of the body, as the ancients understood them.

<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, there were four deportations. For the deportees of 598 and 597 B.C.E. the Exile lasted approximately fifty-eight years; for those of 580 B.C.E., it lasted forty-one years. The traditional view of the Exile's having lasted seventy years is based upon the time between 586, the year of the destruction of Solomon's Temple, and 516, the year in which the Second Temple was completed by the returnees.

Sat and wept  
As we thought of Zion<sup>3</sup>

There on the poplars  
We hung up our lyres  
For our captors asked us there for songs,  
Our tormentors, for amusement,  
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

How can we sing a song of the Lord?  
On alien soil?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand wither;  
Let my tongue stick to my palate  
If I cease to think of you,  
If I do not keep Jerusalem in memory  
Even at my happiest hour.

Fair Babylon, you predator,  
A blessing on him who repays you in kind  
What you have inflicted on us;  
A blessing on him who seizes your babies  
And dashes them against the rocks!

We can see that the themes of sorrow and revenge are strengthened by a premonition of return.

Before considering the circumstances which enabled the deportees to hold on to their traditions of Judaism, and even to establish new ones, it is necessary to try to determine the exact numbers of deportees. Early archaeologists believed that the land of Judah was swept clean by the Babylonians, but subsequent excavations and studies have overturned this view. The most recent archaeological studies have calculated that Judah, just before its destruction, held a population of approximately 75,000, of whom 15,000 lived in Jerusalem, with another 15,000 living in surrounding areas. If the figure of 20,000 deportees referred to earlier is accepted, then this would indicate that less than one fourth of Judah's population was deported.<sup>4</sup>

Admonitions directed at the deportees to maintain their cultural and religious institutions came from many sources. Of these, one of the most famous was the counsel offered by Jeremiah:

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<sup>3</sup> Zion is one of the hills inside the city of Jerusalem and has come in time to represent all of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 306.

Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the god of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper (Jeremiah 29: 4-7).

Jeremiah's admonition was prompted by news of a bloody, general revolt which broke out in the Babylonian Empire in 595 B.C.E. The revolt, which was suppressed with great ferocity, was followed by two deportations of leading Judahites from Jerusalem to Babylon in 598 and 597 B.C.E. The revolt prompted the Jewish deportees to believe that the Babylonian empire would shortly disappear and that they would soon be able to return home. It was to these two groups of deportees of 598/597 B.C.E. that Jeremiah had addressed his admonition that the exile would be of lengthy duration, though it would ultimately come to an end.

The second prophet who offered consolation and hope to the exiles was Deutero-Isaiah (Chapters 40-65 of the Book of Isaiah.)<sup>5</sup> Instructed by God, he asserted that those who retained their faith in God would find the strength to survive the captivity (Isaiah 40: 29-31). The words of the Lord, quoted by Isaiah, mock the idolatry of the Jews' captors and encourage the exiles to hold fast to their monotheism:

The craftsman in wood measures with a line  
And marks out a shape with a stylus;  
He forms it with scraping tools,  
Marking it out with a compass.  
He gives it a human form,  
The beauty of a man, to dwell in a shrine.  
For his use he cuts down cedars;  
He chooses plane trees and oaks.  
He sets aside trees of the forest;  
...All this serves man for fuel;  
He takes some to warm himself,  
And he builds a fire and bakes bread.  
He also makes a god of it and worships it,  
Fashions an idol and bows down to it!  
Part of it he burns in a fire:  
On that part he roasts meat,  
...Of the rest he makes a god – his own carving!

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<sup>5</sup> As was noted earlier, the first thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah refer to events taking place in the eighth century; while Chapters 40-65 deal with events of the sixth century. (The last chapter, 66, stands alone. The second half of the Book of Isaiah (Chapters 40-65) is customarily referred to as II, or Deutero-Isaiah.)

He bows down to it, worships it;  
He prays to it and cries,  
'Save me, for you are my god!' (Isaiah 44: 13-17)

Isaiah assured the exiles that their God had not forsaken them (Isaiah 41: 8-12), and gave them hope for the future: "It is I who say of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,'

And of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be rebuilt; and I will restore their ruined places'" (Isaiah 44:26).

He also reminded the exiles that their current predicament was a chastisement for their failure to observe God's laws (Isaiah 42:24-45).

The Almighty stated further, according to Isaiah:

Fear not, for I am with you:  
I will bring your folk from the East,  
Will gather you out of the West; I will say to the North, 'Give back!'  
And to the South, 'Do not withhold!  
Bring My sons from afar,  
And My daughters from the ends of the earth –  
All who are linked to My name,  
Whom I have created,  
Formed and made for My glory –  
Setting free that people,  
Blind though it has eyes  
And deaf though it has ears (Isaiah 43: 5-8).

Isaiah completed his message from God with the following:

[I] am the one who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd;  
He shall fulfill all My purposes!  
He shall say of Jerusalem, "She shall be rebuilt,"  
And to the Temple: "You shall be founded again"' (Isaiah 44:28).

The reference to Cyrus, the Persian king, is perplexing. There is no problem if one accepts the idea that Isaiah was prophesying the future history of the Jewish community. If one does not accept this prophetic view, however, one then must assume that this passage was written after Cyrus's conquest of Babylon and the issuing of the decree ending the exile.

The last of the great prophets, Ezekiel, who was exiled to Babylonia while still a young man, offered the greatest hope for an eventual return to the land of Israel. In the *Tanakh*, the Lord gives Ezekiel a vision of dried bones, representing the state of spiritual death in which the Hebrews languished when exiled from their homeland.

Suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone matching to bone.... I prophesied as He commanded me. The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude.

And He said to me, 'O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.' Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37: 7-12).

Other prophets who sought to undergird the exiles' strength to maintain their traditions in anticipation of a future return to Jerusalem included Haggai, and Zakariah.

What actually enabled the Judahites to maintain their identity as Jews? After all, the people of the Kingdom of Israel, who had been conquered and deported by the Assyrians in 722, were lost to Jewish history and are known to us as the Ten Lost Tribes. Other peoples, like the Philistines, who were conquered in 586, also disappeared from history. There is no sure answer to this question about why the Jews from the Southern Kingdom survived. What follows is purely speculative.

Tradition has it that the reforms of King Josiah of Judah (639-609 B.C.E.) laid the groundwork for the exiles' continuation of Jewish practices. It should be recalled that Josiah had attempted to eliminate all surviving pagan rituals; had centralized the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem, ensuring that city's status as Judaism's spiritual center; and had reformed the practices of the Jewish faith in order to make them consistent with portions of the Bible. These measures would certainly have served to fortify the bonds of the Jewish community in exile.

Another tradition attributes to the origin of the synagogue the strength to hold the Jewish community together. This tradition erroneously dates the origin of the synagogue to the Babylonian captivity. Louis Isaac Rabinowitz speculates that "...the Exiles...would meet from time to time, probably on Sabbaths, and read the Scriptures..." In support of this viewpoint, he cites Ezekiel 8:6, 14:1, and 20:1, which describe the prophet's words to an "...assembly of the elders..."<sup>6</sup> Rabinowitz is actually reading into Ezekiel more than is there, since archaeologists have found no physical structure corresponding to a

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Synagogue: Origins and History," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 14, col. 580.

synagogue until later times. The origins of the synagogue have been hotly debated by archaeologists for the past twenty years, and a mountain of books has been written on the subject. This controversy continues to the present moment. The sections on the Persian era and the Hasmonean era will bring the controversy up to date. Suffice it to say here that the evolution of the synagogue as we know it today was a long and slow process. But there can be no doubt of its force in later times in strengthening the will of the Jewish community to persist.

A line in Jeremiah provides an additional clue to the survival of Jewish life during the Babylonian captivity. In one place the prophet stated that survival lay not with the Temple but with the behavior of the individual. According to Jeremiah, the Lord had moved from the notion of collective responsibility to a focus on the individual as a means to spiritual survival. Individual Jews in captivity thus recognized that salvation lay in their own hands. Each one had to adhere to all the Jewish practices brought out of Judah in order to please the Deity and achieve an eventual return to the homeland.

A final speculation about Jewish survival in exile may be related to the brevity of the exile – a mere forty-six years for most. The Exile lasted long enough for a new generation of Jews to have grown up and to have begun to replace the culture of their parents with that of the new environment, but not to have lost the "old ways" entirely. The Babylonian Empire, which had conquered Judah in 586 B.C.E., was itself conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia in 540 B.C.E., and in the following year, the Jews, along with other conquered groups, were granted permission to return to their homes. Although the two leaders of the first return to Jerusalem had Babylonian names,<sup>7</sup> assimilation was just beginning to take root when the Exile came to an end.

Cyrus the Great said the exiles were free to go or to stay. Some exiles returned to what was to be the country of Judea. Many, however, chose to remain in Mesopotamia. In the course of the next 1,000 years these Mesopotamian Jews living in the area now known as Iraq blossomed and created a Jewish culture

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<sup>7</sup> And the Hebrew names of the months of the year, still in use today, are copied from the Babylonian calendar.

which included the development of the Talmud (the famous Babli).<sup>8</sup> The Talmud that is used today in every Jewish community in the world thus originated in what is now Iraq, formerly Babylonia.

The term "Babylonian Captivity" found its niche in Western Civilization, at first in the Roman Catholic Papacy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and later in the Italian National Unification Movement of the nineteenth century. In 1309, the French King cajoled or coerced the reigning Pope into moving to Avignon, in southeastern France. The Cardinals at Rome thereupon selected another Pope to replace him, and from 1309 to 1378 there was a succession of popes at Avignon simultaneously with a similar succession at Rome. This was, of course, a scandal for the Church. Ultimately, a Church council was held which deposed the popes reigning at Avignon and Rome and selected a third one to replace them. The two reigning popes, however, refused to resign their positions, and for a period of three years there were three popes as claimants to Saint Peter's chair. The matter was settled in 1417, when two of the three popes resigned, and the unity of the Church was re-established. This period of forced Papal residency at Avignon is known as the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Church, meaning the Church in exile.

A second period that earned the title "Babylonian Exile" occurred in the nineteenth century, when the Italians, along with other subjugated European nationalities, sought to free their country from foreign domination and establish a unified state. This struggle began during the Napoleonic wars and reached its successful conclusion in 1871. The Kingdom of Judea, it will be remembered, was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, in 586 B.C.E. and its inhabitants forced into exile. The great Italian composer, Giuseppe Verdi composed an opera in 1842 entitled *Nabucco*, a shortened form of Nebuchadnezzar. In Act III, Scene II, there is a beautiful chorus, "Va, pensiero," in which the Hebrews lament their captivity:

Fly, thought, on wings of gold;  
Go settle upon the slopes and the hills,  
Where, soft and mild, the sweet airs  
Of our native land smell fragrant!  
Greet the banks of Jordan  
And Zion's toppled towers...

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<sup>8</sup> There is also a Talmud that evolved in Jerusalem, the "Yerushalmi," but it is less significant than the "Babli."



Oh, my country so lovely and lost!  
Oh, remembrance so dear and so fraught with despair!  
Golden harp of the prophetic seers,  
Why dost thou hang mute upon the willow?  
Re-ignite our bosom's memories,  
And speak of times gone by!  
Mindful of the fate of Jerusalem,  
Either give forth an air of sad lamentation,  
Or else let the Lord imbue us  
With fortitude to bear our sufferings!<sup>9</sup>

Overnight, this chorus was adopted throughout Italy as the anthem of the Italian struggle for unity and independence. Verdi, besides being hailed for his musical genius, also became one of the heroes of this liberation struggle.

## 2. The Jewish Military Colony at Elephantine, Egypt – Sixth Century (?) – Fourth Century

On an Island in the Nile near the First Cataract, close to present-day Aswan, there is a collection of boulders which, at low tide, appears to be a herd of elephants bathing. This is Elephantine. Near this formation, which is also very close to Egypt's ancient boundary with Nubia (Sudan), two fortresses stood for several centuries, one of them manned by Arameans and the other by Jewish mercenaries. The Egyptians frequently used Jewish soldiers and even officers in their military campaigns from the Elephantine period or earlier until the Hasmonean era.<sup>10</sup> What was the origin of this Jewish military colony?

In the beginning, the Egyptians favored the Hebrew United Monarchy because it prevented their common enemy, the Philistines, from threatening vital trade routes. But when King David achieved a dominant position over this foe, and Solomon brought prosperity to Israel, the Egyptians saw that the economic threat had shifted to Israel. Jeroboam, a member of King Solomon's entourage, broke with him and fled to Egypt for sanctuary. When the United Monarchy split, Pharaoh Shishak I (or Sheshonq) promoted the cause of Jeroboam and he led a military expedition into the Levant which destroyed

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<sup>9</sup> Giuseppe Verdi, *Nabucco: An Opera in Four Acts*, Librettist: Temistocle Solera, (London: The Decca Record Co., 1966), act III, scene II.

<sup>10</sup> Salo W. Baron, "The Ancient and Medieval Periods: Review of History," p. 28, and Michael Avi-Yonah, "War and Warfare," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 16, Col. 278.

approximately 150 towns in both Judah and Israel.<sup>11</sup> The *Tanakh's* account of this episode, as well as of Shishak's removal of much treasure from Jerusalem, is corroborated in Egyptian archives.

In the era of the Divided Monarchy, a considerable number of small states existed in the western Fertile Crescent. Whenever a threat from the north or east emerged, all of these small states, including Israel and Judah, looked to Egypt as their protector, a role which the Egyptians sought to fulfill.<sup>12</sup> Regrettably, the absence of Egyptian sources for the first third of the first millennium (approximately 1000-650) B.C.E. makes the threads of Egypt's international relations difficult to trace. What is known is that the centralized government of Egypt fell apart in much of this period and local principalities fought with one another. Also, some of Egypt's contemporaries like the city-states of Greece and Anatolia were likewise experiencing a dark age and they, too, provide little archival evidence.<sup>13</sup> It is necessary to turn for our information to Mesopotamian records and to I and II Kings in the *Tanakh*, which Books were written at a later time. It was from these extra-Egyptian sources that knowledge of events like the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel, Josiah's reign, and the Babylonian Exile has been obtained.

In the second half of the seventh century Egypt was re-unified and began once more to assert its influence in the Levant. Pharaoh "...Psammeticus I (c. 664-610 B.C.E.) strengthened Egypt by widespread employment of foreigners – Greek and Jewish mercenary troops and Phoenician sailors and merchants."<sup>14</sup>

It is within this context that the Jewish military colony of Elephantine arose. Exactly when Jews began to settle there is not known. Some scholars think that they may have arrived as early as the middle of the seventh century, while others believe that they settled there after Babylon's first assault on Judah in 597. Still other scholars speculate that when King Josiah was killed fighting the Egyptians in 609, the latter gained control of Judah, including a province of the former Kingdom of Israel which Josiah had earlier absorbed. Jewish soldiers thus became available for recruitment into the Egyptian army, and they

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<sup>11</sup> See above, Chapter Three.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), p. 318.

<sup>13</sup> A city-state is a city with all the attributes of an independent state. Athens, Sparta and Rome are prime examples.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Richard Shulman, "Egypt: Ancient Egypt," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 6, col. 483.

seem to have taken part in Egyptian campaigns against Babylonia. What is remarkable about the Jews of Elephantine is that for several centuries they had their own temple and carried on the worship of Yahweh by animal sacrifice.<sup>15</sup>

Papyri uncovered at Elephantine at the end of the nineteenth century describe the lives of the mercenaries who lived there together with their families. The documents, all written in Aramaic, cover a variety of subjects. After the Persians conquered Egypt in 525, the colony became part of the Persian empire, and there is a well-known papyrus dated in 419, issued by Persian Monarch Darius II, which "...sets out instructions to the colony to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan..."<sup>16</sup> The papyri also confirm the presence of Nehemiah in Jerusalem. The temple at Elephantine was destroyed in 410 but seems to have been rebuilt before the end of the century. Precisely when the colony and the temple ceased to exist is not known.

Something curious is worth noting here about this long relationship between Egypt and the Jews. In all accounts of the Egypt and the Hebrew kingdoms, Egyptian recriminations against the Jews for the deeds of God and Moses depicted in the Book of Exodus almost a thousand years earlier are absent. Nothing is to be found about the "Ten Plagues" which included the turning of the waters of the Nile into blood; torment by frogs, swarms of insects, locusts and lice; pestilence; dust; darkness; and bringing about the death of the firstborn of beasts and humans alike.<sup>17</sup> The Egyptians subsequently learned of their ancestors' sufferings from the *Septuagint*, a third and second century Greek translation of the *Tanakh* which the large, Greek-speaking Jewish community of Alexandria required for worship because it had become so completely assimilated. Greek was then the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world.<sup>18</sup> The Egyptians responded angrily, asserting that the Jews had been expelled from Egypt because they were lepers!

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<sup>15</sup> A.T. Olmstead states that this temple was constructed in rivalry to that of Josiah's. There is no evidence for this assertion. A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, (Chicago: Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 1959 Phoenix edition, 1966 impression, p. 466.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen G. Rosenberg, "The Jewish Temple at Elephantine," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (2004): 4.

<sup>17</sup> See Exodus, 7-11.

<sup>18</sup> The Jewish historian, Josephus (37-100+ C.E.), wrote his masterpiece, *Jewish Antiquities*, in Greek.

### 3. The Persian Era: 539 – 332 B.C.E.

Very little information has come down to us from the Persian Era of more than two centuries, but that period is of tremendous importance in the evolution of Jewish institutions. Although there are hardly any military exploits to discuss, the building up of Jewish institutions and the strengthening of Jewish identity laid the groundwork for the clash of cultures that followed – with the Syrian Seleucids in the second century B.C.E. and the Romans in the first and second centuries C.E. A number of books of the *Tanakh* treat of or were written in the Persian Era. I shall make use of some of them, chief among them the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi to discuss this period of strengthening Jewish selfhood.

Cyrus (reigned 559-529 B.C.E.), the founder of the Persian Empire, holds a special place in Jewish history. He is mentioned in the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah, in the Book of Ezra, in the Book of Daniel (1:21; 6:29; 10:1) and at the end of II Chronicles.

In Deutero-Isaiah, the word "messiah" is applied to him (Isaiah 45:1).<sup>19</sup>

Cyrus was descended from a line of kings who had ruled for several generations over a portion of southwestern Iran. Information about him is largely the stuff of legends, except for some inscriptions in the Babylonian Archives. They say that he began his military exploits by conquering the Medes, who had ruled the Persians in earlier decades. He continued his conquests, building the greatest empire ever known, comprising western Asia, the Middle East, and portions of the eastern Mediterranean. He was also a great statesman. Whether or not he could read and write is uncertain, but his political genius was never in doubt. Shortly after conquering the Babylonian Empire in 540 B.C.E., he proclaimed that Aramaic would be the official language of the empire. This language came to be used by Jews for many centuries thereafter.<sup>20</sup>

Among the ancient empires, Persia stands out for its organization and administration. The empire was divided into satrapies, or provinces, with a satrap, or governor, at the head of each. In addition, special envoys from the capital at Susa (in southwestern Iran approximately fifty miles east of the Tigris

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<sup>19</sup> On Messianism, see below.

<sup>20</sup> The *Babylonian Talmud* is written in Aramaic. Aramaic is a member of the Semitic language family, and portions of the Books of Ezra and Daniel were written in this language.

River) regularly visited each satrapy in order to provide the king with first-hand accounts of the life and people of his empire. The Persian Empire was "noted for its efficient civil service and far flung system of communication."<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the practice of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and several other ancient conquerors, Cyrus did not deport conquered peoples. Instead, he provided all previously deported peoples, such as the Jews, with the choice of returning home or remaining where they were. Persian officials codified the conquered peoples' own laws, and with the help of local religious and political leaders (in the case of the Jews, the priests), promoted obedience to these laws in order to assure tranquility in the realm. In this way the Jews who returned to their homeland, as well as those who remained in Babylonia, now had royal sanction to be governed by their own laws and their own leaders, and to rebuild their Temple. It was Cyrus's general policy to show benevolence to subject peoples; to allow them to worship their own gods; and to correct "the injustices done to [the conquered peoples] by their previous rulers...or in the case of the Jews of Babylon, by Nebuchadnezzar."<sup>22</sup>

In 539 B.C.E, for those who wanted to return to their homeland, Cyrus issued a decree enabling the restoration of the Jewish community in what was to be the country of Judea, or the Second Commonwealth. He also ordered that the expenses for rebuilding the Temple be paid by his government, and that the treasures taken from the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar be restored (Ezra 1: 2-4).<sup>23</sup>

The number of Jews who actually did go back on the several returns is not known for certain. For the first return, the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah provide almost identical figures. These first returnees consisted of 42,360 persons, excluding the 7337 male and female servants (slaves?) who accompany them. Also among the returnees were 200 male and female singers, 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 asses (Ezra 2: 64-66, and Nehemiah 8: 66-68). One wonders what function these 200 male and female singers would serve in a land without a temple. The number of persons migrating to Judea on the

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<sup>21</sup> Aaron Demsky, "Scribe," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 14, Col 1043.

<sup>22</sup> Uriel Rappoport, "Cyrus," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 5, col. 1185.

<sup>23</sup> These treasures were again removed in 70 C.E. by the Roman General Titus, when he conquered Jerusalem after suppressing the Great Jewish Rebellion of 66-70 C.E.

first return is twice that given as having been exiled to Babylonia. Numbers in the Bible, like those in all ancient writings, are suspect, and the foregoing is no exception.

Information about the century following the first return does not yet exist outside the *Tanakh*, and so we must rely upon the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and to a lesser extent on those of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, for our information.

For those Jews who wished to return, the distance of more than 500 hundred miles between Babylon and Jerusalem was surely a deterrent, as was the dimness of the memory of what "home" had been like. Some Jews had become well established in the country of Babylonia, as the documents found at Elephantine attest. Josephus's summary about those who remained, cited in Bright, put it well. They were "not willing to leave their possessions."<sup>24</sup> The reasons for this reluctance were based, at least in part, on the class structure of Babylonian society. According to Salo W. Baron, Babylonian society consisted of three classes: the nobility, half-free subjects, and slaves. Most Jews fit into the middle class of the half-free, who mostly lived in the Babylonian cities. So far as is known, few Jews were slaves. They became involved in business enterprise both in the capital city of Babylon and later in Susa, the Persian Empire's capital. Some Jews even achieved wealth and prominence in Babylon, and later in Susa.<sup>25</sup> Their decision to remain seemed selfish in the short run. But this choice does not seem selfish when viewed historically. By establishing deep roots for the practice of Judaism in the Diaspora,<sup>26</sup> they made it possible for the great rabbinical academies of Sura and Pumbeditha to flourish for centuries into the era following the rise of Islam. Also, as noted earlier, Babylonia became the home of the version of the Talmud that is most widely used today.

Though almost nothing is known of the early years of the re-established Jewish community in Judea, it is known that conditions in Jerusalem and the surrounding area were difficult. The returnees encountered local opposition, as well as hostile actions by the Samaritans in the north to the rebuilding of the walls of the city and the construction of what was to be the Second Temple. The latter was not

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<sup>24</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Vol XI, 1, 3, also cited in Bright, p. 363.

<sup>25</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, Vol. I, p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> The term "Diaspora" is a Greek word meaning "dispersion."

completed until 516 B.C.E.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the rebuilding of the Temple, the returning Jews conducted the ritual of animal sacrifice at a temporary altar in Jerusalem.

We know that the country that was shortly to come to be known as Judea gradually increased in population, and that there were social cleavages between rich and poor. The area of the province of Judea was quadrilateral, thirty-five miles long and twenty-five to thirty miles broad, approximately 875 square miles, roughly one eighth the size of present-day Israel, extending from Bethel to Beth-Zur. It was a plateau between the Dead Sea to the east and the lowland to the west.<sup>28</sup> The prophet Haggai, who was among those returning, reported on the difficulties encountered by the returnees:

Thus said the Lord of Hosts: Consider how you have been faring! You have sowed much and brought in little; you eat without being satisfied; you drink without getting your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one gets warm; and he who earn anything earns it for a leaky purse (Haggai 1: 5-6)

God's remedy for this, Haggai said, was the construction of a Temple, not yet begun.

You have been expecting much and getting little; and when you brought it home, I would blow on it! Because of what? – says the Lord of Hosts. Because of My House which lies in ruin, while you all hurry to your own houses! That is why the skies above you have withheld [their] moisture and the earth has withheld its yield, and I have summoned fierce heat upon the land – upon the hills, upon the new grain and wine and oil, upon all that the ground produces, upon man and beast, and upon all the fruits of labor (Haggai 1: 9-11).

The prophet Zechariah, also among the returnees, provided a future vision of glory for Jerusalem, in order to uplift the morale of the returnees:

In that day, fresh water shall flow from Jerusalem, part of it to the Eastern Sea and part to the Western Sea, throughout the summer and winter

And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord and one name (Zechariah 14: 8-9)

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<sup>27</sup> The year 516 was exactly seventy years after the destruction of the First Temple. Orthodox Jews thus accept the tradition of a seventy-year Babylonian Exile.

<sup>27</sup> The Samaritans accepted the Pentateuch, but nothing else in the developing Canon. At the end of the Persian Era, the schism between them and the Jews was complete.

<sup>28</sup> Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the last of the Macabees: Foundations of Postbiblical Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), Second printing, p. 11.

...all of those nations that came up against Jerusalem shall make a pilgrimage year by year to bow low to the King Lord of Hosts and to observe the Feast of Booths (Zechariah 14: 16)

Very little is known about this period except that as the decades passed, conditions improved and the population grew, both naturally and because of returnees from Babylon. Obedience to Jewish Law, however, wavered. This dereliction was particularly true with regard to intermarriage.

The ultimate fate of Judaism might have been quite different had it not been for the intercession of Ezra and Nehemiah, two Babylonian Jews, both of considerable rank in the Persian court, who visited Judea to try and strengthen the Jewish society developing there. Nehemiah was the Persian King's cupbearer. Ezra was known as a "Scribe," that is, a secretary of considerable rank. Nehemiah strengthened Jerusalem by overseeing reconstruction of the city's walls. Ezra strengthened the practice of Jewish worship into a form recognizable today.

We do not know for sure when Ezra and Nehemiah came to Jerusalem. John Bright thinks Nehemiah came first and Ezra followed.<sup>29</sup> Nehemiah's presence has been validated by the papyri found at Elephantine, but Ezra's presence has not been validated outside the Bible. It is possible that the strengthening of Jewish practices by Ezra and Nehemiah took place in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-423 B.C.E.).<sup>30</sup> Their work is an example of a flourishing Diaspora community coming to the spiritual and material aid of the floundering homeland.

Nehemiah, moved by the tales he heard about the economic and spiritual plight of the Jews in Judea, obtained permission from the Persian King to visit this part of the empire. When he arranged for the wall of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, making them taller and stronger, he enlarged the city by extending the walls around several nearby villages, which were then incorporated into Jerusalem. He enjoined wealthy Jerusalem Jews to take responsibility for the construction of that section of the wall located in front of their properties. He divided the work force for this construction into halves, the first standing guard

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<sup>29</sup> Bright, pp. 379-380.

<sup>30</sup> Anders Runesson, "The Nature and Origins of the 1st Century Synagogue," Unpublished paper delivered at a meeting at Mc Master University, Toronto, Canada, p. 9.



against hostile neighbors and the second rebuilding the wall. Jerusalem after more than a century was "habitable and secure."<sup>31</sup>

Ezra's primary aim in visiting Judea was to strengthen spiritual life in the homeland. But the Persian king who probably sent him, Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.E.), had his reasons as well. The king was more than agreeable to Ezra's bring with him a group of Jews who wanted to return, because he knew that his loyal subjects were relocating in an area of his kingdom near Egypt, where a rebellion had recently been suppressed.<sup>32</sup>

In Jerusalem, Ezra assembled the population at the Water Gate on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). He read the Torah to them from morning to mid-day. The *Tanakh* describes this event as a major and celebratory gathering. The Book of Nehemiah details how Ezra stood on a specially built raised platform before the assembly (Nehemiah 8: 1-5). As he unrolled the scroll, the people stood. (These are familiar practices to present-day synagogue-goers.) Some of the men around him, who were qualified, translated his reading from Hebrew to Aramaic so that the people could understand it (Nehemiah 8:8). (Modern, printed translations were lacking, but the practice of translation was a very early one.) There was also discussion following the reading. The people swore to pay the Temple tax, and to supply wood for the sacrifices

Ezra read the Torah each morning of the seven days of Sukkot. In reading the Torah for a week, he must have read from it on a Saturday, but nowhere in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah is there any reference to reading from the Torah on the Sabbath, especially for the purpose of marking that day. Ezra did, however, establish the custom of reading the Torah on holidays. The person of Ezra may be apocryphal. The accounts of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were written a long time after the events they describe occurred, and Ezra may represent not so much the activities of one individual as a pietistic tendency dominant throughout the fifth century B.C.E.. Ezra was a scribe, and the scribes, forerunners of

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<sup>31</sup> Abraham Leon Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 87.

<sup>32</sup> H. Tadmor, "The Period of the First Temple, the Babylonian Exile and the Restoration," in H.H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 173.

the Pharisees, were becoming influential in interpreting the Law to the people, forcing increasingly stringent adherence to all the laws of Judaism and especially the prohibition against intermarriage.

Ezra sought to expel the foreign wives and children of Jewish men, but apparently did not issue a similar edict regarding the foreign husbands of Jewish women.<sup>33</sup> Shaye Cohen makes Ezra contemporary with Pericles, who in 451 B.C.E. legislated that Athenian citizenship was to be limited to "those born of an Athenian woman lawfully wedded to an Athenian man." Ezra asked the notables of Jerusalem to pledge not to marry foreigners. He also sought to expel approximately 113 foreign wives and their children.<sup>34</sup>

The minor prophet Malachai also warned against intermarriage:

For Judah has profaned what is holy to the land... and espoused daughters of alien gods. May the Lord leave to him who does this no descendants dwelling in the tents of Jacob and presenting offerings to the Lord of Hosts. (Malachai 2: 11-13)

In a remarkable instance of patriarchal sensitivity to women, Malachai pointed out that it was wrong to inflict pain on the wife of one's youth, so it was better not to marry a non-Jewish women in the first place, in order to avoid having to put aside one's lifelong companion in later years. (Malachai 2: 12-16).

Readers familiar with the practices of Jewish worship will recognize in Ezra's public reading of the Law the central features of synagogue worship today. The origin of the synagogue can best be understood in terms of the functions which that institution serves. The synagogue, fully constituted, served as a house of assembly, a house of study, and a house of prayer. (Its banqueting facilities, familiar to the ancients as well as to moderns, may also be noted.) In reading the Torah in public, Ezra was laying the first foundation stone of what would become the synagogue in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.

I cannot end this account of the Jews in the Persian era without commenting upon the events narrated in the Book of Esther. Near the end of the era, the Persians' benevolent treatment of the Jews

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<sup>33</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 267)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

may have been replaced by a policy of savagery. This change is implied by events in the Book of Esther, although the story lacks historical substantiation. It should be understood that the Persians' objectives towards the Jews had always been fundamentally the same as those of other imperial powers – exploitation and military service. The power of the Persian monarch over his subjects was absolute. Nor did the Persians refrain from deporting peoples following insurrections.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews and other subject peoples to go home if they so wished, but "home" was still within the Persian Empire. Nonetheless, there is a tradition, though only a tradition, of royal punishment inflicted on some Jews who may have joined in rebellion with Persian troops returning from the reconquest of Egypt. The tradition states that these rebel Jews were taken from their homes and exiled to the Caspian Sea area, approximately 800 miles to the east of the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Book of Esther, Haman's hatred of the Jews may be a metaphor for a change of attitude. Haman sought permission from the Persian king, Ahashueros, who is thought to have been Artaxerxes II (409-356 B.C.E.), to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire. Haman said:

"There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them. If it please your majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury." (Esther 3: 8-9).

Thus, in this Persian era, the Jews were already separate, distinctive, and apart. They differed from all other peoples in at least six ways: 1) monotheism and the absence of idols; 2) Sabbath observance; 3) injunctions against intermarriage; 4) dietary laws; 5) male circumcision shortly after birth; and 6) the emancipation of slaves at the beginning of their seventh year of service. These distinctive beliefs and practices fostered misunderstanding and hostility between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, and help explain the strife that later ensued between Jews and non-Jews in many parts of the Roman world.

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<sup>35</sup> J.M. Cook, "The Rise of the Achaemenids and the Establishment of their Empire," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2, pp. 225 and 285.

Despite being separate, the Jews seem to have flourished during the Persian era. That very likely was part of the reason Haman was so angry with the Jews. After all, he felt he needed to reimburse the King ten thousand talents of silver, an enormous sum in those days (a talent was 3,000 shekels), to make up for what the King would lose in taxation if the Jews ceased to exist. That was in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire. And in the ancestral lands that were in another part of the Persian Empire, Ezra and Nehemiah laid the foundations for the flowering of Second Temple Judaism in Judea.

The Persian Empire, under whose protection the Jews and Judaism had thrived, lost its power of cohesion in its last years, and the separate provinces, or satrapies and their rulers gained greater independence. Thus weakened, the Empire fell an easy prey to Alexander the Great, who conquered it in 333 B.C.E., and went on to conquer all the lands eastward to the Indus River and westward to Egypt. Judea became part of that empire. There is a legend that Alexander entered the Temple at Jerusalem and prostrated himself in the Holy of Holies. But there is absolutely no evidence that this monarch was ever near Jerusalem.

Two great movements need to be discussed because they are so integral to the continuity of Jewish history, and affected the wars which the Jews had to fight from 198 B.C.E. to the final battles with Rome in 132-135 C.E. The first of these movements was Apocalyptic – Messianism, and the second was Hellenistic civilization.

## 2. Messianism and Other Theological Developments

It was in the Second Temple period that Judaism acquired new doctrines including Messianism, immortality of the soul, reward and punishment after death, and eschatology. The word "Messiah," in Hebrew, "Meshiakh," meaning "the anointed one," first occurs in the *Tanakh* in Isaiah 45:1, as an adulatory reference to the Persian King Cyrus, who conquered the Babylonian Empire, ending the Jewish exile and allowing the Jews to return to their homeland.

There are a number of references to a Messiah or anointed one and to eschatology in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and I and II Samuel, but the meaning attached to the term Messiah in these writings is that of the anointed one, referring in most cases to the reigning anointed Jewish monarch. It

was in the post-Biblical era that the concept emerged of a Messiah as a descendent of the House of David who would come to end injustice and rule Israel and the entire world at the end of time. This concept does not appear explicitly in the *Tanakh*.<sup>36</sup> The Messianic doctrine needs to be understood because all three Jewish rebellions against Rome in the first and second centuries C.E. were led by figures believed by some of their followers to be the Messiah. Earlier, Judah the Maccabee, who founded the Hasmonean Jewish state in the first half of the second century B.C.E. was not referred to as such, but one of his descendants, John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.E.), was given that title.

In Second Temple Judaism, the idea of the Messiah was linked to eschatology, or the notion of the end of days and end of time. The arrival of the Messiah was conceived of as an event which would mark the end of the present world and the birth of a new, perfect one. Eschatological Jewish literature can be dated from 250 B.C.E. to 150 C.E.

Shaye Cohen's interpretation regarding the sufferings of the Jews and concern about the apocalyptic end of this suffering contained two ideas derived from Jeremiah: 1) that non-Jews were ruling Jews in punishment for their sins, and 2) that "the gentiles will continue to rule the Jews until the immutable sequence of empires has run its course and the predetermined day of their destruction has arrived."<sup>37</sup>

Emile Schürer's interpretation of the emergence of Messianism suggests that the doctrine may have arisen among Jews of the post-Exilic period when it became clear that the realities did not fit the twofold assumption that God had chosen Israel and given it His laws, and that faithful observance of these laws would ultimately result in rewards both for the individual Jew and for the entire people Israel. On the contrary, the reality of the post-Exilic period was that conditions for the Jewish people were steadily worsening as one conqueror followed another. Thus, Jews began to adopt the vision of reward through the establishment of a perfect future world – of God's kingdom on earth.<sup>38</sup> Harold L. Ginzburg says that this concept of the end of time was enlarged by the belief that a descendent of the House of David would

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<sup>36</sup> William Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1998), p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, pp. 28-29

<sup>38</sup> Emile Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. – A.S. 135)*, Vol. II, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1979) Revised and Edited by Geze Vermer, Fergus Miller, and Matthew Black, pp. 492-493.

"... be raised up by God to break the yoke of the heathen and to reign over a restored kingdom of Israel to which all the Jews of the Exile would return."<sup>39</sup> This Messianic hope was especially intense in the waning years of the Second Temple period (approximately 150 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.), when Judea came increasingly under Roman domination.

According to Schürer, this vision of an ideal end of time was subsequently broadened to embrace the future of all humanity, rather than that of Israel alone.<sup>40</sup> The end of days was seen as a time in which "all nations would be judged,"<sup>41</sup> and in which the sufferings of the individual would end. "The fullest expression of this was a belief in the resurrection of the dead."<sup>42</sup>

It is important to note that in the Second Temple period, as well as in later ages, Jewish thought never attributed divinity to the Messiah. This, Rabbi Nachmanides (1194-1270 C.E.) maintained, was the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity, and not the question of whether or not Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

The concept of a Messiah who will end the suffering of the Jewish people in exile has been a major constituent element of Jewish thought throughout the ages since.

#### 4. Hellenistic Civilization (4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. – 4<sup>th</sup> Century C.E., approx.)

The civilization which dominated much of the Mediterranean world from the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. until the establishment of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world is known as Hellenistic Civilization.<sup>43</sup>

Many Greeks regarded themselves as descendants of a common ancestor, Hellas, after whom they named their country, and they called themselves "Hellenes." The fabulous civilization which they had

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<sup>39</sup> Harold Louis Ginzburg, "Messiah," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, col. 1408

<sup>40</sup> Schurer, pp. 492-493.

<sup>41</sup> M. Stern, "The Period of the Second Temple," in H.H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 286.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Some historians place the end of the Hellenistic era with the reign of Augustus, Rome's first emperor (31 B.C.E. – 14 C.E.), but this seems illogical because Greek writings remained highly influential until they began to be displaced by the writings of the Church Fathers following 325 C.E., the year in which Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

created and which reached its height in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. was centered around the city of Athens and was called Hellenic Civilization.

According to Edith Hamilton, whose work on Hellenic Civilization is still useful, what the Athenians produced in art and thought has never been surpassed.<sup>44</sup> We have, according to her, "no sculpture comparable to theirs, no buildings ever more beautiful, no writings superior."<sup>45</sup> Their writing consisted of masterpieces: Herodotus and Theucycides in history, Homer and Pindar in poetry, and playwrights like Aeschylus and Sophocles in drama, and Euripides and Aristophanes in comedy. In philosophy, there were the writings of Plato and Aristotle, the former based in part on the thinking of Socrates. The Parthenon, built under the general direction of the sculptor Phidias, has yet to be matched. "Greek achievement is a fact universally acknowledged."<sup>46</sup>

Hamilton contrasted the foundations of Greek thought, which was based upon reasoning, with the contemporary civilizations of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., which were dominated by "a great priestly organization to which is handed over the domain of the intellect."<sup>47</sup> In philosophy, mathematics, science and in the examination of the nature of the world, the Greeks were foremost. Hamilton maintains that Greek civilization stood in stark contrast to the other contemporary civilizations because of the primacy it gave to intellectualism. The Greeks were the first people to play formal sports. Their most famous manifestations of play were the Olympics, games held every four years and first begun in 776 B.C.E. The Greeks used the Olympics as the basis of their calendar, every four years being known as an Olympiad. Thus the date of the third year of the fifth Olympiad would be 753 B.C.E., which is the legendary date for the founding of Rome.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., Hellenic civilization began its decline, hastened by a great war between Athens and Sparta, known as the Peloponnesian War (437 – 404 B.C.E.) Thucydides was the historian of this war, and although he died in 411 B.C.E. before his work could be completed, he is known as the first

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<sup>44</sup> Athens was the cultural center of Greece. Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

scientific historian because he sought to draw conclusions from established facts. The Jewish historian Josephus patterned his work after that of Thucydides.

As Greek power waned, there arose a conqueror in Macedonia named Phillip of Macedon (359 – 336 B.C.E.) who had conquered all the Greek cities by 338 B.C.E. Philip of Macedon died in 336 B.C.E. and was succeeded by his son Alexander (356 – 323 B.C.E., known as the Great because he continued the conquests, subjugating many of the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean including Egypt, and moving eastward into Asia up to the Indus River. As Alexander lay dying in Babylon in the year 323 B.C.E., one of his generals asked him, according to legend, "To whom do you leave your empire?" He replied, "To the strongest." After his death, a series of wars broke out among the generals, and by 301 B.C.E., three empires had emerged. Two of these empires are part of our story. Ptolemy seized Egypt and founded the Ptolemaic Dynasty, and Seleucus seized Syria, establishing the Seleucid Dynasty and Empire.

Alexander's conquests inaugurated the commingling of East and West, and had a tremendous long-term impact on Jewish culture. This combination of Greek culture and Oriental civilization is known as Hellenistic Civilization. The Eastern contributions which were part of this mixture included the "mystery religions" (knowledge of which is known only to the initiates), and many theological concepts, including that of life after death and the struggle of a god of evil against a god of good.

Hellenistic Civilization challenged directly the fundamental religious and cultural values of Judaism. At the same time, its innate appeal influenced a great many Jews, especially those in the upper and middle classes. Many Greek words, like "Synagogue," "Sanhedrin," and "Afikomen" found their way into common Hebrew usage, and are present in the Talmud. The conflict between Judaism and Hellenistic Civilization led to the Hasmonean Rebellion and the re-establishment of an independent Jewish state.

*Here end the chapters that Prof. Rigberg was able to complete before his death. The following "Conclusion" was intended to sum up these chapters and several more which he was unable to finish but it still seems worthwhile to include it here.*