From the Maccabees to the Mishnah

Third Edition

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Foreword to the First Edition

Out of the innumerable religious traditions, cults, and movements of the early Roman Empire, two alone transformed themselves to outlast that empire—even to our own time. The remarkable thing is that both had their origins in sects of Judaism—hardly the most powerful or conspicuous of Roman religions. Those two are rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. The present book investigates that extraordinarily fertile period of Jewish history—the three and a half centuries "from the Maccabees to the Mishnah"—which gave rise to these two religions that have been so central a part of our own history, and so problematic to each other.

That the Library of Early Christianity should include a book on Jewish history of the Hellenistic and Roman periods is obvious. What may not be so self-evident is that this book, unlike many in similar series in the past, does not treat the history of Judaism as merely ancillary or preparatory to the history of Christianity. The history of Christianity's beginnings is *part* of the history of Judaism in antiquity, and both are part of the history of Greco-Roman culture.

It is no exaggeration, I think, to say that an intellectual revolution has taken place—rather, is still in progress—in our understanding of early Judaism. Such astonishing new discoveries as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the existence of a vast body of Jewish art from antiquity, and the deciphering of Jewish mystical texts have been the most dramatic occasions for revising our picture of ancient Judaism. Even more important has been the burgeoning of interdisciplinary methods in studying the sources, both the newly discovered ones and those long familiar, and the employment of multiple methods is the special strength of the present book. It is the achievement of Shaye Cohen to have brought together the results of a wide range of scholarship of fields often

separate. In keeping with the design of the series, he has avoided the kind of argument and documentation that is necessary in the scholarly monographs in which work as new as this is ordinarily presented. Nevertheless, the expert as well as the novice will recognize both the erudition that lies behind this book and the freshness of its presentation.

Wayne A. Meeks

Preface to the Third Edition

I remain grateful to Westminster John Knox Press for keeping this book in print over many years and for giving me yet another opportunity to revise it and update it. I have rewritten sentences and paragraphs here and there, hoping to enhance clarity and remove errors. I have added some references in footnotes. Most important, I have added the entire chapter 8, which is devoted to the "parting of the ways" between Jews and Christians in the second century of our era. This chapter is a shortened and revised version of my "In Between: Jewish-Christians and the Curse of the Heretics," in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, edited by Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 207–36. Readers who enjoy that chapter should seek out the volume from which it is extracted.

If I were to begin to rewrite this book, there would be no end. In particular, I would be much more careful in my use of the terms "Judaism" and "Christianity." For the historian, "Judaism" and "Christianity" exist only insofar as they describe the beliefs and practices, institutions and attitudes, politics and communities of people. For the historian (as opposed to the theologian or philosopher or preacher), "Judaism" and "Christianity" are not theological abstractions. "Judaism" is what Jews do; "Christianity" is what Christians do. Large chunks of this book would need to be rewritten to reflect this perspective, but I must be content with the little bit of rewriting that I was able to accomplish. Similarly, sometimes I speak about "Jews," especially in my historical survey in chapter 1, where I would now be more careful and write "Judeans."

In spite of its changes and improvements, this third edition (with the exception of chapter 8) remains substantially the same as the previous two. Readers who liked those two editions will, I hope, like this one as well; readers

who found something to criticize in the earlier editions will no doubt succeed in doing so here as well.

S. J. D. C.
April 2014

PS: When I wrote the codicil to the preface of the second edition, I earnestly hoped that I would not need to do so for the third. But alas, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues on its anti-Israel course. It has now (20 June 2014) voted to divest from three American companies that it claims are aiding the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. What makes the vote so disturbing is its obsession with Israel and Israel's sins. It is one thing to say that Israel has not treated the Palestinians compassionately or wisely. This is obviously true. But it is quite another to condemn Israel alone when there is so much malfeasance and evil behavior all around the Near East. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) threatens only Israel with divestment, ignoring the wrongs committed by the Palestinian leadership in Gaza and the West Bank, wrongs committed against their own people as well as against Israelis. The Middle East is ablaze with war, civil war, rebellion, and oppression; human rights are abused aplenty in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, just to mention four egregious examples; in fact, the concept of "human rights" is all but unknown in the region. Israel is in a legal state of war with many of its neighbors; many of its Palestinian subjects support Hamas and Hezbollah, which have each declared, publicly and unambiguously, that they intend to see Israel destroyed. But the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), oblivious to all this, criticizes Israel alone for its faults. Protestations of fairness and justice ring hollow when Israel is held to a standard that no other country in the region is held to and when so much evil and suffering in the region are ignored. With this vote the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has chosen to align itself with Israel's enemies.

I have no complaint against WJK Press. My complaint is directed solely against WJK's parent body, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), whose anti-Israel policies I condemn.

Preface to the Second Edition

In revising this book for its second edition, I have rewritten many paragraphs to enhance clarity and remove errors; made much fuller use of Qumran material in chapter 3; introduced a section on women's Judaism in chapter 3; given a fuller introduction to the Mishnah in chapter 7; added numerous footnotes, mostly to provide references to primary sources or collections of primary sources; and updated somewhat the "Suggestions for Further Reading." Still, this is not a wholesale revision, and readers who disliked the first edition of this book will, I fear, also dislike the second. In my revisions I was aided by my research assistant Ms. Eve Levavi.

A reminder: citations from the Tanak (the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament) follow the verse numeration of the Hebrew, which occasionally differs slightly from that of the English versions. [Note change of policy for the third edition: verse numeration of biblical citations follows the NRSV.]

I am grateful to Westminster John Knox Press for keeping this book in print since 1987 and for acceding to my suggestion for a second edition.

I dedicated the first edition of this book to the memory of my father. In the interim my mother too has passed on, and I dedicate this second edition to her memory. May their souls be bound up in the bond of the living.

S. J. D. C.
July 2005

PS: The first edition of this book was published by the Westminster Press in 1987 in the Library of Early Christianity series, edited by Wayne Meeks. I was delighted then to be associated with a Presbyterian publishing house. It is one of the blessings of America that a Presbyterian publisher would commission

a Jew to write a book on early Judaism for a series oriented to students of the New Testament. This never happened in the old country. Eighteen years later I am grateful to Westminster John Knox Press for publishing this second edition and remain grateful to the press for its courtesies to me over the years. I am no longer happy, however, to be associated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the parent body of WJK, because I am deeply pained by the recent anti-Israel turn in its policies. The fact that WJK is editorially and fiscally independent of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affords small consolation; by publishing this book with WJK I am associating myself perforce with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), an organization whose anti-Israel policies I condemn and distrust.

S. J. D. C.
December 2005

Preface to the First Edition

In order to make this book accessible to students and other nonspecialists, I have kept the bibliographical annotation to a minimum. I provide references for all quoted sources and for most of the obscure texts to which I allude, but I do not as a rule provide references for those sources which are well indexed and readily available in English (notably the works of Philo and Josephus) or which can be tracked down easily through the modern works listed in the suggested readings. I admit that I have been somewhat inconsistent in this matter, and I apologize to any reader who is inconvenienced by my bibliographical shorthand. I cite the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and the Loeb Classical Library translation of Josephus (by Henry St. J. Thackeray, Ralph Marcus, Allen Wikgren, and Louis H. Feldman, published by Harvard University Press in nine volumes, 1926–65), except that I have occasionally departed from them wherever I felt it necessary. The other translations I have used are listed in the Suggestions for Further Reading under "Sources." Citations from the Tanak are according to the verse numeration of the Hebrew. [Note change of policy for the third edition: verse numeration of biblical citations follows the NRSV.]

The writing of this book was much more difficult and painful than I had anticipated, and I am grateful to various friends for their advice and encouragement. Professor Wayne Meeks read the entire manuscript, made many helpful suggestions, forced me to clarify both my prose and my ideas, and rescued me from errors large and small. Chapter 3 was immeasurably improved by the suggestions and criticisms of Professor George W. E. Nickelsburg, Rabbi Leonard Gordon, and Mr. Bradley Artson. Chapter 6 was similarly improved by the suggestions and criticisms of Professor John J. Collins. Ms. Stefanie Siegmund helped me organize my ideas in chapter 1. The level of

accuracy in chapters 2 through 5 was raised substantially by the detailed comments of my teacher Professor Morton Smith. To all of these friends I am deeply grateful, and if I have not incorporated all of their suggestions, it is my own stubbornness which is to blame.

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

S. J. D. C.
August 28, 1986

1

Ancient Judaism

Chronology and Definitions

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

CHRONOLOGY

In 587 BCE, many of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah were exiled to Babylonia, thereby inaugurating the *exilic period.* (BCE = before the Common Era; and CE = of the Common Era—religiously neutral equivalents of BC = before Christ; and AD = anno Domini, "Year of the Lord.") In 587, Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and the kingdom was no longer. With the Persian conquest of Babylonia in 539 BCE, the Judeans (or Jews) were permitted by the conqueror, Cyrus the Great, to return to their homeland. Some of them took advantage of his offer. At least two waves of Babylonian Jews returned to the land of Judea during the 530s and 520s BCE. After some complex and bitter feuding with the community of those who never had been exiled, the Jews rebuilt the temple and dedicated it in 516 BCE. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were active at the beginning of the exilic period; Second Isaiah and

his school (the anonymous authors of Isa. 40–66), Haggai, and Zechariah (the author of Zech. 1–8) were active at its end.

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

The conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great inaugurated the *Hellenistic period.* After Alexander's death (323 BCE), his empire was divided by his generals. Twenty years of fighting followed. Finally the dust settled (301 BCE), and Judea was part of the kingdom of Egypt (ruled by the Macedonian Ptolemies). A century later (200 BCE), Judea was conquered by the Macedonian kings of Syria (the Seleucids). In the sphere of cultural history, the Hellenistic period endured for centuries, perhaps until the Arab conquests of the seventh century CE. From the perspective of political history, however, the Hellenistic period was much shorter. For most inhabitants of the Levant, it ended when the rule of the Macedonian kings of Egypt and Syria was replaced by that of Rome in the first century BCE. For the Jews, it was even shorter.

Throughout the Persian and Hellenistic periods, the Jews maintained a quiescent attitude toward their rulers. There is no indication of any serious uprising by the Jews against the empires that ruled them. This changed dramatically in the 160s BCE. In 168–167 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, profaned the temple and persecuted Judaism. In the temple he erected an altar to Zeus, and everywhere he attempted to compel the Jews to violate the laws of the Torah. Various groups of Jews rebelled against the king, the most prominent of them being the clan of Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah the Maccabee (hence the entire dynasty is often called Maccabean or Hasmonean). In 164 BCE the Maccabees reconquered

and purified the temple; the end of Seleucid rule followed twenty years later (142 BCE).

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

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

Their fall from power was caused by both internal and external enemies. During the reigns of John Hyrcanus (135–104 BCE) and Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE), many Jews opposed Maccabean rule. These opponents were not "hellenizers" and "lawless" Jews who supported Antiochus's attempt to destroy Judaism, but loyal Jews who had had enough of the Maccabees' autocratic ways. The Seleucids and the Greek city-states of the region never fully accepted Maccabean independence, but the most potent external threat came from a power that first entered the scene as a friend and ally. At first, while the Seleucid Empire was still strong, the Romans accepted a treaty of alliance with the Maccabees (1 Macc. 8); as the proverb says, "An enemy of my enemy is my friend." However, as Seleucid power waned and Maccabean power increased, the Romans realized that it was no longer to their advantage to support the Judean state since the Maccabees had become as much a threat to Roman interests in the area as the Seleucids had been. After the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 63 BCE, they realized that the Maccabees were a

nationalist element that could not be combined easily with their own imperial vision, so the Maccabees were pushed aside and a new dynasty was created.

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

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

Taken by surprise, the Romans suffered a few serious defeats at first, but in the summer of 67 CE Vespasian marched from Syria into Galilee and began the slow and deliberate reconquest. By the year 68 the entire country, except for Jerusalem and a few isolated strongholds, had been pacified. Vespasian was in no rush, however, to storm Jerusalem. The Jews were killing each other in their own power struggles; most important, there also was a power vacuum in Rome in the wake of Nero's suicide in June of 68 CE. Vespasian had everything to gain and nothing to lose by taking his time. He played his cards correctly, with the result that in July of 69 CE, he had himself proclaimed emperor. He spent the rest of that year securing his power. A new emperor needs a victory to prove his worth, and Vespasian entrusted the war to his son Titus. After a brutal siege, in the summer of 70 CE Jerusalem was retaken and the temple was destroyed. A few mop-up operations remained, notably the taking of Masada (73 or 74 CE), but for all practical purposes, the war was over. The *Second Temple period* came to an end.

The war of 66–70 was the first Jewish revolt against the Romans but not the last. In 115–117, the Jews of Egypt, Cyprus, and Cyrenaica (in modern-day

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

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

Roman rule over the Jews continued until the Parthian and Arab conquests of the sixth and seventh centuries CE (by which time the Roman Empire had become Christian and Byzantine). Yet the centuries after the destruction of the temple often receive the name *the rabbinic period.* The word *rabbi* means "my master" and was originally a deferential form of address (like the French *monsieur*). By the first century CE, the title was normally used by students when addressing their teacher (John 1:38). In the second century CE, the meaning of the word began to change. It remained a generic title for a teacher or anyone in a position of authority, but it also became a technical term designating a member of that society which, from the second century to the sixth, in both Israel and Babylonia, created a voluminous and distinctive literature. The earliest of these works, completed around the year 200 CE, was the Mishnah. The Mishnah in turn was the subject of two gigantic commentaries (or more accurately, works that claimed to be commentaries): the Talmud of the land of Israel (also called the Jerusalem Talmud, or Yerushalmi), completed

around 360–400, and the Talmud of Babylonia (the Babylonian Talmud, or Bavli), completed around the year 500 (but still being edited two or three centuries later). The rabbis also produced a series of commentaries on Scripture and various other works. In this book "the rabbis" and "the rabbinic period" refer to the society and religion of the second to sixth centuries CE.

PERIODIZATION AND PERSPECTIVE

Periodization based on the political setting of ancient Judaism is relatively benign, for there are no ideological issues at stake. No one will contest the fact that the Persians, the Hellenistic dynasties, the Maccabees, and the Romans successively ruled the Jewish polity in the land of Israel. In contrast, periodization based on religious or cultural factors is ideologically charged. The bias may be either Jewish or Christian, because both Jews and Christians have a stake in the interpretation of ancient Judaism.

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

If we accept the claims of the rabbis themselves, the rabbinic period begins much earlier than the second century CE. The rabbis believed themselves to have been the bearers of a sacred tradition revealed by God to Moses, and thus the direct heirs of the communal leaders of the Jews throughout the generations. According to this belief (or "myth"), by which the rabbis legitimated themselves and their teachings, the rabbinic period begins with "Moses our rabbi." Only fundamentalist Jews today accept the historicity of this perspective, but modern scholars, especially Jewish scholars, have been influenced by it as well. Until recently scholars spoke readily of a normative Judaism, as if rabbinic Judaism (and its antecedents) were always the dominant and authentic expression of Judaism. Many scholars still view the Second Temple period

through rabbinic spectacles, assuming that all the central institutions of society were under rabbinic aegis, and ascribing enormous influence and power to various protorabbinic figures. But none of these beliefs can be substantiated by historical evidence. For the believer, rabbinic Judaism is normative Judaism, and the rabbis were always at the center of Jewish history. For the historian, however, "the rabbis" and "the rabbinic period" become meaningful entities only after 70 CE. I shall return to this point in chapters 5 and 7.

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

Several modern writers continue to use the term "late Judaism," unaware of its origins and implications, but in recent years many scholars have begun to use the term "early Judaism" as its bias-free replacement. What once was late is now deemed early! While "early Judaism" lacks the anti-Jewish overtones of "late Judaism," it is chronologically vague, and therefore other, more precise expressions are preferable. One scholar has proposed that the Judaism of the last centuries of the Second Temple period be called "middle Judaism," to distinguish it from the "early Judaism" of the Persian period that preceded it and from the "rabbinic Judaism" that followed it.[1]

Another legacy of Christianity is the term "intertestamental period." Since the New Testament is the "end" of the Old Testament, the centuries that linked the two were dubbed "the intertestamental period." This perspective is not necessarily prejudicial to its subject, but it usually is, because it regards "intertestamental Judaism" primarily as the preparation for the emergence of Christianity. Books with titles like "Judaism in the Age of Jesus" or "The Jewish Background to the New Testament" often have as their purpose, whether explicit or implicit, the demonstration that "intertestamental Judaism" was

1. Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); and other works by the same author.

somehow “fulfilled” or “completed” when it gave birth to Christianity. But ancient Judaism is worthy of study in its own right, not only because it is the matrix of early Christianity. Whether Christianity is indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament and of intertestamental Judaism is a question that a historian cannot answer.

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

FROM PREEXILIC ISRAEL TO SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

When describing the rebuilding of the Second Temple, Josephus remarks that those who returned from Babylonia should be called “Jews” (or “Judeans,” *Ioudaioi* in Greek, literally, “those of the tribe of Judah”) rather than “Israelites.”[2] Josephus was referring only to a change in nomenclature, but that change masks a much more significant shift. The religion, society, and culture of the preexilic kingdoms of Judah and Israel differ in many important ways from those of the period after the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE. The practices, ideas, and institutions that were elaborated during the Second Temple period formed and still form the basis of the religion known as Judaism.

How does Israelite religion differ from Judaism? In many respects, of course, it doesn’t. The two are linked by a common belief in the one supreme

2. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 11.5.7 §173.

God, who created the world, chose the Israelites/Jews to be his people, and entered into a covenantal relationship with them; by a shared attachment to the Holy Land of Israel, the holy city of Jerusalem, and the holy temple; and by the same sacred calendar and many of the same religious observances. Even more important than these commonalities is the fact that the Jews of all times have always seen themselves not merely as the successors to, but also as the continuators of, the legacy of preexilic Israel. Christianity claimed (and to some extent, still claims) to be the true Israel, but this claim was accompanied by an assertion of newness. Christianity is the fruit of a new creation, a new revelation, and a new covenant (a New Testament). Premodern Judaism never developed this sense of newness, and it is this sense of continuity that more than anything else connects Second Temple Judaism to preexilic Israel, in spite of numerous changes and enormous upheavals.

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

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

Second Temple Judaism also developed a regimen of private worship unknown to preexilic Israel. The word of God was to be the object of constant study and meditation, not only because this activity would teach the conduct that God expected, but also because the very act of study was deemed to be an act of worship. In addition to study, daily prayer became part of the

piety practiced by the religious elite. The commandments of the Torah were elaborated and expanded, thus affording individual Jews opportunity for demonstrating their loyalty to God. The piety of preexilic Israel centered on the group (the people of Israel or the family), while the piety of Second Temple Judaism centered on both the group and the individual. (Throughout this book I shall refer to the democratization or individualization of religion, but at the outset I concede that no ancient society, including ancient Judaism, allocated the individual as much freedom and importance as does modern Western culture. Relative to modern culture, ancient Judaism is not individualistic at all, but relative to preexilic Israel it is.)

Preexilic Israel and Second Temple Judaism also differed in their understanding of *theodicy*, God's administration of justice. Everyone agreed that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, but God's accounting methods were the subject of intense scrutiny. Preexilic Israel believed that God administered justice in this world. The righteous and the wicked were not always the direct recipients of God's attentions, because God could reward or punish their offspring in their stead (emphasis on the collective). Second Temple Judaism insisted that God punishes or rewards only those who deserve it and that the conduct of one's ancestors is irrelevant (emphasis on the individual). Since God does not always seem to set matters right in this world, he must do so in the next. Second Temple Judaism therefore elaborated complex schemes of reward and punishment after death or at the end time. Some of these schemes included the resurrection of the dead. Just as God will reestablish justice for the individual, he shall do so for the nation by destroying the yoke of the nations and restoring the sovereignty of the people of Israel. Jerusalem and the temple will be restored to their former glory, and God's anointed one (*messiah*) shall reign securely. All of these *eschatological* doctrines (that is, doctrines concerning the *end time* or ultimate future) are innovations of Second Temple Judaism.

Even as it elaborated new theories to account for God's mysterious ways in administering the world, some segments of Second Temple Judaism admitted that the problem was insoluble. They accounted for the triumph of evil by positing the existence of numerous supernatural beings who opposed God's dominion and everything that was good and true. Mirroring this cosmic struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil is the struggle of good and evil spirits within each person. Some of these schemes are so dualistic that we may debate whether they should be called monotheistic (expressing a belief in one God). Even those Jews who would have nothing of these radical dualistic schemes nevertheless believed in angels and spirits of all sorts. The God of Second Temple Judaism was much more transcendent than the God of preexilic Israel. God needed intermediaries to run the world, and humanity

needed intermediaries to reach God. (All of these theological developments are discussed in chap. 3.)

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

Prophets no longer enjoyed the prestige and authority that had been theirs in preexilic times. In Second Temple Judaism, prophets became apocalyptic seers, mystics, healers, and holy men. A new type of authority figure emerged to replace the classical prophet: the *scribe*, whose authority derived not from his pedigree and institutional setting (like the priest), not from his charismatic personality and direct contact with God (like the prophet), but from his erudition in the sacred Scriptures and traditions. Various sects as well claimed authority on the basis of their superior erudition. The party against which this superior erudition was brandished usually was the priesthood.

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

Second Temple Judaism is a "book religion." At its heart lies the Hebrew Bible, the book that Jews call Tanak (or Tanakh) and Christians call the Old Testament. Preexilic Israel produced the raw materials out of which most of the Bible was constructed, but it was Second Temple Judaism that created the Bible, venerated the very parchment on which it was written, and devoted enormous energies to its interpretation. This process is called *canonization*. The Jews of the Second Temple period realized that they lived in a postclassical age. They studied the books of the ancients and did not try to compete

with them. They turned instead to new literary genres and new modes of expression. This development is at the heart of the shift from Israelite religion to Judaism (see chap. 6).

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Second Temple Judaism was a complex phenomenon. Judaism changed dramatically during the Persian, Hellenistic, Maccabean, Roman, and rabbinic periods. Generalizations that may be true for one period may not be true for another. In addition, at any given moment Jews practiced their religion in manifold different ways. The Jewish community of Egypt in the first century CE was far from uniform in practice and belief, and we have no reason to assume that any of the Egyptian interpretations of Judaism would necessarily have found favor in the other communities of Greek-speaking Jews throughout the Roman world (e.g., in Rome, Asia Minor, North Africa, and parts of the land of Israel). The Judaism of the land of Israel was striated not only by numerous sects but also by numerous teachers and holy men, each with a band of supporters. We have no reason to assume that any of the Judean interpretations of Judaism would necessarily have found favor in the other communities of Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking Jews throughout the East (e.g., in Babylonia and parts of Syria). With such diversity, was there any unity? What links these diverse phenomena together and allows them all to be called *Judaism*?

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

This self-perception manifested itself especially in the relations of Diaspora Jewry to the land of Israel and the temple. The Maccabees tried hard to win the support of Diaspora Jewry, basing their campaign to some extent on loyalty to the mother country. They instructed the Jews of the Diaspora through a series of epistles to observe the newly introduced festival of Hanukkah, which celebrated the repurification of the temple in 164 BCE (2 Macc. 1–2). It was during the century of Maccabean rule that 1 Maccabees was translated from Hebrew to Greek, and that Esther was translated into Greek by a priest from Jerusalem. At this same time, the author of the *Letter of Aristeas*

described how seventy-two elders went from Jerusalem to Egypt, where they would translate the Torah into Greek. The Maccabees also reinterpreted Exodus 30:11–16 to mean that every male Jew was obligated to contribute a half shekel to the temple in Jerusalem every year. Herod the Great continued this policy. He appointed as his high priests Jews from Babylonia and Alexandria, the two largest Diaspora communities. When the Jews of Asia Minor needed an advocate to plead their cause before the Romans, Herod sent his chief adviser, who succeeded brilliantly in their behalf.[3]

Even if these overtures were motivated more by a desire for support rather than a sense of kinship, Diaspora Jews, especially those of Egypt, responded to them. They contributed large sums of money to the temple, and by Herodian times at the latest, streamed in the thousands to Jerusalem to witness and participate in the festival rituals of the temple. Philo describes Jerusalem as the "mother city" of the Jews and went there on pilgrimage at least once.[4] The book of Acts mentions that Jews from virtually every part of the world could be found in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5–11).

The mutual loyalty of the Jews of the homeland and the Diaspora had political implications too. During the second century BCE, two Jewish generals of the queen of Egypt refused to lead her army against the Maccabean ruler because, they said, it was impious for them to fight their coreligionists. In addition, they warned that the Jews of Egypt might rebel against the queen if she were to attack their home country. When a person claiming to be the last representative of the Maccabean line came to Rome at the end of the first century BCE, the Jews turned out en masse to show their support. (Alas, he was a pretender.) According to Josephus, the Roman emperor Claudius wrote a public letter protecting the rights of "the Jews throughout the empire under the Romans"; in the eyes of the emperor, all the Jews of the Roman Empire constituted a single entity. During the war of 66–70 CE, some Diaspora Jews supported the revolutionaries and sent them aid. The fact is revealed by a Roman historian of the third century CE who wrote that the rebels were assisted by "their coreligionists from across the Euphrates (that is, Babylonia) and indeed, the entire Roman Empire." After the revolt of 66–70 CE, the Romans imposed a punitive tax (the *fiscus Iudaicus*) on all the Jews of the

3. Jacob Liver, "The Half-Shekel Offering in Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 173–98. High priest from Babylonia: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.2.4 §22 and 15.3.1 §40. High priest from Alexandria: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.9.3 §320. Herod sent Nicolas of Damascus to intercede on behalf of the Jews of Asia Minor: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12.3.2 §§125–27 and 16.2.3–5 §§27–65.

4. Philo, *Against Flaccus* 7 §46; idem, *Embassy to Gaius* 36 §281, "mother city"; idem, *On Providence* 2 §64, re pilgrimage.

Roman Empire, not just the Jews of Judea. In the eyes of the Romans, all the Jews were responsible for what had happened.[5]

It is perhaps not surprising that outsiders saw the Jews as a single people or ethnic group. Outsiders seldom see the disagreements, tensions, and rivalries that are so apparent to insiders. It is perhaps more surprising that the Jews of antiquity, in some contexts at least, saw themselves as citizens of one nation and one religion, unaware of, or oblivious to, the fact that they were separated from each other by their diverse languages, practices, ideologies, and political loyalties. But in fact, for all of their disagreements and rivalries, ancient Jews were united by a common set of practices and beliefs that characterized virtually all segments of Jewry (see chap. 3). This common Judaism was the unity within the diversity; both the unity and the diversity are the subjects of this book.

5. Two Jewish generals: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.13.2 §354. Jews of Rome support their Hasmonean favorite: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.12.1 §330. Letter of Claudius: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.5.3 §288. Diaspora Jews support the revolutionaries: Dio Cassius 66.4.3, in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1974–84), 2:373, no. 430. *Fiscus Iudaicus*: Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.6.6 §218.

Timeline

539–334 BCE	Persian period
516	Second Temple built, 70 years after destruction of Solomon's
mid-5th cent.	Activity of Ezra and Nehemiah
334	Alexander the Great begins his career of conquest
334–63	Hellenistic period
301–200	Judea ruled by Hellenistic kings of Egypt, the Ptolemies
200–167	Judea ruled by Hellenistic kings of Syria and Asia Minor, the Seleucids
167–164	Profanation of the temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes; Hasmonean revolt led by Judah the Maccabee
164	Rededication of the temple, with new Festival of Hanukkah
160	Death of Judah the Maccabee
ca. 152–143/2	High priesthood of Jonathan, brother of Judah
142–134	High priesthood of Simon, brother of Judah
134–104	High priesthood of John Hyrcanus I, son of Simon
104–103	High priesthood of Aristobulus I, son of John Hyrcanus
103–76	High priesthood of Alexander Jannaeus, brother of Aristobulus

76–67	Reign of Salome Alexandra, widow of Alexander Jannaeus
67–63	High priesthood of Aristobulus II, son of Salome Alexandra
63	Romans conquer Jerusalem; Judea part of Roman sphere of influence
63 BCE to 4th cent. CE	Roman period
37–4	Herod the Great, a vassal king
4 BCE	Herod the Great dies, his kingdom split into three (Archelaus, Philip, and Herod Antipas)
1 BCE—1 CE	Transition from BCE (before the Common Era) to CE (Common Era)
6 CE	Judea comes under direct Roman rule through procurators
ca. 26–36	Pontius Pilate is procurator/prefect
early 30s	Activity of Jesus
37–41	Emperor Gaius Caligula; attempt to put a statue in the temple
41–44	King Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great
early–mid 50s	Letters and travels of Paul (1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Romans, Philemon, 1 and 2 Corinthians)
54–68	Emperor Nero
66	Outbreak of riots in Judea lead to war against the Romans
68	Qumran settlement destroyed by the Romans
70	Jerusalem temple destroyed by the Romans
73 or 74	Masada falls to the Romans
ca. 70	Gospel of Mark
80s	Gospels of Matthew and Luke
80s	Book of Acts (some scholars date Acts ca. 120 or even later)
ca. 80	*Jewish War*, by Josephus

81–96	Emperor Domitian
ca. 80–90	Beginnings of rabbinic activity at Yavneh (Jamnia)
ca. 90–100	Gospel of John
93/94	*Jewish Antiquities*, by Josephus
late 90s	*Against Apion*, by Josephus
90s	Book of Revelation
ca. 96	*Epistle to the Corinthians*, by Clement of Rome, re church hierarchy and discipline, implicit Roman primacy
98–117	Emperor Trajan
ca. 100	*Didache = Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, first church order
112	Letter of Pliny, governor of Pontus and Bithynia, to Emperor Trajan about Christians
115–117	Revolt of Jews in Egypt, Cyprus, and Cyrene against the Romans
117–135	Emperor Hadrian
ca. 120	Ignatius of Antioch, the term “Christianity”
ca. 130	*Letter of Barnabas*, allegory of Torah Law
132–135	Revolt of Bar Kokhba (Kosba) in Judea; religious persecution of Judaism; expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem and the de-Judaization of Judea
ca. 160	*Martyrdom of Polycarp*, first Christian martyrology
161–180	Emperor Marcus Aurelius
mid-2nd cent.	Rabbinic sages active in Galilee (in Usha)
ca. 160	Justin Martyr (martyred ca. 160), *1 Apology*, *1 Apology*, *Dialogue with Trypho*
ca. 160	Marcion in Rome, pitting the God of Love against the God of Law
ca. 160	Valentinus in Rome, the most distinguished teacher of “Gnosticism”
ca. 160–170	Melito of Sardis, *On Pasch*
3rd quarter of 2nd cent.	In Asia Minor, the seer Montanus, apocalyptic Christianity, renewal of ecstasy and prophecy, rigorism in practice

ca. 178	Irenaeus becomes bishop of Lyon; writes *Against the Heresies*, defends "Orthodoxy," speaks of a New Testament similar to ours, four Gospels, the rule of faith, apostolic succession
ca. 197	Tertullian of Carthage, *Apology*; beginnings of Christian Latin literature
ca. 200	Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* (= *Miscellanies*)
ca. 200	Rabbi Judah the Patriarch edits the Mishnah, the first rabbinic book