

The Role of Messianism in the First Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE

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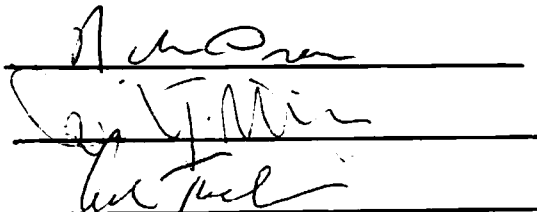
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On the basis of this thesis
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HIGH HONORS in History


The image shows three handwritten signatures, each written on a horizontal line. The signatures are in cursive and appear to be the names of the undersigned individuals mentioned in the text above.

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INTRODUCTION

For Josephus, the “Great War” of the Jews against the Romans was a contest of monumental significance. In his preface to his *War* (1.1),¹ he claims this war was not only the greatest of any in his own time but nearly the greatest of any conflict between cities or nations throughout history. This, of course, is a wild exaggeration, based on a desire to imitate Herodotus and Thucydides who made similar claims for the wars about which they wrote.² Nevertheless, for the Jews, to be sure, this conflict did have momentous implications.

The Jewish defeat by the Romans in the First Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE was massive and virtually unprecedented in history. So thorough and devastating were the Roman efforts at suppressing the insurrection that for the next nineteen centuries, Jerusalem would no longer be the capital of the Jews. Over half of a million Jews were killed during the revolt, dozens of Jewish cities were wiped off the map, and a large part of the territory of Judaea was confiscated by the Romans and repopulated by Gentiles.³ But perhaps most importantly, the defeat marked the end of the Second Temple Period and the beginning of a new period in Jewish history, one defined by both political powerlessness and significant changes in the nature of Judaism. Prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, which, save for a brief interlude in the sixth century BCE, had stood for over a thousand years, the political and religious identity of the Jews had been inexorably entwined. However, in the aftermath of the First Jewish Revolt, the ruling class and the priesthood were each deprived of their respective political powers, and Jewish identity was thereafter defined almost exclusively in terms of religious culture. For these reasons, many historians often consider the Roman destruction of Judaea, of Jerusalem and of the Temple of

¹ Translations from Josephus, *Works*, 10 vols., trans. by R. Marcus Thackeray, et. al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

² Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London: Duckworth Publishers, 2002), 5.

³ Moshe Aberbach and David Aberbach, *The Roman-Jewish Wars and Hebrew Cultural Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 1-4.

Yahweh as the fundamental watershed in Jewish history.⁴

We may know that there was a war in Judaea during the years 66-70 CE. We may even know that the war culminated in the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and that the main protagonists were Jews of Judaea and Galilee matched against the troops of the Roman empire. Awareness of these events, however, does not mean that we understand *why* the war occurred. This question falls within the realm of understanding. As historians, therefore, the simple collection of information is only part of the task. Without the accompanying analysis the data acquired remains a silent record.

Unfortunately, scholars of the revolt of 66-70 CE have failed to understand this critical component of the historian's craft. When explaining the cause of the war, modern scholars have traditionally cited a number of long standing factors, including some combination of the nature of Roman rule, the growth of Jewish nationalism, the status of Jewish-pagan relations, and the inability of the ruling class in Jerusalem to offer effective leadership.⁵ But to simply ascribe the cause of the war to a series of political and social factors fails to make a connection with what was happening within Judaism and in Judaea at large during the period—namely, the proliferation of messianic hope. Many of the available Jewish and pagan sources of the period indicate that the first century CE Judaea was a time full of intense messianic expectation; yet scholars persist in their contention that expectations of an imminent End and a forthcoming messiah were not in the normal mindset of a first century Jew.

The aim of my thesis is to locate messianic hope in the first century CE and clarify the role and prominence of such ideas in in the First Jewish Revolt. What is the real connection between the huge interest of those times in the last things and concerted political action? Was

⁴ D. Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 10-11.

⁵ The most notable examples of secondary literature devoted to the causes of the Revolt include P. A. Brunt's "Josephus on Social Conflicts in Roman Judea," P. Bilde's "The Causes of the Jewish War According to Josephus," U. Rappaport's "Jewish-Pagan Relations and the Revolt against Rome in 66-70 CE," and M. Goodman's "The First Jewish Revolt: Social Conflict and the Problem of Debt."

messianism a language for the expression of political ideas, for envisaging social and political change? Did the thoughts and the actions emanate from the same circles? Was messianic expectation at the heart of the movement, or on its fringes? And again, what exactly was expected? Finally, how can we explain the discrepancy between our ancient sources and modern scholarship?

In Chapter One, I provide a history of the Israelite people from the establishment of the United Hebrew Monarchy in c. 1025 BCE through the end of the Second Temple Period in 70 CE. In this brief outline, the revolt of 66-70 acts as a frame for viewing the events of the previous thousand years. In Chapter Two, I return to the Maccabaeen resistance of the second century BCE to examine the emergence and proliferation of the apocalyptic world view, particularly messianism, in Jewish thought. Through an analysis of the content and popularity of the religious texts that espoused these ideas, it is possible to show that these ideas were indeed pervasive in Jewish society during the years leading up to the revolt. In Chapter Three, I shift my focus from scribal exegesis and demonstrate that messianic expectations also had an anarchic and revolutionary character that found expression in popular resistance against the Romans. Finally, in the first section of Chapter Four, I show that, in spite of all of the evidence, modern scholars have failed to include messianism among the causes of the war. In the following section of this chapter, I offer possible explanations as to how, or why, scholarship could have consistently made such a seemingly obvious omission.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The United Monarchy, c. 1030-931 BCE

The question of how and why groups of Hebrews moved to the hills of Canaan and organized themselves into tribes by the twelfth century BCE has continued to perplex and fascinate scholars. The answers to these questions were not even apparent during biblical times, as the marked discrepancies between the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges demonstrate, and so it should come as no surprise that modern scholars hold vastly differing views on these issues.⁶ However, in spite of this disagreement, new archaeological discoveries and advancements in the relevant technology have allowed scholars to at least agree on one thing: the historical reality of early Israel is very different from the biblical version and would be hardly recognizable to the writers of the Bible. But rather than providing an account of the competing historical hypotheses, which, at least at this point, can offer little more than speculation, let us continue onto the period of the United Hebrew Monarchy.⁷

According to the narratives presented in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, it was a group of foreign invaders that provided the main impetus for the formation of the United

⁶ For a discussion of the discrepancies mentioned above between the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges, see Joseph Callaway, "The Settlement in Canaan: The Period of the Judges," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 55-58.

⁷ Archaeological evidence and research is integral to an understanding of ancient history, as it provides scholars with invaluable information on the structures that a society had- most importantly, how its people lived and how their economic system developed. However, physical evidence by itself is not enough to construct a satisfactory account of a historical event. What we need are texts, even though they are extraordinary more difficult to use than the largely unwritten materials that archaeology provides. These secondary sources give us insight into a people's language, political boundaries and structures, religious beliefs, social and legal customs, trade and business organization. From them, we can also learn about the fears, beliefs, prejudices and values of the writers and the society in which they lived. Unfortunately, however, outside of the Bible, Palestine is very poor in such texts from periods earlier than the Hellenistic Age. Thus, without any extra-biblical evidence with which we might compare the biblical account, the historicity of ancient biblical narratives and hence the Judeo-Christian perception of the origins and subsequent history of ancient Israel cannot be confirmed. See Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

Hebrew Monarchy in Canaan. The invasion was that of the Philistines, a non-Semitic people of unknown origins who quickly conquered so much of Canaan around 1050 BCE that the region became known alternatively as Palestine, in effect meaning “the Philistine country.”⁸ Faced with the threat of extinction, the Hebrews now intensified their struggle. Whereas previously they had preserved a tribal form of organization whereby wise men, known as “judges.” in each tribe were chosen when there was a need to resolve conflicts, it now became clear that a tighter, “national” form of government was necessary to meet the Philistine challenge. Accordingly, around 1025 BCE, Samuel, a tribal judge and prophet with the force of personality to gain adherence from all the Israelite tribes, selected for all them a king, Saul, who would make them a united people.⁹

Saul (c.1025-1005) was made king by divine election and by popular acclamation after his victory over the Ammonites, but his career thereafter was clouded by conflict with Samuel. Samuel, evidently upset by what he considered to be a usurpation of the his authority as prophet, began making claims that Saul had been rejected by God. Samuel as a result began to lend his support to an energetic young warrior, David, who carried on a series of skillful maneuvers to draw popular support away from Saul. Waging his own military campaigns, David achieved one triumph over the Philistines after another.¹⁰ In contrast. the armies of Saul met frequent defeat. Finally, the king, being critically wounded, ended the rivalry by killing himself in 1005 BCE.¹¹

With Saul dead, David (c.1005-965) took the throne and proceeded to become the most successful and popular king the Jews ever had. Advancing relentlessly against the Philistines, David significantly reduced their territory to a narrow strip of coast in the south, and forged an

⁸ Frederick F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations: From the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 21.

⁹ Moshe Weiss, *A Brief History of the Jewish People* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 4-7.

¹⁰ Andre Lemaire. “The United Monarchy.” in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 163.

¹¹ Anthony Kamm. *The Israelites: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 53.

enormous empire, the scale of which was never duplicated in Israel's subsequent history.¹²

Among his conquests was the city of Jerusalem, which he made the seat of the Hebrew national monarchy. Then, recapturing the Ark of the Covenant¹³ from the Philistines, David installed it in his capital, thereby linking the God of Israel, the chosen dynasty of David, and the chosen city of Jerusalem in a henceforth indissoluble union.¹⁴

The essence of the Davidic monarchy was the idea that, in addition to divine election through Samuel and public acclamation, David had God's promise of an eternal dynasty.¹⁵ This promise was conceived of as a covenant with David, paralleling the covenant with Israel and instrumental in the latter's fulfillment; i.e., that God would channel his benefactions to Israel through the chosen dynasty of David. Consequently, the subsequent kings of Judah were drawn from David's lineage through the destruction of the Temple in 587 BCE.¹⁶

David died in about 965 BCE. Especially in light of subsequent national disasters, later chroniclers portray David as a great king who presided over a "Golden Age." Although the Jews were largely indifferent to this tradition until approximately the mid-second century BCE,¹⁷ the Golden age became, from that point on, the standard to which all later times would be compared.¹⁸ So much did the longing for a return to this age become incorporated into Israelite

belief that the Jews began to expect that an individual—a Messiah, of the line of David—would

¹² Lemaire, "The United Monarchy," 163.

¹³ The Ark of Covenant had served as the central shrine to the Israelite god Yahweh and the symbol of His divine presence among the Israelites

¹⁴ Kamm, *The Israelites*, 54-57.

¹⁵ Forms of this promise exist in Psalms 132 and II Samuel 7.

¹⁶ Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, 26.

¹⁷ Ptolemy Philadelphus (283-247 BCE) commissioned the translation of the ancient Jewish scriptures into Greek, thereby making the texts, and thus the Davidic tradition, widely available throughout the Judaeo-Hellenistic world.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, however, an accurate historical construction of the events of the so called golden age, much like those of early Israel, remains beyond scholars. Although we have found almost nothing outside of the biblical texts to support the purported historical realities in Palestine's tenth century BCE, the conception of the golden age by the first century CE Jews is nevertheless of the utmost significance. Whether or not their view of the period was an exaggeration of real events, a complete fabrication, or indeed historical is of little consequence. The Jews who revolted against the Romans in 66 CE never doubted what they understood to be their prestigious historical tradition, and so, if we are to uncover the motives behind the First Jewish Revolt, we must first see ancient Judah as the Jews themselves saw it. To do so is paramount, as it was *their* perception of the events of the Golden Age, and not the *actual* events, that ultimately determined the course of history. See Lemaire. "The United Monarchy," 106-108.

come restore Jerusalem to its rightful status. As we shall see in later chapters, the messianic expectation born from this tradition was to have a pronounced effect on Jewish political ambitions in the first century CE.

David was succeeded by his son Solomon (c. 965 to 933 BCE), the last of the three kings of the United Hebrew Monarchy. Solomon was determined to finish his father's work in building a political and religious center at Jerusalem. The purpose was twofold. First, if the Israelites were to take their place among the great nations of the region, they had to have a magnificent capital as a visual manifestation of their greatness. And secondly, they also needed a splendid temple to reaffirm their national religious commitment.¹⁹ Until then, the Ark of the Covenant had been carried by the Israelites in their wanderings in a "tabernacle," actually no more than a portable tent. To house an exalted shrine in a tent may have been satisfactory for a nomadic people, but not for the settled people of a great nation. Instead, the Ark had to be located in a mighty capital and housed properly in the innermost precincts of a splendid temple.²⁰ For these reasons Solomon spared no expense in building his capital, and especially in building the temple that would be the central monument of Hebrew national and religious life. In the long run this policy contributed fundamentally to the survival of the Hebrews, for Solomon indeed succeeded in erecting a splendid temple and Solomon's Temple thereafter served as an inspiring symbol whenever Israel was faced with the possibility of national and cultural obliteration.²¹

In the short term, however, the king's lavish building projects caused trouble because Palestine did not have the natural resources needed for basic building materials. When, despite mounting oppressive taxation, Solomon found himself unable to pay his construction debts, he first ceded territory to his main supplier, the bordering country of Phoenicia, to the north, and

¹⁹ Kamm, *The Israelites*, 63-67.

²⁰ Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, 36-41.

²¹ Weiss, *A Brief History of Israel*, 11-13.

then he drafted and deported Hebrews to work in Phoenicia's forests and mines.²² Not surprisingly, such tyrannical behavior provoked bitter antagonism among many of Solomon's subjects, especially those of the north. While Solomon remained alive his northern subjects continued to be obedient to him, but his death was the signal for open revolt. Refusing to pay taxes to Solomon's son Rehoboam, and opposed to many of Solomon's religious innovations, the northerners quickly seceded from the united Hebrew state and set up their own kingdom. Thus ended the United Hebrew Monarchy.²³

The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, c. 931-332 BCE

The northern kingdom came to be known as the Kingdom of Israel, having its capital in Samaria, while the remnant in the south was the Kingdom of Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem. Even as a united state the Hebrew realm would not have been impressively strong, but split in half, the realm was weak. More by luck and the forbearance of its neighbors than by intrinsic viability the Kingdom of Israel managed to survive, usually by paying tribute, for two centuries until 722 BCE, when it was annihilated by the Assyrians.²⁴ Since the Assyrians followed a policy of leveling all the important buildings of conquered nations and scattering their populations, the Kingdom of Israel was never heard from again.²⁵ As for the Kingdom of Judah, it just barely eluded the Assyrian menace, partly because of its very insignificance, but in 586 BCE it was conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, who plundered and burned Jerusalem and its Temple, and deported Judah's leading citizens to Babylon.²⁶ For a half century thereafter the Jews, as they will now be called, endured their "Babylonian Captivity," fearing

²² Lemaire. "The United Monarchy." 110-112.

²³ Kamm, *The Israelites*, 64-66.

²⁴ William Stiebing, Jr., *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2003), 249-54.

²⁵ Bruce. *Israel and the Nations*, 63-67.

²⁶ The importance of the Babylonian exile cannot be stressed enough, as it sparked a social transformation that ultimately would lead to the development of both Judaism as a religion and a social movement.

that they would never see their homeland again.²⁷

However upon conquering Babylon in 539 BCE, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to Palestine and to establish their rule there semi-independently under Persian overlordship. Those who returned wasted little time in rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple (c. 516 BCE), and their heirs lived more or less peacefully within the Persian sphere of influence²⁸ until 332 BCE, when Palestine, and much of the known world, was conquered by the Greek, Alexander the Great. Alexander died abruptly in 323 BCE, however, before he could ensure the perpetuation of his empire. Chaos reigned throughout the Mediterranean as his heirs, generals and friends battled for the rights to his empire. When the dust had settled nearly twenty years later, Alexander's dynasty had been reduced to three smaller ones- the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Seleukids in Asia and the Antigonids in Macedonia.²⁹

The Jewish Community Under Ptolemaic and Seleukid Rule, 332-167 BCE

Palestine became part of the Hellenistic kingdom of Ptolemaic Egypt, the policy of which was to permit the Jews considerable cultural and religious freedom.³⁰ The Jews continued to worship at their temple without interference, and the office of high priest was still allowed to exercise great authority over religious and political matters. Thus, although the threat of assimilation and loss of identity were certainly present, Judaea was for the most part excluded from the process of Hellenization that was sweeping through surrounding regions.³¹

When in 198 BCE Judaea was conquered by King Antiochos III (247-187 BCE) of the

²⁷ James Purvis, "Exile and Return," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 205.

²⁸ James Purvis, "Exile and Return," 205-207.

²⁹ Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, 122-127.

³⁰ Under the Hellenistic monarchies, Judah came to be called Judaea, and from this point on, it will be referred to as such.

³¹ W. Stewart McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 86-88.

Syrian Seleukid dynasty, the Jews were treated even more liberally, being granted a charter to govern themselves by their own constitution, namely, the Torah.³²

Circumstances were not to remain the same under the successors of Antiochos III. The most extreme example of a break with the past was the decrees against traditional Jewish observance promulgated by Antiochos IV in 168 BCE. To circumcise one's children, to be found in possession of a roll of the sacred law, to refuse to eat pork or the meat of animals offered on pagan altars, were all punishable by death (1 Macc. 1.44-49). In addition to renouncing their way of life, the Jews were also forced to profess their loyalty to Zeus, the Olympian deity of whom Epiphanes claimed to be a manifestation. To enforce his edict, Epiphanes constructed a new pagan temple, the Acra, which overlooked the Temple of Yahweh and provided quarters for the twenty two thousand troops he had stationed in Jerusalem.³³

The Hasmonaeans, c. 167 BCE-37 BCE

Although the motives of Antiochos IV in issuing these decrees remain a subject of intense scholarly debate, two facts are clear: first, that some Hellenizing Jews collaborated with the royal decrees; second, that these decrees led to an armed revolt, initiated by a family of conservative country priests, headed by Mattathias the Hasmonaeon, in the village of Modin. He and his five sons began a campaign of guerrilla warfare, harassing the Seleukid troops and destroying pagan altars. Mattathias was succeeded by his third son, Judah, known as Judah the Maccabee ("the hammer").³⁴ Judah's immediate successes attracted not only the common Jew, but also the *hasidim*, an extremely pious faction within the Jewish religion that was often at odds with the more normative forms of Judaism (1 Macc. 2.42-43). The *hasidim* had previously taken the

³² John Hayes and Sara Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity: from Alexander to Bar Kochba* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1998), 38-40.

³³ McCullough, *History and Literature*, 112-118.

³⁴ Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, 146.

attitude of passive resistance towards the Hellenizers, as their uncompromising loyalty to the divine law dictated.³⁵ This inclusion among the ranks of the Maccabean army demonstrated that Jewish perception of the Hellenistic threat was so great that even the most orthodox Jews were willing to unite with the insurgents in order to preserve their religious freedom.³⁶ Soon, Judah had a small, but determined, guerilla force. which, taken together with the troubles afflicting the Seleukid empire on the eastern front, was sufficient enough to have the Temple restored to its original worship and purified by 164 BCE (1 Macc. 4.36-60; 2 Macc. 10.1-9). This success was memorialized in the holiday of Hanukkah (2 Macc. 1.102.18). Furthermore, in 162 BCE, the decrees of Antiochos IV were annulled by his successors, and Jews returned to their former legal dispositions (2 Macc. 11.22-26).³⁷

The trouble was not over yet, though. Although the Seleukids had met the demands of the rebels, their subsequent appointment of Alcimus to the high priesthood (1 Macc. 7.5) was rejected by Judah.³⁸ Accordingly, he marched, this time not against pagans but against Alcimus' Judaeans supporters (1 Macc. 7.8-16). The new Seleukid king, Demetrius I, sent an army against Judah, but Judah conquered him and again entered Jerusalem, as he had done in 164 BCE, in triumph. This victory made Judah master of the country.³⁹ Like other heads of smaller states subject to the deteriorating Seleukid kingdom, he turned to Rome for support, and the Senate confirmed the freedom of the nation of the Judaeans (1 Macc. 8.17-32). For the first time since the Babylonian conquest of the kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE, the Judaeans were recognized as an independent power. This moment, however, also marks the fateful entrance of Rome into

³⁵ 1 Maccabees 2.29-38 provides an illustration of this attitude with the story of a thousand hasidim who fled from Jerusalem and took refuge in the wilderness of Judaea. The Seleukids discovered their abode and attacked them on the Sabbath. Rather than fight back, the hasidim chose to observe the Sabbath, and were consequently slaughtered en masse.

³⁶ Michael Avi-Yonah, *A History of Israel and the Holy Land* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2001), 112.

³⁷ Levine, 242.

³⁸ McCullough, *History and Literature*, 109.

³⁹ Bruce. *Israel and the Nations*, 146.

Judaeen affairs.⁴⁰

Judah was killed in 160 BCE and was succeeded as head of the family by his brother Jonathan. Eight years later, Jonathan was appointed high priest by the pretender to the Seleukid throne in return for his military support against Demetrius I. This appointment changed the character of Maccabaeen rule: their uprising had begun in opposition to the Seleukids and the Hellenization of Judaea's ruling class, but Jonathan came to power by Seleukid authority and behaved like any other minor Hellenistic despot, fighting according to his own political interests.⁴¹ His brother Simon, who succeeded him, obtained freedom from tribute to the Seleukids and conquered the Acra; in 140 BCE, Simon was proclaimed high priest by a national assembly, taking the additional title of ethnarch and establishing a dynasty that would last until 37 BCE. This dynasty was known as the Hasmonaeen dynasty.⁴²

The Hasmonaeen state flourished during the long decline of the Seleukids, as long as its existence was convenient for Rome. Its greatest achievements were under the rule of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE), Aristobulus I (104-103 BCE) and Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE). Hyrcanus extended the realm northward over the Galilee, destroying the Samaritan temple, and southward over Idumea, forcibly Judaizing its population; Aristobulus took the title of king, in addition to the traditional title of high priest; and Jannaeus completed the conquest of the coastal strip and extended the realm to the Transjordan.⁴³ In the process, the whole character of the Hasmonaeen family changed, from priestly rebels dedicated to the overthrow of Hellenized ruling class to a succession of Hellenized despots.⁴⁴

In reaction to the growing presence of Hellenism and the subordination of religion to politics, some of the population withdrew from society at large and renounced the Temple cults.

⁴⁰ Martin Sicker, *Between Rome and Jerusalem: 300 Years of Roman-Judaeen Relations* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 22.

⁴¹ Sicker, *Between Rome and Jerusalem*, 20.

⁴² Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 93-100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 93-100.

⁴⁴ Sicker, *Between Rome and Jerusalem*, 22-28.

The Sadducees and Pharisees, and also the Essenes, represented different movements within the Jewish faith at this time. All Jews accepted the fundamental belief in the one God, and in the authority of the Torah as the basis of their religion and community life.⁴⁵ Differences of opinion, often amounting to open conflict, arose in the interpretation and application of the Torah. Josephus says very little about these groups at this point in history, only discussing their understanding of Fate and its relationship to human events and achievements. The Essenes are said to see everything as the product of fate, the Sadducees to do away with Fate altogether and the Pharisees to assign some events to Fate and others to human initiative (*Ant.* 13.171-73).⁴⁶

During this period, Jews were also split in their attitude towards Roman authority into two main groups. One pursued the Herodian policy of seeking a compromise enabling the Jews to live in peace with their rulers: this consisted of the “Herodian” party and the Temple aristocracy. They saw in accommodation with the Romans the only way to survival for themselves and for the people. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were moderate supporters of the Herodian view. At the other end of the spectrum stood the uncompromising Zealots, or the “fourth philosophy,” who were supporters of all out war against the Roman occupiers.⁴⁷ But to see the Zealots as a unified body of extremist insurgents, as Josephus depicts them, is a reductionist view of the Zealot movement. There was no single “Zealot” banner to rally a monolithic movement; rather, the Zealots were split into a number of different factions, each with its own profile. Accordingly, the Zealots cannot be considered a sect, but rather a movement or ideology.⁴⁸

The Period of Roman Rule. 37 BCE-66 CE

⁴⁵ Naomi Pasachoff and Robert Littman, *Jewish History in 100 Nutshells* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995), 63.

⁴⁶ Pasachoff and Littman, *100 Nutshells*, 63-65.

⁴⁷ Avi-Yonah, *A History of Israel*, 162.

⁴⁸ See

The Romans had been players behind the scenes of Judaeen politics ever since the days of Judah the Maccabee; during the dynastic confusion that followed the death of Salome, Alexander Jannaeus' successor, they intervened directly. In the course of his great march throughout the Near East, Pompey occupied Jerusalem and turned Judaea into a vassal of Rome, stripping Hyrcanus II (63-40 BCE) of his title of king and reducing his territories.⁴⁹ In 37 BCE, the Romans simply put an end to the Hasmonaean dynasty and reorganized the province, establishing Herod (37-4 BCE) as king of Judaea.⁵⁰

Herod was a half-Jew from Idumaea and governor of Galilee who, with the help of Rome, conquered Judaea and succeeded in establishing himself as king of the Jews in 37 BCE (*War* 1.343). Although Herod was a local Jewish ruler, he was clearly a vassal-king to the Romans. The needs of the country were secondary to his efforts to maintain a place for himself within the empire (*Ant.* 15.328). Having forced his rule upon the nation, he reigned like a tyrant and retained his control by fear and repression. During his tenure, the high priest, formerly an officer with a life term, was appointed and deposed at Herod's will, thereby stripping the office of much of its power (*Ant.* 15.40-41). Herod also abolished some of the civil rights of his subjects and opened the region to intense Hellenization (*Ant.* 15.366). His brutality toward opposition, including his own family, was horrendous. It did not take long for the nation under Herod to feel the full weight of the oppressiveness of foreign rule.⁵¹

Herod died of natural causes in 4 BCE. Because his power rested on his relations with Rome, his kingdom barely outlasted him, and by 6 CE, Judaea had become a province of Rome. At this point, the government of Judaea took on a rather different form. The territory was placed directly under Roman administration, and it was in some sense joined to the province of Syria.

⁴⁹ Pompey left Hyrcanus II as high priest, the de facto head of the nation.

⁵⁰ Sicker. *Between Rome and Jerusalem*, 46.

⁵¹ Shaye Cohen, "Roman Domination," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), 269-273.

The Roman rulers in the area tended not to be as sensitive to distinctive Jewish ways as even Herod had been.

This period of Roman rule can be divided into two parts: during the first (6-41 CE) officials with the title prefect were placed in charge, while from 44-66 CE the territory was governed by procurators. Between these two periods there was a brief interlude when the Herodian Agrippa I served as king (41-44 CE). The prefects who governed from 6-41 CE were loosely under the control of the Roman legates in the province of Syria. They, and later the procurators, had their official residence in the seaside city of Caesarea, which served as the capital of Judaea. They would, however, move temporarily to Jerusalem to boost the security of the area when the great festivals attracted large numbers of Jews to the holy city.⁵²

Six or seven men held the office of prefect during this period. The best known of them is Pontius Pilate, who governed from 26 to 36 CE. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo quoted a letter from King Agrippa I in which the king described Pilate as harsh, greedy and cruel (*Legatio* 38.302). The sources credit him with a number of actions that reflected his failure to take Jewish views sufficiently into account. For example, he ordered his troops to enter Jerusalem at night with their standards (on which the emperor's image was found, a violation of the second commandment). Jewish pressure forced him to have the images removed a few days later (*Legatio* 38.302). On another occasion he used temple funds to build an aqueduct that brought water to Jerusalem; his act led to strong opposition, which Pilate suppressed with much bloodshed (*Legatio* 18.60-62). In the end Pilate was removed from his post for the excessive cruelty with which he broke up a seemingly harmless crowd in Samaritan territory (*Legatio* 18.87, 89).⁵³

An end came to this phase of Jewish history with the death of the deranged emperor

⁵² Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 153-156.

⁵³ Helen Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10-12.

Caligula (37-41 CE), who had ordered that a statue of himself be erected in the temple in Jerusalem. Huge numbers of troops were moved to Palestine to enforce the edict (*Legatio* 18.262). The emperor's enthusiasm for the statue, however, was not shared by Petronius, the governor of Syria, who would have to handle the violence it would spark. Petronius did manage to stall implementation of the edict, and not long thereafter the emperor was murdered (*Legatio* 18.263-72).⁵⁴

The new emperor Claudius (41-54 CE) wasted little time in naming Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great, as king of Judaea, Samaria and all the territories that had belonged to his grandfather. Herod Agrippa was personally close to the emperor, who granted him some flexibility in managing the troublesome state. At the same time, he was more sympathetic to the Judaeans way of life and religion than Herod had been, and therefore was more trusted by his subjects (*Ant* 29.279-85). The king remained in office only a short time, however; he died in 44 CE.⁵⁵

Following his death the decision was made not to give his territories to his son Agrippa II but to place them once again under direct Roman control (*Ant.* 29.360-463). From then on the officers whom the Romans appointed bore the title procurator. In general, it can be said that these non-Jewish rulers failed to respect Jewish religious sensibilities sufficiently. In this volatile area the chief Roman goal was maintaining public order. Josephus writes about all of the procurators, and several of them are mentioned in the book of Acts. One of the first men to hold office was Tiberius Julius Alexander (c. 48-48) who was the Jewish philosopher Philo's nephew (*Ant.* 20.100-104); he had rejected his ancestral religion and risen to high rank in the Roman world. The famine mentioned in Acts 11.28-30 occurred during his administration. While the procurators ruled, there were frequent outbursts of violence for one reason or another, and just as

⁵⁴ H. Jagersma, *A History of Israel from Alexander the Great to Bar Kochba* trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1985), 130-134.

⁵⁵ Jagersma, *A History of Israel*, 135.

frequent forceful reaction on the part of the Romans. For example, during the time of Felix (c. 52-60 CE) disturbances were nearly continuous and he himself is criticized throughout the sources for his cruelty in handling the situations (*Ant.* 20.160). In 60 CE, he was recalled to Rome. But the troubles continued under his successor Porcius Festus whose term ended in 62 CE.⁵⁶

The next procurator, Albinus, is said to have been a rapacious tyrant who was open to bribery from anyone (*Ant.* 20.197-215). The last of the procurators was a man named Gessius Florus (64-66 CE) who, Josephus wrote, was the worst of all, a public bandit who plundered whole cities (*Ant.* 20.252-58). At the end of his term of office, after a long period of unrest, tension and violence—a time of provocations on both sides—the First Jewish Revolt against Rome broke out in the spring of 66 CE.

The First Jewish Revolt and the End of the Second Temple Period, 66-73 CE⁵⁷

In May of 66 CE, a property dispute in Caesarea between Jews and Greeks sparked the First Jewish Revolt (*Ant.* 20.184). Although this was merely a small municipal conflict, the resulting tension was exacerbated by Florus when he gave the orders for seventeen talents to be taken from the Temple treasury in Jerusalem to compensate for uncollected back taxes (*War* 2.293). This demand was not out of the ordinary for a Roman procurator, but relations between the Jews and their overlords had, over the previous twenty years, deteriorated to a point of no return, and so the riot that ensued was unusually intense.⁵⁸ To quell the insurrection, Florus

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134-138.

⁵⁷ Most of the known events, personalities and interpretations of the period surrounding the First Jewish Revolt have no source other than Josephus, and so, for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter Four, an objective summary of the events becomes highly problematic. Fortunately, as a re-creation of the revolt is not the purpose of this thesis, I have left others to wrestle with these methodological issues, and I trust they have done the best they can with the available materials. I have, however, included references to certain passages of Josephus's account. I have done so, however, only where I feel his controlling hand is not as ever-present.

⁵⁸ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 180-83.

responded with severity, ordering approximately one thousand of his troops into the Upper Market area to kill the dissenters and plunder at will. What followed was a massacre, and the Jews who could not escape from the city were either killed in the streets or scourged and crucified without trial before Florus' tribunal (*War* 2.305-308).⁵⁹

Florus' response succeeded in suppressing the initial Jewish riot, but violent confrontations continued throughout the city. Fearing the situation was spiraling out of his control, Florus fled Jerusalem and assigned a pro-Roman Jewish faction, led by the High Priests, the Pharisees and the Herodians, with the responsibility of maintaining law and order (*War* 2.330). A single cohort was left behind to be employed at their disposal and the remainder of Florus' troops accompanied him to Caesarea (*War* 2.332).⁶⁰

Recognizing that the reduced Roman military presence in Jerusalem was not sufficient to hold the city, Menahem, the son of Judas the Galilaeen and a leader of the Sicarii faction, mobilized a contingent Jewish force and proceeded to capture the Roman fortress at Masada (*Ant.* 2.408). This proved to be an essential strategic victory, as it provided both a stronghold for the Jewish dissenters and an arsenal of weapons from which they could arm themselves for their future takeover of Jerusalem. The overwhelming success of Menahem and his supporters convinced other Jews, even those previously opposed to the sectarians, to join the rebel cause. The fervor of revolt quickly spread throughout Judaea, and Roman fortresses all over the country were besieged.⁶¹

Meanwhile, an internal struggle for political power gripped Jerusalem. The authority of the pro-Roman Jewish leaders, or the "peace party," had become increasingly undermined by an aristocratic priestly revolutionary party, led by Eleazar, son of the High Priest Ananias.⁶²

⁵⁹ Neil Faulkner, *Apocalypse: The Great Jewish Revolt Against Rome* (Great Britain: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2002), 66.

⁶⁰ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 182.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶² Eleazar's motives for opposing his own class remain unclear, and are currently a major topic of research in the field. Typically, though, most scholars attribute youthful zeal to his decision.

Eleazar, in an act of supreme defiance aimed at garnering support for his priestly revolutionary party, ordered the suspension of the sacrifice for the emperor and Rome, which until then had been offered on a daily basis in the Temple. According to Josephus, this essentially marked an official declaration of war between the Jewish religious community and the Roman empire (*War* 2.408-21).⁶³ Realizing the implications of such an action and hoping to prevent a military conflict with Rome, the peace party immediately sent embassies to both Florus and Agrippa II.⁶⁴ The appeal to Florus was unsuccessful, but Agrippa responded and dispatched two thousand troops to Jerusalem (*War* 2.418-21).

Initially, his forces fared well, but by the seventh day of fighting (*War* 2.422), the insurgents had driven not only Agrippa's troops, but also the entire peace party out of the upper city and set fire to the palaces of Ananias the High Priest and King Herod Agrippa II, as well as to the public archives. Over the next three days, Eleazar's forces captured the Antonia fortress, which housed the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, thereby neutralizing any potential Roman threat (*War* 2.425-30). However, just as the rebels began to stabilize their hold of the city, a civil war erupted among the Jewish rebels as Menahem and his supporters returned to Jerusalem from the Judaeen countryside. After a brief struggle, Menahem unseated Eleazar as the leader of the insurrection, and assumed de facto control of Jerusalem. Agrippa's troops were allowed to withdraw unscathed, but the Roman troops were slaughtered (*War* 2.449-56) and the main representative of the peace party, the High Priest Ananias, was murdered (*War* 2.411).⁶⁵

In the opening stages of the Revolt, the aristocratic revolutionaries, led by Eleazar, and the Sicarii, led by Menahem, had put aside any lingering hostility from their class differences to unite against the Roman. However, Menahem's brash coup d'état and the subsequent murder of Ananias fractured this tenuous alliance and caused a serious split in the rebel movement. Eleazar,

⁶³ Peter Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 120-23.

⁶⁴ Agrippa II, in the meantime, had been granted a smaller kingdom in Galilee.

⁶⁵ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 185.

whose decision to suspend the daily sacrifice had been integral to the initial success of the rebels operating in the Judaeen countryside, no longer supported Menahem's brutal and increasingly tyrannical regime and led a conspiracy against him. Within days of his triumphant arrival in Jerusalem, Menahem was murdered and his followers were forced to find refuge at Masada, where they were to remain idle until the end of the war (*War* 2.445). At this point, the moderate priestly revolutionary party once again took control of Jerusalem.⁶⁶

The general ineptitude of Florus and the failure of Agrippa to restore order in Jerusalem forced Cestius Gallus, the governor of both Syria and Judaea, to intercede on their behalf. Gallus, stationed in Antioch, marched through Judaea with a large force and destroyed several Jewish towns along the way. Upon reaching Jerusalem, however, Gallus realized that he had grossly underestimated the strength of the rebel forces, and so he withdrew from the gates of the city. This show of weakness prompted the Jewish insurgents to pursue the retreating Roman legion until the Romans were eventually routed at Beth-horon (*War* 2.540-53). This improbable but decisive Jewish victory sent the province into an uproar, and signaled a transition of the rebel activities from an overt insurrection to an all out war against the Romans.⁶⁷ After Beth-horon, the priestly revolutionary party, in order to prepare all Jews in the entire Judaeen region for war, assigned generals to each district in the country. This was the first attempt by the Jews to systematically organize a war effort against the Romans.⁶⁸

As the Jews became stronger and grew more confident, they began to attack pagan cities bordering on Judaea. In revenge, Jews living in Syria were massacred, and the hostilities between Jews and Greeks escalated to new heights (*War* 2.457-60, 2.466). The most notable example of these conflicts occurred in Caesarea, where the Gentiles killed over twenty thousand Jews.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World*, 122.

⁶⁷ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 185.

⁶⁸ Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco Roman World*, 123.

⁶⁹ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 188-90.

Upon learning of the Roman defeat at Beth-horon and the ensuing riots in Syria, Nero reacted swiftly. He saw a great danger in the revolt- not only could it lead to a flare up throughout the East among the Jews in the diaspora but it would certainly sever crucial trade and communication lines in the region. Most importantly, though, the collapse of Roman control of Judaea would make the province an easy target for a Parthian attack.⁷⁰ Thus, to ensure victory, Nero entrusted the Roman offensive to Flavius Vespasian, a proven commander who had made his mark in Britain under Claudius. Sixty thousand men, including the army of Vespasian's son, Titus, were made at his disposal, as was the army of Agrippa. With this exceedingly large force, Vespasian left Antioch and marched toward Judaea in June of 67 CE (*War*).⁷¹

For geographical reasons, Vespasian was forced to attack the northern border of Judaea, thereby placing the burden of fighting the first, potentially decisive battle against the Romans on the shoulders of the Galilaeans, led by Josephus (*War* 7.568).⁷² Josephus was at that time already a controversial figure, as his appointment to the generalship of Galilee had been opposed by several members of both the moderate revolutionary party and the Sicarii. Thus, without much support from the upper ranks of the rebel movement, Josephus could hardly inspire loyalty among his own troops.⁷³ And so, upon the approach of Vespasian's army, almost the entire northern army ran away, and Galilee was left exposed (*War* 3.141-288).⁷⁴ Over the next six months, the Romans easily subdued Galilee, and the entire northern part of the country was once again controlled by Rome. He could proceed undisturbed, because the Jewish rebels at the time were engaged in another civil war. The remainder of Menahem's forces still residing at Masada, in the confusion following the Roman victory at Galilee, emerged from the fortress and sought to

⁷⁰ Rupert Furneaux, *The Roman Siege of Jerusalem* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972), 116-20.

⁷¹ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 187.

⁷² Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco Roman World*, 124-26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 124-26.

⁷⁴ Josephus and some of his men retreated to the fortress of Jotapata, where they successfully held off Vespasian's forces for some time. However, after seven weeks, the surviving rebels, wary of capture, took their own lives. Josephus, however, did not, and chose instead to surrender to Vespasian. See *War* 2.614.

displace the priestly revolutionary party.⁷⁵ We need not take the dramatic description of the havoc wrought by this internal clash too seriously, but there can be no doubt that it was detrimental to the Jewish resistance.

Jerusalem, however, was given grace by external events. Although the rebels had miscalculated in time, their basic assessment of the instability of Nero's rule was vindicated. In the summer of the year, he was dethroned by the revolt of Galba, governor of Spain, and killed himself (*War* 2.521). Galba did not long enjoy the emperorship, being murdered by a new claimant, Otho, who, in turn, was vanquished by Vitellius and the garrisons of Germany. Vespasian bided his time: after having swept through western Idumaea, northern Judaea, Peraea and the Jordan Valley, he now made only a few minor sorties, taking the rest of Idumaea and approaching Jerusalem from the north.⁷⁶

His patience was rewarded. The Pannonian and oriental armies, resentful of the favors bestowed by Vitellius on his men, proclaimed Vespasian emperor, and after a short campaign, waged mainly by his Pannonian general, Antonius Primus, Rome fell. Now universally accepted as the emperor, Vespasian left for the capital and his son Titus took over the final besieging of Jerusalem.⁷⁷

In the spring of 70 CE, Titus, with four legions, marched against the Holy City. Titus set up his main camp west of the city, and a subsidiary one on the Mount of Olives. The defenders, though boasting a mere twenty five thousand men against the eighty thousand of the Roman army, fought back resolutely, undermining ramps and wrecking the siege engines. Titus made up his mind to starve out the city, and build a siege wall about it. Thus, when he renewed the assault in July, the defenders were enfeebled by hunger; and although the rebels succeeded in holding the towers, the Romans stormed the Antonia, entered the Temple and overran the inner

⁷⁵ Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco Roman World*, 124-26.

⁷⁶ Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), 240-42.

⁷⁷ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 189.

sanctuary. It was burnt down on the 9th of the Hebrew month of Ab, and that has since been a day of mourning for all Jewry (*War* 6.252). The Romans took the whole lower city, but the upper held out until the 8th of Elul, a month later: then only did the last of the rebels lay down their arms. Slaughter, enslavement and penalties ensued in the usual Roman fashion.⁷⁸

The fortresses at Herodium, Machaerus and Masada remained in rebel hands after the fall of Jerusalem: Herodium was evacuated without a fight; Machaerus was soon taken; but Masada resisted to the last.⁷⁹ Masada was built on an almost inaccessible rock, a thousand feet high, above the Western shore of the Dead sea. It had been well provided by Herod during his reign with arms and supplies, including water.⁸⁰ The defenders, numbering about a thousand in all, including women and children, could defy the legions for a long while. In 73 CE, Silva, the Roman governor, laid siege to the fortress. Surmounting great technical difficulties, the Romans constructed a ramp and on it mounted a tower. When they thus breached the outer wall, the defenders put up a second one, of wood, but it was set on fire (*War* 6.280-84). All hope now lost, the garrison, killed their families and then took their own lives (*War* 7.91). So ended the First Jewish Revolt.⁸¹

Having provided the necessary background for an understanding of the first century CE, let us return to the Maccabean resistance of the mid-second century BCE. As we shall see in Chapter Two, the ramifications of this event go far beyond the establishment of an independent Judaeen state.

⁷⁸ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 190-92.

⁷⁹ Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco Roman World*, 124-26.

⁸⁰ Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel*, 242.

⁸¹ Schafer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco Roman World*, 124-26.

CHAPTER TWO

APOCALYPTICISM AND MESSIANISM IN EARLY JEWISH LITERATURE

The Maccabean period was a watershed in Jewish history. The Jewish community in Judaea was forced to make a choice: either abandon their faith and be assimilated into Hellenistic culture, or fight. One response to this crisis was violent rebellion, as we have seen in Chapter One. Another response, one of an entirely different sort, appeared as a motif in the Jewish literature of the period and has come to be known as *apocalypticism*.⁸² The authors of this movement sought, first, to provide an alternate view of the world that would help to console their fellow Jews in the face of the Seleukid threat and, second, to express support for any course of action that their fellow Jews deemed necessary to ensure the survival of their way of life.⁸³

Although this response was meant merely as a short term remedy to the crisis of the day, the eschatological view espoused by the apocalyptic texts, as we shall see, demonstrated remarkable staying power and proceeded to characterize the mindset of a considerable number of Jews from the Maccabean period through the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. This chapter examines the emergence of apocalyptic texts in Judaism and the ensuing proliferation of apocalyptic eschatology, particularly messianism, in Jewish society. By doing so, I hope to reconstruct the intellectual and religious landscape of Judaea in the years leading up to the First Jewish Revolt so that we may better understand *why* the Jews, even in the face of such insurmountable odds, chose open rebellion against the most powerful army in the world.

The apocalypticism in the literature of this period was more of a frame of mind than a

⁸² Apocalypticism should be distinguished from *apocalypse*, which will be used to refer to the literary works produced by apocalypticism. Apocalypticism should also be distinguished from *apocalyptic eschatology*, which will be used to refer to that particular religious perspective, not confined to the apocalypses, which speaks of the consummation of history. See John Collins, *Daniel, With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans, 1984), 4.

⁸³ Collins, *Daniel*, 19-22. See also Yehoshua Amir, "Messianism and Zionism," in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed., Henning Reventlow (England: Sheffield Academy Press, 1997), 13-31.

distinct literary genre, and so each apocalypse has unique features. But in spite of such differences, there are indeed similarities in form and content between the various writings. These common elements, agreed upon by scholars, are summed up by John Collins: “An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”⁸⁴ However, even having defined the movement as such, the heterogeneous nature of the writings has rendered a consensus on which texts should be included and which should be excluded from a list of apocalyptic writings almost impossible. And so what follows is a basic delineation of those works that are generally thought to contain apocalyptic elements in them, followed by their approximate date of composition:

1. 1 Enoch 72-82 (third century BCE)
2. 1 Enoch 1-36 (third century BCE)
3. 1 Enoch 93:1-10; 91:11-17 (200 BCE)
4. 1 Enoch 85-90 (170 BCE)
5. The Book of Daniel (165 BCE)
6. The Book of Jubilees (150 BCE)
7. Qumran Scrolls (second century BCE onwards)
8. The Sibylline Oracles, Book III (from 150 BCE onwards)
9. The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs (latter part of the second century BCE)
10. The Psalms of Solomon (48 BCE)
11. 1 Enoch 37-71 (end of first century BCE)
12. The Assumption of Moses (6-30 CE)
13. “The Martyrdom of Isaiah” (before 70 CE)
14. The Apocalypse of Moses (shortly before 70 CE)
15. The Apocalypse of Abraham (first century CE)
16. The Testament of Abraham (first century CE)
17. II Enoch (first century CE)
18. The Sibylline Oracles, Book IV (80 CE)
19. II Esdras 3-14 (90 CE)
20. The Apocalypse of Baruch or II Baruch (after 90 CE)
21. III Baruch (second century CE)

⁸⁴ Collins, *Daniel*, 4.

22. The Sibylline Oracles. Book V (second century CE)⁸⁵

Our study is primarily concerned with the influence of messianism on the mindset of the first century CE Jew, and so this chapter will limit itself to a discussion of the major apocalypses that were important in the development and proliferation of such ideas in the Judaism of the period. Before continuing with an analysis of these texts, a few words on the popularity of the Jewish apocalypses may be helpful to illuminate just how prevalent this tradition was in late Second Temple Judaism.

The Popularity of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic was not a popular literature in the sense that it was written for the masses. It was not the product of ignorant men, as has sometimes been suggested; on the contrary it would appear to have been written for the most part by learned men who were thoroughly acquainted with the historic Jewish faith.⁸⁶ It is an unwarranted assumption, however, to conclude that, because it originated in a relatively small section of the population, it therefore represents an insignificant part of the population. The evidence points rather to the fact that apocalypticism, especially messianism, were fairly strong currents in the mainstream of Judaism in the years immediately before and after the First Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE.

The ideas contained in these apocalypses, however, were much more widespread than the books themselves and continued to exercise a strong influence even long after the books had disappeared.. The popularity of such ideas at an early stage may be hinted at in Dan. 12.4 where the seer is bidden to “shut up the word and seal the book,” for “many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase.” Likewise at a much later stage, towards the close of the first century CE, the writer of II Esdras can refer to no fewer than seventy secret books, presumably

⁸⁵ D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 37-38. The list follows Russell's list of apocalyptic writings and their corresponding dates.

⁸⁶ Collins, *Daniel*, 20-22.

apocalyptic writings, to be delivered to the wise among the people, which were in circulation in his day and which he mentions in the same breath as the canonical scriptures themselves.⁸⁷ This confirms the widespread influence of apocalyptic and suggests that those apocalyptic books now extant are only a fraction of what must have been at one time a very considerable literature. The discovery of the library at Qumran with its profusion of apocalyptic-type literature is a further graphic indication of the significant part played by apocalyptic during this whole period.

Even though the writing of these books may have been confined to relatively restricted circles within Judaism and the initial reading and study of them to certain defined strata of Jewish society, their influence would make itself felt from an early time on the life of the Jewish people as a whole. There seems little reason to doubt that during the oppressive reigns of the Herodian rulers, for example, and the troublesome years of the Roman procurators right up to the outbreak of the Jewish War in 66 CE they were a source of encouragement and strength to the nation in face of dire peril and danger.⁸⁸

By far the greatest number of these apocalyptic books were written in Judaea either in the ancient Hebrew language, the tongue of the learned of that day, or in the vernacular Aramaic, the language of Jewish literature generally. In due course they found their way into the Diaspora, where they were translated into Greek and won popularity among the Jews. One sign of the popularity of these books is the great number of languages into which they were in due course translated-Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Coptic, Slavonic, Georgian, etc. This wide range of translation no doubt reflects the degree of popularity they came to have among the Christians, but it is also an indication of the place they held within Judaism itself.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Collins, *Daniel*, 21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

The Origins of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

Though the apocalypses represent a new development in the history of Judaism, scholars have determined that the apocalyptic writers were heavily influenced by the prophetic oracles of the ancient Hebrew prophets.⁹⁰ The first of these prophets to consider is Amos. Amos, when the first waves of the Assyrian threat reached Palestine in the middle of the eighth century BCE, proclaimed, for the first time in the Hebrew tradition, that the “end” was near (Amos 8.2).⁹¹ By this, Amos meant that the kingdom of northern Israel, and not the world, was nearing its end, as there was yet no concept of an end of this world. Amos spoke of this event as “the day of the Lord.” and predicted that, contrary to the popular belief of the time, it would be a day of darkness and not light (Amos 5.18-20). Aside from that, Amos does not offer any speculation on the character of the forthcoming change. It is important to note that there is no indication by Amos that history or time will end with the forthcoming day of the Lord; there is a shift, but not a discontinuity.⁹²

Zephaniah, who lived slightly more than a century later, expanded on this tradition to include an ethical dimension, as did Micah and Jeremiah. None of these prophets, however, deviated significantly from Amos’ conception of the day of the Lord.⁹³ It was not until the post exilic prophets of the Persian period (c.539-332 BCE), including Ezekiel, Zechariah and Isaiah, that any dramatic change can be seen. From this point on, God’s intervention in the affairs and history of Israel is portrayed against a backdrop of cosmic upheaval and discontinuity.⁹⁴ For example, an oracle preserved in the book of Isaiah predicts the fall of Babylon: “the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its

⁹⁰ Hans LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 6-12.

⁹¹ LaRondelle, *End-Time Prophecies*, 6-12.

⁹² Bob Becking, “Expectations About the End of Time in the Hebrew Bible: Do they Exist?” in Christopher Rowland and John Burton, eds. (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). 46-49.

⁹³ LaRondelle, *End-Time Prophecies*, 14.

⁹⁴ Becking, “Expectations About the End,” 48-51.

sinner from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. . . . Therefore I will make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken out of its place at the wrath of the Lord of hosts, in the day of his fierce anger” (Isaiah 13.9-13). Here the prophet, like Amos, remains concerned with the destruction of a specific city, but his language evokes a catastrophe of cosmic proportions.⁹⁵

It must be conceded, though, that we know very little about the groups that transmitted eschatological expectations in Judaism during the Persian period. When apocalypticism emerges full blown in the books of Enoch and Daniel in the Hellenistic Period, it is a far more developed and complex than any of the fragmentary prophetic texts discussed above. It is not possible to show any social continuity between the visionaries of the Persian period and their Hellenistic successors. The prophetic oracles were taken up into the canon of scripture, and so became part of the source material of the apocalypics.⁹⁶

The apocalypticism of the Hellenistic, however, is a new phenomenon in many crucial aspects. From this point on, we will focus specifically on only one of these aspects—the expectation of an imminent messiah. In Hebrew, “Messiah” means “anointed,” and in the Old Testament is applied to someone consecrated in this fashion for a high office such as king, priest, or prophet. The use of the term to mean an ideal leader who will take in hand the salvation by God of the Jewish people is post-Biblical.⁹⁷ So it is clear when I use “messiah” I am referring to the traditionally understood eschatological agent, anointed by God for the redemption of Israel. He normally is understood as Davidic, although there are variations on this theme. The following sections serve as introduction to the emergence of messianism in the Maccabean period and its subsequent development into a critical component of Judaism in the years leading up to the

⁹⁵ LaRondelle, *End-Time Prophecies*, 6-9.

⁹⁶ Collins, *Daniel*, 20. See also Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Ground, 1975).

⁹⁷ See Jacob Neusner, ed., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

revolt of 66-70 CE.

The Emergence of Messianism in Jewish Apocalypticism

In the period of the Maccabees, c. 164 BCE, the first examples of messianic expectations can be found in *1 Enoch* 83-90 and the Apocalypse of Daniel. In the case of these apocalypses, we are mainly dealing with the genre of the “historical-eschatological apocalypse,” that is, the type of apocalyptic that is “temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation.” This type of apocalypse turns out to be the main carrier of eschatological ideas and messiah concepts.⁹⁸

1 Enoch 83-90

The oldest part of *1 Enoch* 83-90 was probably written before 160 BCE, because the retold history of Israel continues until the time of the Maccabees. In *1 Enoch* 83-90, which from this point will be referred to as the Animal Apocalypse,⁹⁹ there is a zoomorphic and eschatological portrayal of the history of Israel from Noah until messianic times, divided into nine periods.

In the Animal Apocalypse’s attempt to schematize history, we are no longer dealing with a single event or judgment, but a whole sequence of events, envisaged in literal terms, that starts with the author’s own time and runs forward without interruption until the establishment of God’s kingdom of glory. Such an unbroken historical continuum was unprecedented in the Hebrew prophecies of the Babylonian and Persian periods.¹⁰⁰ In the post exilic period, Israel, whose subjects are symbolized by sheep, experienced defeat after defeat, “until a big horn grew on one of those sheep (90:9).”¹⁰¹ Much like the seventh week in the Apocalypse of Weeks, this

⁹⁸ Collins, *Daniel*, 13.

⁹⁹ The apocalypse derives its name from the main literary device used throughout its account of history and the “end of days”- the representation of people as animals and angels as people.

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *Daniel*, 11-13.

¹⁰¹ Translations from P. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of Enoch 1* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

is the turning point in history. The horned sheep, which is a clear reference to Judas Maccabees, soon becomes the object of a unified assault by Israel's enemies, and though it fights valiantly, it is simply outmanned and cannot overcome its foes. In the sheep's final stand, however, the Lord of the sheep descends upon Israel's enemies and delivers victory for the sheep. In the judgment scene that follows in 90.37, an individual called a "white bull" appears. It was born at the end, and "its horns were big, and all the wild animals and all the birds of heaven were afraid of it and entreated it continually. And I [Enoch] looked until all their species were transformed, and they all became white bulls; and the first one among them was a wild-ox, and that wild-ox was a large animal and had big black horns on its head. And the Lord of the sheep rejoiced over them and over all the bulls (90.37-38)."¹⁰²

The image of this white bull is unique in the literature of the period and marks the first instance of an end-time leader in Jewish apocalyptic literature. This messiah comes at the end of world history with the express purpose of transforming *all* of humanity, and not just Israel, into his likeness. However, unlike later conceptions of the messiah, the end-time figure in the Animal Apocalypse, although being identified as a specific individual who exercises power over all the nations, is not a different being from his contemporaries.¹⁰³

Thus, in the Animal Apocalypse, then, we can trace a progression, from those apocalypses that are more speculative in content to those that are more concerned with history. In the heat of the Maccabean crisis, the interest shifts from the mysteries of the cosmos to those of history, and the sense of imminent expectation becomes greater.¹⁰⁴ Although scholars cannot directly attest to the popularity of the circulation of the Animal Apocalypse in the first century CE, its pronounced influence on the world view espoused by the author of the book of Daniel

¹⁰² Maxwell Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings From Qumran* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 76-100.

¹⁰³ Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*, 99-100.

¹⁰⁴ Collins, *Daniel*, 12-13, 21.

and the scrolls found at Qumran indicate that it must have been well known, at least in some circles.¹⁰⁵ It is to the book of Daniel, perhaps the most important book in all of Jewish apocalyptic, that we now turn our attention.

The Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel was popular from the start, as we can tell from the survival of the Septuagint corpus of two rival translations, from the book's propensity to acquire lively accretions, such as the story of Susanna and the tales of Bel and the Dragon, and from the use as a reference point of the image of the three young men in the burning fiery furnace is subsequent martyr literature.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, at least twelve fragments related to Daniel are known from Qumran literature and the book's influence is visible in the sectarian literature of the Qumran community.¹⁰⁷ Even Josephus notes the popularity of Daniel: "For the books which he [Daniel] wrote and left behind are still read by now even now. . . (*Ant.* 10.268)."

The book of Daniel is a composite work, of which the oldest part, Daniel 1-6, written before 168 BCE, has been enlarged by two redactors. In later times the apocryphal stories about Susanna and Bel and the Dragon have been added. Chapters 7-12 describe the circumstances during the reign of Antiochos IV Epiphanes without mentioning the Maccabean rededication of the Temple, so that they must be dated before the year 164 BCE.

In the history of the development of messianism, the expression "Son of Man" or the "One Like a Man" in Daniel 7 has played a crucial important role. Before discussing Daniel 7, though, let us examine Daniel 2, for it is here, in this earlier text, that the foundation for the messianic expectation is set. In Daniel 2 (2.1-2.29), King Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel to interpret a troubling dream of his but refuses to reveal its nature. Daniel prays to God for help,

¹⁰⁵ See Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*. 18-31.

¹⁰⁶ James VanderKam. *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmann, 2001). 75-78.

¹⁰⁷ See Collins. *Daniel*, 27-33.

and in response, a revelation is granted and he returns to the Chaldaean court to make the dream and its interpretation known to the king. The dream concerns a large statue composed of different metals: the head of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the middle and thighs of bronze, and the feet of iron mixed with clay. Daniel interprets the statue in terms of four kingdoms, in declining succession, with Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom as the head of gold. It is then made known to the king that in his place there will stand another kingdom, traditionally interpreted as Media, which is inferior to the first; this kingdom will then be replaced by the Persian empire, which will itself be replaced by the kingdom of Greece. The sequence of four kingdoms comes to an end when a stone, cut from a mountain, falls and destroys the statue. This stone represents the kingdom of God, which will last forever.

There is no sense of immanent expectation in Daniel's interpretation, and for this reason, Daniel 2 is not considered an apocalypse.¹⁰⁸ Rather, the coming of the kingdom of God is in the distant future from the viewpoint of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. Much like the oracles of the Hebrew prophets and the post exilic prophets, the point of the dream is not to invoke images of the impending apocalypse, but rather that the God of Israel is in control of history and that this control will eventually be made manifest.¹⁰⁹

Daniel 7 (7.1-7.28) returns to the theme of four kingdoms as related in Chapter 2, but this time the imagery is very different. Four beasts emerge from the sea, one more fearsome than the other, and the fourth, which has ten horns plus an additional smaller one, is the most fearsome of all. The scene continues with a scene of judgment in which God serves as the enthroned judge before whom the horned fourth beast is executed and the other beasts are deprived of their dominion. Finally, Daniel's vision climaxes as he sees "one like a human being [traditionally and more literally: one like a son of man] coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the

¹⁰⁸ Collins, *Daniel*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Young, *The Messianic Prophecies of Daniel* (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 23-6.

Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed (Daniel 7.13-14).” An angel then explains to Daniel that four beasts are four kingdoms, traditionally identified as Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. Finally, the angel explains that the little horn will attempt to change the times and the law, and that “the people of the Holy Ones of the Most High” will receive the kingdom (Daniel 7.27).

It is clear that the little horn represents Antiochos Epiphanes, and that the vision predicts his overthrow. But as Daniel sees it, the struggle is not just between Jews and Greeks, but rather a cosmic struggle between good and evil, represented by the rightful God and the beasts of the sea, respectively. The most striking aspect of this vision is that there are two divine figures. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, there is but one, the God of Israel.

The function of this other divine figure, the Son of Man, in the eschatological hopes of Daniel 7 runs parallel to the role of the Messiah in later examples of messianic expectations. First, the Son of Man will receive kingship, making him a royal figure. Second, Daniel 7 emphasizes that the four monsters are kingdoms. In an analogous way, the Son of Man, who corresponds to the Holy Ones of the Most High in the interpretation of the vision, is a kingdom. Third, the later traditions of interpretation, for example, the Qumran scrolls, the *Psalms of Solomon*, *1 Enoch 37-71*, and the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus is identified as the Son of Man, confirm the close relationship between the Son of Man and messianic expectation. However, in the book of Daniel, the Son of Man is never expressly identified with the Messiah. Thus, it seems that the Son of Man represents a stage of development in Jewish eschatology in which the messianic expectation with an earthly focus, first evident in the Animal Apocalypse, was transformed to the transcendental dimension.

Outside of Enoch and Daniel, there are some traces of messianism in the Maccabean period. It is evident, however, that messianism was neither widespread nor prominent in this period and that there was no “orthodox” notion of the Messiah. The traditions on which Davidic messianism was based were preserved, though, but these in themselves did not ensure any lively expectation. Not until the beginning of the first century CE, which coincided with the arrival of the Romans in Jerusalem, do we find a strong and developed interest in messianism.

The Proliferation of Messianism in the Roman Period

As we have seen, the first Jewish apocalyptic writings originated in the period shortly before and during the Maccabean revolt. For another comparable cluster of writings we must wait until the next major crisis in Jewish history, the First Jewish Revolt against Rome in 66-70 CE. In the intervening period of over two hundred years, we do not find many apocalypses, but we do find considerable evidence of the spread of apocalyptic ideas—especially, for our purposes, messianism—in several areas of Jewish life. We should not think that this hope was exclusive to communities living apart from the rest of Judaism, as many scholars have contended. On the contrary, messianism was very prevalent in the Judaism in the period.

The Qumran Scrolls

The Qumran Scrolls are a collection of manuscripts discovered in caves near the Dead Sea. These documents date approximately from the second century BCE to the first century CE and contain, among other things, books of the Hebrew Bible, including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphy. While the scrolls are not necessarily a coherent or consistent body of literature, there is wide agreement that they contain a core group of documents that represent the world view of a particular sect, which from this point will be referred to simply as the Qumran

community.¹¹⁰

Before launching into a discussion of the function of the messiah of the Qumran texts, a few words on the eschatological setting envisioned by the scrolls will be helpful. The Qumran community believed that the end was drawing near. According to CD 20.14, “From the day of gathering of the unique teacher until the destruction of all the men of war who turned back with the man of lies there shall be forty years.”¹¹¹ This is understood to mean forty years after the death of the Teacher of Righteousness, which occurred perhaps in 60 BCE, shortly after Roman occupation of Jerusalem. Some of Qumran’s Scripture commentaries, the *pesharim*, were written before this event, while others may have been written, or rewritten, after and in response to it. But the end did not come.¹¹² Nevertheless, expectations of it coming soon continued to be held at Qumran, probably right up to First Jewish Revolt in 66-70 CE.

Qumran’s eschatology, which seems to have been derived from the Animal Apocalypse and Daniel,¹¹³ seems to have been primarily focused on the restoration of Israel. The Qumran community anticipated a return to the Golden Age as they imagined it to have been, and held that this age would be final and not subject to the vicissitudes that marked Israel’s checkered history. This was understood not as the end of human history but as the beginning of Israel’s restoration, when the covenant with God finally and fully would be renewed. The era of Roman oppression would be over, and Israel’s long awaited anointed king at last would arise and serve faithfully alongside a righteous, anointed priest.¹¹⁴

A great deal of attention has focused on Qumran’s expectation of the appearance of these two messianic figures: the royal messiah and the priestly messiah. Several times the *Damascus*

¹¹⁰ VanderKan, *Early Judaism*, 160-162.

¹¹¹ Translations of the scrolls are based on M. Wise, M. Abegg, and E. Cook. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

¹¹² C. Marvin Pate, *Communities of the Last Days: The Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament and the Story of Israel* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 97.

¹¹³ Davidson, *Angels of Qumran*, 18-31.

¹¹⁴ VanderKan. *Early Judaism*, 160-162.

Document speaks of a time when the “anointed of Aaron and of Israel” will appear (e.g., CD 12.23-13.1). It is on this basis, though not exclusively, that scholars began to speak of a diarchic or binary messianism at Qumran. For our purposes, though, we will deal only with the Royal Messiah, as it is he who is to play a leading role in the anticipated great war for Israel’s liberation. It is this battle that we now turn our attention.

In the Scrolls, the biblical elements of the final victory against all nations are clearly present, and, as they were in the Animal Apocalypse and Daniel, they are placed in an eschatological perspective. But in the scrolls the eschatological battle does not simply coincide with the biblical and apocalyptic vision of the final victory against the foreign nations, because it comprises the victory against all evil forces. The dividing line is not between Israel and the foreign nation but between the Sons of Light, or the elected ones of Israel, and the Sons of Darkness, or pagans and those unfaithful Israelites.¹¹⁵ This thought is most apparent in the *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, which from this point will be denoted either as the *War Scroll* or 1 QM. This scroll has been best preserved in a copy from Cave 1, but it is also attested in several fragmentary copies from Cave 4 (4Q 492, 4Q 494-496). Other manuscripts, such as 4Q 491 and 4Q 493, have preserved materials related to this composition, while two other manuscripts (4Q 285 and 11 Q11) that also deal with the eschatological war may represent part of the lost end of 1 QM or may come from another composition dealing with the same topic. All of this points to the fact that the ideas espoused by the *War Scroll* must have been central to the beliefs of the Qumran community.¹¹⁶

Because of certain repetitions, inconsistencies and especially because there are basically two different compositions of the eschatological war, most scholars recognize that 1 QM is the

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Pomykala, *The Davidic Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 210-212.

¹¹⁶ Antti Laato, *A Star is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of Messianic Expectation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

result of the fusion of at least two documents. One of them, inspired by Daniel 11-12, developed the idea of an eschatological conflagration on seven lots in which each one of the sides has the upper part during three lots and which ends with the victory of God.¹¹⁷ As stated in col. 1: "In the war, the sons of light will be the strongest during three lots, in order to strike down wickedness; and in three (others), the army of Belial, will gird themselves in order to force the lot of [. . .] to retreat. . . And in the seventh lot, God's great hand will subdue [Belial, and all the angels of his dominion and all the men of [his lot]]" (1QM 1.13-15). The same idea is found in cols. 14-19, in which, in spite of the bad state of preservation, we can discern that these seven lots alternate, a victory following a defeat, until the final victory of the Sons of Light in the seventh lot, when "the Kittim shall be crushed without a [remnant. . .] when the hand of the God of Israel is raised against the whole horde of Belial" (1QM 18.2-3). This war is envisaged in two levels, the human and the angelic: "On the [day], the assembly of the gods and congregation of men shall confront each other for great destruction" (1QM 1.10), but the angelic hosts appear to have no leader apart from God himself, who at the end decides the victory. These two ideas characterize cols. 1 and 14-19.¹¹⁸

The function of the *War Scroll* has been defined in very different terms by various scholars: as the apocalyptic revelation of the several phases, enemies, and general development of the eschatological war; as a composition designed to instruct the perfect soldier, a manual to be used on the battlefield to oppose the enemy; as a propaganda pamphlet to oppose the way rival Jewish leaders were conducting the war indicating the right way to proceed; as a composition written more for liturgical than for practical purposes, more to celebrate the future victory than to prepare for or to conduct the war. But in fact these readings of the function of the text do not need to be mutually exclusive, and perhaps the best way to understand this complex document is

¹¹⁷ James VanderKam, "Apocalyptic Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. John Collins and Robert Kugler (Michigan: William B. Eerdmann, 2000), 116-124.

¹¹⁸ VanderKam, "Apocalyptic Tradition," 116-124.

by combining these apparently contradictory functions. The *War Scroll*, by representing the dramatic final conflict of the forces of good and evil as a liturgy in which the trumpets are as effective as the weapons, the priestly prayers as necessary as the movements of the troops, and the purity regulations as essential as the presence of the heavenly warriors, stimulates the hope for the future intervention of God, helps to organize the present as a preparation for this intervention, justifies the present opposition to other forces, and conveys the conviction that the actual dreams and hopes will be fulfilled in the final victory.¹¹⁹

Although the messiah is not depicted in the *War Scroll*-at least in the part of it that is extant-his involvement in the great struggle between the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness” very probably is supposed. 1QM 11.1-2 alludes to David’s defeat of Goliath, while 11.2-3 alludes to David’s victory over the Philistines. Allusions to David’s great military victories suggest that his anointed successor also will enjoy great victories over Israel’s contemporary oppressors. 1QM 11.4-7 quotes Numbers 24:17 and says, “He rules from Jacob.” Who is it that rules? It must be the messiah. In 1QM 11.11, the author reminds God of his promise to “display the might of your hand against the Kittim,” that is, against the Romans.¹²⁰

The messiah may only be implied in the *War Scroll*, but he makes unmistakable appearances in other Qumran texts. The two most important are the *Pesher on Isaiah* (4Q161) and the *Rule of War* (4Q285), both of which are based on Isa. 10.34-11:5, and the latter of which may have been part of another version of the *War Scroll*. The texts are too lengthy to quote, but they depict an image of a militant, victorious royal messiah that is consistent with the biblical picture of old, and it is consistent with the imagery of the Davidic messiah in the *Psalms of Solomon* 17-18, which will be discussed below. Thus, Qumran’s expectation of a conquering messiah is not distinctive, but appears to be entirely consistent with Jewish messianic and

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Billah Nitzan, “Eschatological Motivations in the Qumran Literature,” in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish Tradition*, ed. Henning Reventlow (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 142-151.

eschatological traditions from the time of Qumran through the destruction of the Temple.¹²¹

The Psalms of Solomon

The *Psalms of Solomon*, which were composed some time after the Roman general Pompey entered Jerusalem in 63 BCE, are a set of poems that were transmitted under the name Solomon. *Psalms* 17 and 18, the last two in the collection, express a vivid, detailed hope for a Messiah from the line of David.¹²² The author goes to great lengths to locate his beliefs about a Messiah within the context of a repeated confession that God is the eternal king who is the savior and whose kingdom is also forever. He refers to the promise of an eternal dynasty for David (17.4) but also notes that national sin has led to the rise of evil, non-Davidic rulers, apparently the Hasmoneans, who established themselves as kings (17.5-6). The Lord judged and overthrew them through an alien, who seems to be Pompey (17.7-10).¹²³ Terrible times ensued because of the arrogance and violence of the foreign conquerors (17.11-20). In the context of all that had gone wrong during the periods of rule by the Hasmonaeans and Romans, the author enunciates his yearning for a new Anointed One from David's line.¹²⁴ The passage is too lengthy to quote, but its teachings and those of the shorter section in chap. 18.5-9 are summarized below.

The author reveals that the Anointed One is a king (17.21, 32) who is a descendent of David (17:21); he is called Lord Messiah, is said to be free from sin (17.36), and whatever he does is characterized by righteousness. God, however, as the eternal king, is always the superior one who acts and is in control. God will raise the Anointed One in his own time (17:21) and will support him with the ability to drive out the gentiles (17.22). The Messiah is to reign over God's servant Israel (17.21, 35; 18.5). He will gather them and lead them in righteousness, will

¹²¹ Laato. *A Star is Rising*, 126-131.

¹²² Pomykala. *The Davidic Tradition*, 155.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 159-170.

judge them, and will be their righteous king. He blesses the Lord's people with wisdom and happiness; he shepherds them and leads them in holiness and discipline. He also directs them in righteous acts in the fear of the Lord (18:8-9). This figure is to "destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from Gentiles (17:22)."¹²⁵ He will "smash the arrogance of sinner," "shatter all their substance with an iron rod," and "destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth (17:24)." The nations will flee from his when he warns them (17:25). As one might expect, he judges "peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness" (17:29). The nations will serve him and will stream to Jerusalem to observe his and the Lord's glory. He will be compassionate to the peoples who revere him (17:34). To summarize, in the *Psalms of Solomon* the Messiah is an extraordinary individual to whom God will grant gifts such as wisdom, righteousness, holiness and the fear of the Lord, but he remains a human monarch who is subservient to God, the eternal king.

Although the conception of the royal messiah is similar to the one described in the Qumran scrolls, there is no reason to suppose that the author of the *Psalms of Solomon* felt any influence of the sectarian community. The *Psalms of Solomon* clearly affirm resurrection, which is only weakly contested in the scrolls. Thus, the *Psalms* demonstrate that other groups besides the the community at Qumran were interested in messianism and eschatology.¹²⁶

1 Enoch 37-71

One apocalypse that should be dated before 70 CE and most likely originated in the land of Israel is *1 Enoch 37-71*, also known as the Similitudes of Enoch. The Similitudes are presented as heavenly visions of Enoch, but their content is most heavily indebted to the book of Daniel. They are typically apocalyptic in their focus on the coming judgment and the hope for a

¹²⁵ Translation from R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphy* 2 vols., ed. J. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

¹²⁶ Pomykala, *The Davidic Tradition*, 168-170.

heavenly afterlife for the righteous. The Similitudes are atypical though, in that it provides, for the first time in Jewish apocalyptic literature, an extended and complicated treatment of a messianic individual.¹²⁷ In 1 Enoch 46:1, Enoch sees “one who had a head of days and his head was white like wool; and with him there was another, whose face had the appearance of a man, and his face was full of grace, like one of the holy angels.”¹²⁸ From this point on, the figure described here is referred to either as “that Son of Man” or the “chosen one.”¹²⁹ This messianic individual is associated with a group appropriately designated the “chosen ones” (e.g. 45:3, 51:3, etc.); on the day of judgment he will sit on a glorious throne and judge the different classes of evildoers. He is a source of comfort and strength for the chosen; his glory is eternal and “all the secrets of wisdom will flow out of the counsel of his mouth (51.3).” Mountains will melt like wax before him (52.6), and various metals will be destroyed when he appears (52.9). It is said that his name was named before creation, and later that he is seated side by side with the Most High on a throne of glory (Chapter 62). The wicked are confounded when they see him, but the righteous share his life in heaven forever.

It appears that in much of the material that describes the messianic figure, the author of the Similitudes relies heavily on the conception of the “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7. The eschatological leader in the Similitudes is an exalted individual who will judge the wicked at the end and vindicate the suffering chosen ones, thus bringing about a great reversal from the present miserable conditions of oppression. The Similitudes are not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and so presumably were the work of a different sect, once again demonstrating the liveliness of messianic expectation in the period.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Gerbern Oegema, *The Anointed and His People: Messianic Expectation from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 140-147.

¹²⁸ Translation from G. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

¹²⁹ “That Son of Man” is also referred to as “righteous one” and the “anointed one,” but much less frequently. However, although four different terms are used for an eschatological leader, equivalencies and interchanged titles in the text demonstrate that they do indeed refer to the same individual. See Oegema, *The Anointed and His People*, 141.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

Apocalyptic Literature and Messianism in the post-Temple Era

The second major cluster of Jewish apocalypses dates from the end of the first century CE, in the aftermath of the Jewish Revolt. These apocalypses, which are all reflections on the catastrophe that had come to pass, include *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch* and *3 Baruch*. While they continue to console and exhort, they represent a rather different use of the genre from that of the Enoch writings and Daniel. Unlike the eschatologically charged rhetoric of the messianic texts examined above, they could scarcely have incited anyone to revolt. Instead, they attempt to understand with failure and destruction. Nevertheless, they indicate that apocalyptic eschatology, particularly messianism, were still very prominent in Judaism, even in the wake of the destruction of the Temple.¹³¹

This brand of apocalyptic literature flourished from the destruction of the Temple through the Bar Kokhba Revolt from 132-135 CE. After this, the third in a series of failed revolts against the Romans, the rabbis who undertook the codification of Jewish tradition seem to have turned away from apocalypticism. Certainly, eschatological motifs can still be found in the Talmud and midrashim, but the primary emphasis in rabbinic Judaism was placed on the Torah and its interpretation. Claims of higher inspiration were, from that point on, viewed with skepticism and suspicion. With the exception of the book of Daniel, the apocalypses of the Hellenistic and Roman period were not preserved by the rabbis. Many of these discarded Jewish apocalypses, though, were taken up by the Christians and updated in order to accommodate their belief system. It is for this reason that many of the other potentially messianic apocalypses of the late Second Temple, such as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the book of *Jubilees*, and portions of the *Sibylline Oracles*, were not included in my survey of messianic texts. These are Christian in their present form and so it is difficult to construct a Jewish stratum with any

¹³¹ Tom Willet, *Eschatology in the Theodices of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 51, 77, 121-125.

confidence.¹³²

In this chapter, I have portrayed early Jewish messianism by focusing only on scribal exegesis. Now, in Chapter Three, I will show that messianic expectations also had an anarchic and revolutionary character. That is, the messianic figures did not originate from circles shaped by scribal explications of biblical expectations, so that the Messiah or the Messiahs appear from the House of David, or from high priestly families. On the contrary, they originated from people of lower class, and they have their very backing and support from this very class.

¹³² Oegema, *The Anointed and His People*. 282-289. See also Jacob Neusner, "Mishnah and Messiah." in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, Jacob Neusner and William Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 275-280.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF MESSIANISM IN THE REVOLT OF 66-70 CE

This messianic zeal apparent in the literature of the late Second Temple Period was transformed from an abstract theological concept into a political reality that would define the Jewish population of Judaea through the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. The shift from the tolerant rulers and religious autonomy of the Persian and Ptolemaic periods to the repressive imperial regimes of Antiochos IV and the Romans was the salient factor in the birth of political eschatological messianism. Philip Davies and John Rogerson describe the messianic expectation as “essentially not a religious doctrine but a political reflex.”¹³³ As imperial governance of Judaea grew more repressive, the Jews felt increasingly in need of divine intervention to aide them in their redemption. They drew upon the prophetic visions of earlier Jewish literature, specifically the “Son of Man” figure in the book of Daniel, to imagine a messianic figure who could redeem them from oppression and exact vengeance upon their tormenters. This impulse was not a new innovation in Jewish thought. Joseph Klausner, a leading scholar of messianism summarizes, “[In ancient times] the political part of the belief in the Messiah took...first place during periods of trouble and distress precisely because it declared comfort and the hope that political freedom would return to the Jewish people.”¹³⁴ Prophetic figures, especially during the period of the Babylonian Exile, also preached messianic redemption and rebirth in the face of utter tragedy and oppression. The appeal to messianism as a tool to face political upheaval is thus a well-documented trend in Jewish theology, which emerges as powerfully as ever before in the face of the new reality of the Roman repressive rule.

From the period after the death of Herod in 4 BCE until the war that culminated in the

¹³³ Philip Davies and John Rogerson, *The Old Testament World* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹³⁴ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, 11.

destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, we encounter, both in Josephus¹³⁵ and the New Testament, numerous examples of messianic contenders. Josephus is overtly hostile to all of these figures—he consistently refers to them as “messiah pretenders” and “false prophets” throughout his works. Josephus does this deliberately, for reasons that will be examined in Chapter Four. The authors of the New Testament were likewise biased towards such leaders, as they held Jesus of Nazareth to be the one true Messiah. Nevertheless, the information we can glean from our sources on the messianic movements is enough to construct a fairly coherent picture of the religious landscape of the first century CE.

The messiahs that appeared during this period, in contrast to the spiritualized “anointed ones” expected by the Pharisees or the Essenes, led their followers with the goal of liberating themselves from foreign and tyrannical rule and reestablishing the peace and prosperity of the Golden Age.¹³⁶ R. A. Horsley, whose work represents the most recent and thorough study of these movements, has identified five figures who he believes can be properly characterized as messiahs: Judas, the son of Ezekias; Simon, Herod’s servant; Athronges; Menahem, son of Judas the Galilean; and Simon bar Giora.¹³⁷ In my survey of the various messianic movements of the period, I also include the leaders known as Jesus of Nazareth, the Samaritan, Theudas, the Egyptian and Jonathan the Weaver, even though they are typically not mentioned in a discussions of Jewish messianic leaders. Finally, it is worth mentioning that although these are the only specific figures identified by the primary sources, Josephus hints that others, beyond the persons mentioned above, aspired to be the Messiah: “Anyone might make himself king as

¹³⁵ Josephus (c. 37-100 CE) is the author of *The Jewish War*, the *Antiquities of the Jews*, *Against Apion* and *Life*. The reader should be aware that, concerning the history of the Hellenistic-Roman period, we are mainly dependent on his works. A full treatment of Josephus’s life and literary career, as well as methodological issues, will be addressed in Chapter Four.

¹³⁶ James Vanderkam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 40.

¹³⁷ See Richard Horsley and John Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 88-134. See also M. Hengel, *The Zealots* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 290-302.

the head of a band of rebels (*Ant.* 17.285).” Clearly, messianism was rampant in this period.

Messianism at the Turn of the First Century BCE

The first messianic figures appeared shortly after Herod died, when Roman armed force were weakened and confusion reigned. Josephus writes, “There were ten thousand other disorders in Judaea; . . . a great number put themselves into a warlike posture. . . There was Judas, the son of that Ezekias who had been head of the robbers; which Ezekias was a very strong man, and had with great difficulty been caught by Herod. . . This Judas gathered together a large number of desperate men at Sepphoris in Galilee and there made an assault on the royal palace (*Ant.* 17.271-272).” He then plundered the armory and the treasury and armed his men, after which Judas “became an object of terror to all men by plundering those he came across in his desire for great possessions and his ambition for royal rank (*Ant.* 17.272).” Josephus does not make Judas’ fate explicit, but there is a reference to his rebellion and death in Acts 5.37: he is said to have died, having rebelled against Roman taxation and to have had many followers, who later were scattered.

The next figure we encounter is Simon, the son of Judas: “Elated by the unsettled condition of affairs, he was bold enough to place the diadem on his head, and having got together a body of men, he was himself also proclaimed king by them in their madness, and he rated himself worthy of this beyond anyone else (*Ant.* 17.273-274).” When his forces met the Romans, they “fought rather in a bold than a skillful manner” and were defeated. Following the collapse of his movement, Simon and his brother James were crucified on the orders of Alexander, the procurator (*Ant.* 17.273-274).

Shortly thereafter, a third messiah appeared. This man, Athronges, was tall, with strong hands, and had been a shepherd, with no claim to the throne through wealth or family (*Ant.*

17.278): “[Anthronges] had the temerity to aspire to the kingship. . . Anthronges himself put on the diadem and held a counsel to discuss what things were to be done, but everything depended on his own decision. This man kept his power for a long while, for he had the title of king and nothing to prevent him from doing as he wished (*Ant.* 17.278-281).” Throughout his reign he killed many, both Romans and the king’s forces, eventually leading his men in a senseless campaign of cruelty against Jews and Romans, soldiers and civilians alike. before he was finally subdued (*Ant.* 17.282).

Although Josephus speaks of these figures simply as leaders or kings, explaining that they “claimed the kingship” or “were proclaimed king” by their followers, it would seem reasonable to surmise, on the basis of other sources for Jewish socio-religious forms, that they indeed had messianic intentions, to be understood against the background of the long standing Jewish tradition of popular anointed kingship.¹³⁸ Thus, once we have a clearer sense of what Josephus means when he says Judas, Simon and Athronges presumed to claim the kingship, it becomes evident that these movements were far more serious than mere peasant riots, as Josephus’s narrative suggests. Perhaps only after noting the size of the military force which Varus, the governor of Syria, believed necessary to reconquer Judaea, can we begin to understand the popularity of these movements. To reinforce the Roman legion already in Judaea he brought the two remaining legions in Syria, four regiments of cavalry and all the auxiliary troops supplied by the client rulers and Hellenistic cities in the region.¹³⁹ The Romans found, however, that it was not a simple matter to reestablish their control of the areas now dominated by the popular messianic movements. In Judaea especially the movement led by Athronges continued on for some time before the Roman or Herodian forces could eventually subdue the various companies

¹³⁸ Gerbern Oegema, *The Anointed and his People* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 138. See also Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiah: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20-30.

¹³⁹ Gerard Israel and Jacques Lebar, *When Jerusalem Burned* trans. by Alan Kendall (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1973), 50-52.

of Athronges' peasant followers (*Ant.* 17.282).

Messianism Prior to the Revolt of 66-70 CE

Due to the general paucity of sources we know very little about the other messianic movements that occurred between that occurred prior to the revolt 66 CE. We can, however, discern a few figures during the intermediate period: the Samaritan, Theudas and the Egyptian. The literary sources draw a distinction between these leaders and the ones mentioned above, labeling them as mere "sign prophets" or "magicians." Admittedly, Judas, Simon and Athronges seem to have had a better understanding of the concrete military and political situation in Judaea than most of the sign prophets, and correspondingly, a more legitimate claim to messiahship. They and their followers were armed and organized, and in some cases exercised effective political control over parts of the country for a period of time.¹⁴⁰ But, as we shall see, Rome's severity in suppressing the so called sign prophets clearly indicates that they either entertained messianic notions about themselves or announced themselves as the Messiah. The messianic hope, of course, always implied the overthrow of the Romans and so would elicit such a response. Therefore, though the movements of the Samaritan, Theudas and the Egyptian were perhaps not as developed as the ones immediately following the death of Herod, we should not dismiss their messianic overtones.

In the time of Pilate (c. 36 CE), a Samaritan, in the tradition of taking Moses, rather than David, as the messianic ideal, appears.¹⁴¹ Josephus in *Ant.* 28. 85 reports: "The Samaritan nation too was not exempt from disturbance. For a man who made light of mendacity and in all his designs catered to the mob, rallied them, bidding them go in a body with him to Mount Gerizim,

¹⁴⁰ Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 290-95.

¹⁴¹ In Judaism there was great variety in the identity of the Messiah. The idea that the Messiah would be like Moses was one-but only one-of the forms in which this expectation appeared. Judging from the literature which has been preserved, the expectation of the Mosaic prophet was not so strong as the expectation of the Davidic Messiah. Nevertheless, the idea was active and should be recognized. See Howard Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1957).

which in their belief is the most sacred of mountains. He assured them that on their arrival he would show them the sacred vessels which were buried there, where Moses had deposited them.” Little else is known about this mysterious Samaritan.

In the procuratorship of Fadus (c. 44 CE) the Jewish messianic prophet Theudas led a great number of followers to the Jordan valley by promising them that the water of the river would be divided miraculously just as with the crossing of Joshua in Joshua 3 (*Ant.* 20.97-99). He probably wanted to lead his followers, in the Mosaic model, to the land of Trans-Jordania so as to inaugurate the messianic age with his exodus. However, according to Josephus, “Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of this wild attempt but sent a troop of horsemen out against them, who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive and cut off his head and carried it to Jerusalem (*Ant.* 20.98).”

Messianism gained even more headway under the procuratorship of Felix (52-60 CE). Numerous outbreaks are reported, but no names are given. “There were such men as deceived and deluded the people under the pretense of divine interpretation, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government; and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty; but Felix thought the procedure was to be the beginnings of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen, both armed, who destroyed a great number of them (*War* 2.259-2.260).”

An Egyptian prophet, undoubtedly an Egyptian Jew, then appeared on the scene, whose short messianic career brought sharp reprisals upon the Jews. Josephus describes him: “A prophet who summoned his following to the Mount of Olives, the Egyptian promised that the walls of Jerusalem would fall so that they might enter the city. Four hundred were slain, but the Egyptians escaped, never to be heard from again (*War* 2.261; *Ant.* 20.169).” Josephus says that

he had thirty thousand followers (*War* 2.261). This figure is also attested in the New Testament. In Acts 21.38, Paul is taken for this messianic figure while on his way into Jerusalem. The chief captain of the soldiers accuses him of being “that Egyptian, who made such an uproar a short while before and led four thousand murderous men out into the wilderness.” The end of the Egyptian episode, however, only marked the beginning of even more “impostors and brigands” being active and working together (*War* 2.264). Attempting to turn the people towards war with Rome, they attacked those that refused to comply (*War* 2.264-65; *Ant.* 20.172).

Against such a backdrop of intense messianic fervor, it is not difficult to understand why the Roman authorities stationed in Palestine responded with such deadly retaliation against what to us sounds like harmless religious extremism. The attacks against Theudas, who promised to part the waters of the Jordan River, and the anonymous Egyptian Jew, who promised to bring down the walls of Jerusalem, did not arise out of misunderstanding and so cannot be regarded as overreactions. On the contrary, the Romans understood very well the expectations and intentions of these and other potential messianic figures, and believed them to be popular enough among the people to warrant such reactions.¹⁴²

The movement focused on Jesus of Nazareth began more than a generation earlier after the death of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, a prophet who preached the imminence of the kingdom of God (Matthew 3.1), was executed by Rome for his eschatologically charged teachings (*Ant.* 18.116-19). In a period ripe with such eschatological fervor and messianic expectation, Jesus’ followers came to believe him to be the Messiah, the Son of God and king of Israel. However, although “his fame reached the whole of Syria. . . [and] great crowds followed him (Matthew 4.24), his preaching regarding the imminent arrival of God’s kingdom (Mark 1.14-15; Luke 11.20) and his frequent association with the more downtrodden and less desirable elements of the population brought him into conflict with the Judaeian establishment, including the high

¹⁴² Robert Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* (New Jersey: Castle Books, 2004), 57.

priest.¹⁴³

In 34 CE, upon Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem at the approach of Passover (Matthew 22.15-25), his followers acclaimed him as the Messiah and king of Israel. With the Judaeans effectively held hostage by Pilate for the submissiveness of the population, the political implications of Jesus' acclamation became a matter of considerable concern.¹⁴⁴ He was brought before a council convened by the high priest and was interrogated about his teachings, most especially as to whether he considered himself to be the Messiah, and therefore king of the Judaeans (Mark 14.43-65). The Judaeans were fearful that if Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, it might well precipitate a rebellion against Roman overlordship. His responses to the council's inquiries were not found to be adequately reassuring with regard to his intentions; and so, they turned him over to Pilate (Mark 15.2-15) as King of the Jews, as Messiah and as political revolutionary.¹⁴⁵ The inscription on the cross—"King of the Jews" (Mark 15.15-32)—testifies to the fact, as does the Roman law which said: "Instigators of revolt or rebellion are, according to their status, liable to be crucified, thrown to wild beasts, or deported to an island."¹⁴⁶

Jesus' mass movement then collapsed, leaving a number of confused and demoralized followers who somehow managed to hold themselves together as a group. Central to their survival, almost certainly, was their belief that Jesus was not really dead and would reappear at any moment to lead them into battle against the Romans. Messianic hope was thus held in suspension. Ideologically rearmed in this way, the Judaea-Christian cadre—often referred to as *christiani*—regained their confidence and continued preaching. Apparently, their efforts were rewarded, as *The Acts of the Apostles* reports that their membership rose from 120 to 8,000 in only a few years.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ E.P. Sanders, "The Life of Jesus," in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development* (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 2001), 75-80.

¹⁴⁴ Israel and Lebar, *When Jerusalem Burned*, 54-56.

¹⁴⁵ Sanders, "The Life of Jesus," 75-80.

¹⁴⁶ Israel and Lebar, *When Jerusalem Burned*, 56.

¹⁴⁷ Faulkner, *Apocalypse*, 130.

That Rome considered such apocalyptic hopes dangerous and pervasive in Jewish society is illustrated not only by the harshness of the empire's responses to the messianic movements, but also by the episode in 40 CE involving Caligula's statue.¹⁴⁸ It had been a matter of Roman state policy to adopt and promote the cult of emperor-worship, but the emperors themselves were deified only after their deaths.¹⁴⁹ Caligula, however, reached the conclusion that he was a living god, and demanded that he be venerated as such. To this end, Caligula ordered that a more than life size statue of him should be erected not merely in Judaea, but in the very Temple itself. Anticipating that this order might provoke a violent reaction that the procurator of Judaea would be unable to suppress with the forces at his command, Caligula charged the governor of Syria with the responsibility of assuring that his instructions were carried out.¹⁵⁰

Why, though, knowing the certain violent ramifications of placing a statue in the Temple, did Caligula proceed with such a demand? Scholars have typically agreed with the ancient sources and simply attributed his actions to a fit of megalomania.¹⁵¹ "But to simply ascribe these actions" to megalomania, Robert Drews argues, "neglects any connection with what was happening in Judaea at large and at the Jerusalem temple in particular."¹⁵² Messianic expectations were at their height during the years following the death of Jesus, and the Temple was undoubtedly central to the further development and proliferation of such ideas among the Judaeian population.¹⁵³ Thus, by attacking the movement at its very foundation, Caligula hoped to stamp out the messianic fervor of the Judaeian people. The fact that Caligula was willing to involve the Syrian army indicates how serious he considered the successful implementation of his

¹⁴⁸ The connection between Caligula's statue and messianism was suggested by Professor Drews of Vanderbilt University. See Robert Drews, *Classics 224 Course book* (Vanderbilt University, 2004-5); available from <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/classics/drews/cls224coursebook>

¹⁴⁹ Jagersma, *A History of Israel*, 129.

¹⁵⁰ Drews, *Classics 224 Course book*.

¹⁵¹ See Philo's account in *Legatio*, 188 and 198-348, in which he explains that Caligula's order was a response to the destruction of one of his altars in Judaea by the Jews.

¹⁵² Drews, *Classics 224 Course book*.

¹⁵³ Drews, *Classics 224 Course book*.

plan was to the security of Rome.

Messianism During the Revolt of 66-70 CE

We now turn to a consideration of the messianic contenders during the war period. As the crisis approached in the life of the nation, the messianic excitement of the people was at fever heat. It was at this time that two of the more significant and well documented movements of this type developed: the relatively small group of Sicarii led by Menahem, and the extremely large force following Simon bar Giora. These represent the final two messiahs as denoted by Horsley.

After Jewish insurgents had begun their attack on Jerusalem, they were joined by the Sicarii, a group of urban terrorists led by Menahem. Josephus reports: “[Menahem] returned [to Jerusalem] like a veritable king to Jerusalem, became the leader of the revolution, and directed the siege of the palace (*War* 2.434).” Although it is not explicit, it is clear through Josephus’s language that Menahem was posturing himself as the divinely elected king, being recognized as such by his “fanatical” followers. Not only did he presume to take sole political control of affairs in Jerusalem, but he and his followers were giving ceremonial expression to his office in the Temple: “whither he had gone up in state to pay his devotions, arrayed in royal robes and attended by his suite of armed fanatics (*War* 2.444).” Shortly after this, however, Menahem was murdered by rebels loyal to another leader (*War* 2.445).

Far more serious and important than this incident,¹⁵⁴ which ended rather abruptly, was the messianic movement focused on Simon bar Giora, who eventually became the principle political-military commander in the besieged Jerusalem and whom the Romans recognized as the enemy general.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Due to the brevity of Menahem’s royal leadership, Horsley calls Menahem’s bid for power a messianic incident rather than a messianic movement. See Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 116.

¹⁵⁵ Kenneth Pompykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1995), 258.

Simon bar Giora's name. "son of proselyte," indicates that he was not from a notable family.¹⁵⁶ From the very beginning of the revolt he was leader of a fairly substantial force and was apparently one of the real heroes of the Jewish victory over the advancing Roman army in October 66 CE (*War* 2.521). But he was then passed over for a command by the provincial government, as such a popular leader at the head of a peasantry army could be dangerous to the aristocrats.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, because of his messianic qualities of "physical strength and courage" he continued as a popularly recognized leader of the social revolution in the region.¹⁵⁸ He bided his time, and even stayed for a time with the Sicarii at Masada, when the governing group in Jerusalem took serious steps to suppress his activities (*War* 4.507-509).

When Simon heard of the death of the High Priest Ananus (*War* 2.441-53), however, he began to systematically build his movement. With the people as a whole yearning for effective leadership against the Romans, large numbers of Jews, including some of the more prominent figures in Judaeen society, came to obey him "as a king (*War* 4.510)." Simon's entry into Jerusalem to seize the reins of government may have involved his formal recognition as king by the citizen body of Jerusalem and chief priests.¹⁵⁹

That Simon had assumed the messianic role of the Jews is manifest in two events: his dramatic surrender to the Romans after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and his ritual execution in Rome as the enemy general or head of state. After attempting to escape through the tunnels and secret passages under Jerusalem, Simon apparently decided on a ceremonious and symbolic surrender: "[Simon] dressed himself in white tunics and buckling over them a purple mantle arose out of the ground at the very spot whereon the Temple formerly stood (*War* 7.29)." The significance of this attire is unmistakable. It is that of the king-Messiah.

¹⁵⁶ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 194

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁵⁸ Pompykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 258-61.

¹⁵⁹ Pompykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism*, 259.

The symbolism would have been clear to all. It had long since been used to denote the king of the Jews, from Herod the Great to Jesus.¹⁶⁰

The ritual execution of Simon formed part of the triumphal procession and celebration of the Roman victory over the Jewish nation (*War* 7.153-154). It could not be clearer that the Romans recognized Simon as the leader of the Jewish nation. His rival for leadership during the prolonged Roman siege of Jerusalem, John of Gishala, was simply imprisoned by the Romans (*War* 6.433).¹⁶¹ Simon, on the other hand, was ceremoniously paraded, scourged, and executed as the leader, perhaps explicitly as “king” of the Jews.¹⁶² Taken together with the manner of his surrender, clad in the symbolic robes of the king of the Jews, the ceremonial event in Rome provides a significant manifestation of the way in which Simon bar Giora had assumed the role of Messiah.

Further evidence of the messianic expectation of the period is given by Josephus, who recounts that, while the Temple was burning, a prophet appeared announcing that the Messiah was at hand. “A false prophet made a public proclamation in the city that very day that God commanded them to get up upon the Temple and deliverance. Now there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them that they should wait for deliverance from God (*War* 6.52).”

Finally, Josephus reports that, after the fall of Jerusalem, many of the Sicarii fled to Egypt, where they continued their battle against the Roman rule and the collaborators. In this connection he mentions a messianic figure, *Jonathan*, a weaver: “The madness of the Sicarii further attacked, like a disease, the cities around Cyrene. Jonathan, an arrant scoundrel, by trade a weaver, having taken refuge in that town, won the ear of not a few of the indigent class, and led them forth into the desert, promising them a display of signs and apparitions (*War* 7.438).”

¹⁶⁰ Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 220-226.

¹⁶¹ Sicker, *Between Rome and Jerusalem*, 159-164.

¹⁶² Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 226.

Thus, although these realizations of Jewish messianic expectations failed in history, they clearly demonstrate the liveliness and diversity of Jewish messianic hope prior to and during the revolt of 66-70 CE.

CHAPTER FOUR

SCHOLARSHIP ON THE REVOLT OF 66-70 CE

In the last fifteen years, Jonathan Price's *Jerusalem Under Siege* has been the only published monograph specifically devoted to the First Jewish Revolt, but there has been numerous smaller scale studies on particular aspects of the war.¹⁶³ The main focus of these investigations has varied from the role of Josephus as general and historian to the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple. Though some consensus on these issues has been reached, one area—the causes of the rebellion—remains a highly controversial topic. Below, in the first section of this chapter, I survey modern scholarship on the causes of the war of 66-70 CE. By doing so, I hope to draw attention to a glaring deficiency in their account—the role of messianism as a factor in the war. In the second section of this chapter, I speculate on why such a seemingly important aspect of first century CE Judaea, pervasive in the literature of the period and attested to by the ancient authors, has been repeatedly marginalized by modern scholars.

Modern Scholarship on the Causes of the Revolt

For Elizabeth Smallwood, in her *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*,¹⁶⁴ the trouble in Caesarea between the Jews and Greeks was the “spark which lit the tinder.”¹⁶⁵ However, she contends, the revolt had its origin in much “deeper” causes; it “would have occurred inevitably sooner or later.”¹⁶⁶ The trouble began in 6 CE with what she refers to as the protest of Judas. What was founded in 6 CE was a dream of independence. The protest became the spiritual foundation for the later brigand activity. Here Smallwood implies a sense of

¹⁶³ See Jonathan Price, *Jerusalem Under Siege: The Collapse of the Jewish State 66-70 CE* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1981).

¹⁶⁵ Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 288.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

continuity and inevitability in which 66-70 CE acts as a frame for viewing the events from 6 CE onwards. For Smallwood: “the hardening of Jewish nationalist feeling into a militant resistance movement at the very start of the period of Roman rule was the fundamental cause of the recurrent disturbances of the next sixty years and of the revolt which was their climax, in the sense that it created or sharpened the dilemma facing the Romans in attempting to govern Judaea as a province.”¹⁶⁷ The last phrase of this quote is important. The inability of the Romans selected to administer the province was to become the trigger for the Jewish “intransigence.” Rome protected Jewish “religious liberty” but could not tolerate any nationalist aspirations. Added to this, a series of governors was unable to display the required diplomatic skills, hampered by limited military support, with the end result that “the story of the years 6-66 is largely the story of how the occupying power and the nationalists reacted on one another, each provoking the other to further excesses until the final explosion came.”¹⁶⁸

Smallwood’s assessment of the existing situation of turmoil and conflict, which she attributes to the failure of Rome’s ability to effectively administer the Judaeian province, is accurate and can be confirmed by our sources. Moreover, her central thesis that Jewish nationalism was the main contributing factor to the war is well articulated and certainly deserves consideration. However, she ignores the role of messianism and thus her account is rendered incomplete. Perhaps messianic fervor is implicit in her discussion of nationalism, but she never makes the connection clear. Certainly, nationalist movements and messianic movements arise from similar circumstances and share similar characteristics, but a distinction must be made. The Jews had briefly obtained political freedom under the Hasmonaeans and so nationalism had presumably been an important element in the Jewish psyche from that point on. However, they showed considerable restraint in the thwarting of their desire for national independence for over a

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 155.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 155.

century afterwards, presumably because they understood that such aspirations could not feasibly be realized. Smallwood's thesis, then, cannot adequately explain the Jew's decision to revolt—there must have been another factor that nurtured the Jewish nationalism. Since messianism had recently become such a popular phenomenon in Jewish society, it is reasonable to assume that now, armed with the belief that divine providence was bound to aid them in their bid to recover the independence they had enjoyed under Maccabean rule, the Jews were ready to free themselves from the reins of rationality and finally realize their nationalist longings. Thus, messianism was not merely a manifestation of nationalism, as Smallwood implies—no, it was an altogether different impulse in Jewish society that merits much more attention than she is willing to give it.

The second example to consider is Uriel Rappaport's explanation of the revolt in his article, "Jewish-Pagan Relations and the Revolt against Rome in 66-70 CE."¹⁶⁹ Rappaport, like Smallwood, asserts that the revolt was inevitable: all that needs to be determined is the exact basis by which this was the case.¹⁷⁰ In opposition to Smallwood, Rappaport declares that there is another fundamental cause: the conflict between Jews and Greeks residing in Judaea. Surveying the various opinions regarding the origin of the revolt, Rappaport claims that they assume there was a complex chain of events which worked together over an extended period of time.¹⁷¹ The debate is simply over an attempt to distinguish between the primary and secondary factors. Rappaport, however, begins from the premise that even among the so-called primary causes a distinction can, and should, be made. For him, all but one factor could be resolved in a manner that would not end in revolt.¹⁷² Therefore, the only factor that made the rebellion inevitable was the ongoing conflict between the Jews and Greeks in Judaea.

¹⁶⁹ Uriel Rappaport, "Jewish-Pagan Relations and the Revolt against Rome in 66-70 CE," in *The Jerusalem Cathedra: Studies in the History, Archaeology, Geography and Ethnography of the Land of Israel*, ed. L. Levine (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi Institute, 1981).

¹⁷⁰ Rappaport, "Jewish-Pagan Relations," 81.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 84.

From this conclusion, Rappaport turns to what he argues should be viewed as the factor of inevitability. Jewish-pagan relations in Judaea was the “issue, apparently that confronted Rome with a dilemma it could not resolve: hence the “inevitability” of the revolt.”¹⁷³ These relations were a constant source of tension, which meant the Jews could not reconcile themselves to Roman rule. Rappaport outlines the nature of Jewish-pagan contact in Judaea, through the Hasmonaean period and into the first century CE. Rome, through Herod and then during the period of direct rule, tried to maintain a delicate balance, protecting both Jews and Greeks. Such an approach, however, was not feasible. According to Rappaport, “the problem underlying this situation [Roman desire for coexistence] was that Jews and pagans lived side by side amidst the friction and animosity of their struggle for existence and their mutual refusal to recognize the rights of the other side.”¹⁷⁴ Although Rome tried to maintain peace, increasingly the governors were drawn into supporting the pagans in the various ethnic conflicts that broke out. The revolt was waiting to happen, the territory was a time bomb. Therefore, for Rappaport, it is not an accident that it was a dispute in Caesarea between the Jews and pagans that instigated the revolt and that the most intense fighting of 66 CE was between pagans and Jews *in cities* throughout the region.

Although he cites messianic fervor as one of the contributing factors to the revolt, Rappaport contends that messianic fervor simply intensified the seriousness of the existing situation of hostility.¹⁷⁵ However, the primary evidence can scarcely carry the weight Rappaport wants to place on the hostile relations between the Jewish population of Judaea and the pagans in the surrounding Greek cities in terms of it being the sole cause for the inevitability of the revolt. Martin Goodman, whose explanation will be treated in full detail below, has essentially discounted this view. Goodman explains the “occasional urban violence” in the region before and

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

during the war as merely the “bickerings of Jews and gentiles.”¹⁷⁶ The fact that prior to the revolt of 66-70 CE Jews chose to dwell in these cities suggests to him that the atmosphere was not one of deep hostility, but that rather “the inter-communal violence of 66 may have been the consequence rather than the cause of the revolt.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, though Jewish-pagan relations were certainly not amicable, they could not have been the main contributing factor to the events of 66-70 CE.

The final and perhaps most important contribution to consider on the debate regarding the revolt is Goodman’s *The Ruling Class of Judaea*.¹⁷⁸ Goodman’s central thesis is that the revolt took place because the group who functioned as the ruling class in Judaea during the first century BC failed to act as effective rulers. They were not a “natural elite” and they were unable to find acceptance among the Jewish community as a whole. As their own internal bickering intensified in the 50s CE so too did the fact that the ruling class was not equipped with the local “prestige” necessary to govern. The ambitions and divisions of the Judaeian ruling class thus brought war onto their country. By implication the revolt was inevitable. Thus the system failed because one of the key components of the administration, the local ruling class, was incapable of fulfilling its function.

Goodman begins by acknowledging the range of explanations for the revolt offered by scholarship. Five explanations are outlined: “the incompetence of the Roman governors; the oppressiveness of Roman rule; Jewish religious susceptibilities; class tensions; and quarrels with local gentiles.”¹⁷⁹ Although these factors may be viewed as making the revolt seem inevitable, he

¹⁷⁶ Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome AD 66-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6.

¹⁷⁷ Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea*, 6-7.

¹⁷⁸ Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome AD 66-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Martin Goodman, “The First Jewish Revolt: Social Conflict and the Problem of Debt,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* (1982), 417-27, where the general socioeconomic context in Judaea is presented as one in which an uneven distribution of money is a dominant background factor.

¹⁷⁹ Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea*, 5-14.

does not believe they inevitably led to revolt against Rome.¹⁸⁰ Nor does Goodman accept that “an amalgam of all these causes was responsible” for the revolt in itself.¹⁸¹ Instead, he argues that it is a cause not overtly identified by Josephus in his narrative that acts as the fundamental cause. The “power struggle within the Jewish ruling class,” to which Josephus only makes passing reference, acts as “a crucial link”.¹⁸²

The ruling class of Judaea that emerged in 6 CE failed to provide the effective type of leadership required to keep the peace in the province. Rome followed its normal practice, identifying a wealthy elite in whom responsibility for helping maintain order would be delegated. It was an elite, however, that did not have the support of the local population. The eventual outbreak of the revolt was, according to Goodman, evident even in 6 CE.¹⁸³ The removal of Joazar from the high priesthood was an early sign of the impending failure. The census was completed but the high priest was hated to such an extent because of his involvement in the process that he had to be replaced. At no stage could the ruling class prove they had the appropriate credentials to the community.¹⁸⁴ By implication, what happened in 66 CE was the direct result of decisions taken at the beginning of the first century BC. In fact, the “leadership [of the ruling class] turned popular discontent into full scale revolt against Rome.”¹⁸⁵ The reality of this situation was acknowledged by the Romans in the actions they took after the revolt, the destruction of the Judaeian ruling class.¹⁸⁶

The exact timing of the revolt can be also primarily associated with the activities of the ruling class. Judaea had been plagued with many problems throughout the first century CE, such as the social ramifications of the various economic changes and those due to matters of “religious

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸² Ibid., 19.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 124.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 231.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 233-235.

inevitability.”¹⁸⁷ It was, therefore, almost inevitable that the ruling class would fail once the community was confronted with a major “crisis.”¹⁸⁸ Such a crisis took place in 66 CE and the end result was the revolt. The events associated with Florus’s visit to Jerusalem, in particular, and the activities of Eleazar and the other aristocrats, were the catalyst for the trouble that had been built into the system in 6 CE. Factions within the ruling class developed in the 50s, with rival groups actively trying to assert prominence. This internal division—in part, a reflection of the failure of the ruling class to win popular support from the outset—eventually became such a public battle that it explained why the revolt began in 66 CE.¹⁸⁹ The Sicarii, led by Eleazar, made a bold bid to win popular support by ceasing to offer sacrifices at the Temple.¹⁹⁰ Here, the revolt comes as the final scene in a tragedy: “the ambitions and divisions of the Judaeian ruling class then brought war into their country.”¹⁹¹

Of all the explanations we have encountered, Goodman’s gives the least weight to messianic expectation. Unlike Smallwood and Rappaport, who at least conceded that these beliefs could have at least been a contributing factor, Goodman places the sole responsibility of the revolt on the shoulders of the Judaeian ruling class. This conclusion is drawn from his belief that the ruling class lacked all natural authority and so could not govern effectively. This seems like an odd assertion, though, considering the royal descent and high priestly pedigree of many of the ruling class. After all, these were qualities that had been held in high esteem by Jews for some time. Furthermore, none of the major sources on the revolt, including Josephus, Tacitus or the rabbinic account, can corroborate Goodman’s thesis. Certainly, the failure of the ruling class to maintain the confidence of the masses played a key role, but other factors, which Goodman leaves little room for, must have been important. In no way does Goodman’s thesis explain the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 51-108.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 137-51.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 154.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 231.

Jew's irrational belief that they could win a war with the Romans.

The studies described above, each specifically devoted to explaining the cause or causes of the revolt, display a diversity on the solutions offered. This apparent diversity is, however, merely a mask under which there exists a uniformly held principle. The revolt is explained in terms of long standing causes that impact upon the key fabric of the functioning of Jewish society. Whether it be the failure of the Roman administration, nationalist aspirations, the nature of Jewish-pagan relations, or the inability of the ruling class to offer effective leadership, as Smallwood, Rappaport and Goodman have each suggested respectively, they all have their origins well before 66 CE. Without a doubt, these works illuminate the causes of the revolt and offer an important glimpse into the political and social landscape of Judaea during the first century CE. However, even ignoring the inherent weaknesses of each explanation, the province of Judaea was not the only territory subject to the factors listed above and a further explanation is necessary to explain why this particular case evolved into full-scale war. I argue that this explanation can be found in the single factor which distinguished Jews from all other peoples of the period-that is, their intense messianic expectation.

As I have demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, a survey of the religious texts of the period, biblical and extra biblical, as well as several passages in Josephus and the New Testament indicate that messianic hope was pervasive in the mindset of first century CE Jew. And yet, despite the abundance of messianic expectations and eschatological savior figures in the period, this aspect of the Jewish psyche is barely mentioned by Smallwood, Rappaport, or Goodman. The failure to attach the proper significance to messianism during the period begs several questions. Of central importance, particularly because of the overwhelming level of agreement among the scholars is the origin of their picture-the historian Josephus. This question is all the more relevant because of the apparent parallel between what Josephus and scholars present-

Judaea in turmoil that escalates to the point of open war, with 70 CE viewed as a climatic end-point.

Josephus on the Causes of the Revolt

With our attention directed towards Josephus it is appropriate to consider his career. Our understanding of Josephus's personal career is entirely dependent upon what he permits the reader of his texts to know. Allowing for this, it appears that he was born in 37 CE into the Jewish priestly aristocracy. His father, Matthis, was a member of the first of the twenty priestly clans (*Life* 2). Through his mother, Josephus claimed to be of the royal blood of the Maccabees (*Life* 4). Josephus's heritage thus identifies him with the priestly ruling class of Judaea, the class which cooperated most directly with the Romans and which had the most to lose by a war with Rome.¹⁹²

At the age of nineteen, after a trial investigation of all three major Jewish religious parties, Josephus entered public life and decided to follow the party of the Pharisees (*Life* 12). When the revolt against Rome broke out in 66 CE, he was sent to Galilee to lead over the Jewish resistance in the area. Despite the length of Josephus's narrative regarding the 66-70 CE revolt, the description of his activities during this crucial period of Jewish history is sluggish. Josephus became involved in the revolt at its outset. His motivation for involvement is unknown, but it is clear that he had sufficient profile to be named the general of Galilee in the initial phases of the war. Although Josephus provides a description of his outwitting the Romans at Jotapata and in his gaining the respect of the Galilaean population, he was captured at the downfall of Jotapata (*War* 2.569-71; 3.141-289, 316-44).¹⁹³ His capture inaugurated the beginning of a new stage in Josephus's career. As a prisoner of the Romans he became an interpreter for his captives in the

¹⁹² Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London: Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 2002), 10-16.

¹⁹³ Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society*, 11.

69-70 CE campaign. His task incorporated parleying with the Jewish rebels in an effort to seek terms for their surrender during the siege of Jerusalem.¹⁹⁴

It is apparent that Josephus was rewarded for his actions in the latter part of the war by the Romans. The protection of Vespasian saw Josephus move to Rome after the revolt, where the new emperor provided him with a house and pension. To this were added estates in Judaea and Roman citizenship (*Life* 422-23). It is while Josephus was in Rome that his literary activity began. Within ten years after the destruction of Jerusalem, Josephus wrote a history of the Jewish struggle for independence entitled *The Jewish War* (75-79 CE). Comprised of seven books, this work contains a lengthy description of the revolt, preceded by a political history of the Jews from the time of the Maccabean Revolt. Josephus also wrote an extensive history of the Jews entitled *The Jewish Antiquities* completed later in his life (93-94 CE); this work, comprised of twenty books, contains a continuous Jewish history from its origins up to the beginning of the revolt in 66 CE. As such, it contains no record of the war itself. But its history of the prewar period from the time Judaea became a province in 6 CE parallels that of *Jewish War* and is more detailed. Attached to the published copies of the *Ant.* is a brief work called the *Life*. Probably completed several years after the *Ant.*, this autobiographical work is mainly a first-person account of the period when Josephus was general in Galilee.¹⁹⁵

For scholars interested in Roman, Jewish and early Christian history the texts of Josephus, including *Ant.*, *War* and *Life*, provide a substantial body of information. Although Josephus is certainly not the only source for historical inquiry into the late Second Temple

¹⁹⁴ Norman Bentwich, *Josephus* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914), 67.

¹⁹⁵ Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* . 14.

Period in Judaea, he stands above the rest.¹⁹⁶ It is only Josephus who provides a narrative of events that covers the entire period. Moreover, he has the added bonus of being a contemporary of the events which mark the end of the period. As historians are interested in understanding Jewish society, so too Josephus was interested in promoting understanding of the society in which he grew up.¹⁹⁷ But the problems begin when scholars commence their dialogue with Josephus. They want to use Josephus in an effort to acquire knowledge and establish understanding, but they rely on his conception of the first century CE to such an extent that one cannot help but ask: who is in control? Is it the historian, or Josephus?

Having explored the personal perspective of Josephus, we must now demonstrate how Josephus's perspective interacts with his narrative and in turn, therefore, how we should approach his texts. The central contention, one that is widely recognized, is that his narratives are not objective but rather are steeped in hindsight and formed by his interpretive framework, by which I mean the choice of subject matter as well as the way that he records the material. This interpretive framework controls all aspects of *War. Ant.* and *Life*. Having said this, let us turn to Josephus's explanation of the causes of the war so that we may obtain some insight regarding the nature of the relationship between Josephus's account of the causes of the war and modern scholarship's account of the causes of the war. As we shall see, individual features within

¹⁹⁶ There are, of course, other sources for our knowledge of this period. Several authors have written historical accounts which parallel and supplement those of Josephus. Philo (20 BCE-45 CE), the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria in Egypt, relates some incidents which took place in Judaea at the times of Pilate and Caligula. Also, the works of some Roman historians, Tacitus (55-120 CE), Suetonius (69-140 CE) and Dio Cassius (163-early third century CE), deal with Rome during the First Jewish Revolt. However, each of these historians include only brief sections on the war.

The New Testament writings, especially the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, contain historical material from the time of Pilate and subsequent procurators. These are Christian theological documents written over a period of thirty years or more after the war, and they often express antipathy towards Judaism. As such, they must be read with caution as historical sources. The large body of rabbinic literature such as the *Mishnah*, the *Tosephta*, the *Jerusalem Talmud*, the *Babylonian Talmud* and the midrash writings, contain legal traditions from many centuries of Judaism. Although written down several hundred years later, they contain oral traditions which predate the war of 66-70 CE. These traditions are, however, very difficult to date. Furthermore, the branch of Pharisaism which survived the war to preserve these traditions was not in general sympathetic to the nation's cause against Rome. See VanderKam, *Early Judaism*. 59-146.

¹⁹⁷ Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* . 1-10.

Josephus's explanation may be altered (see Goodman), but his interpretive framework nevertheless stands in place. The two pillars central to this framework are that Judaea was a place of escalating turmoil and that the revolt of 66-70 CE was the inevitable climax of long standing causes.

Per Bilde, in his article "The Causes of the Jewish War According to Josephus," focuses specifically on identifying Josephus's attempt to explain the revolt.¹⁹⁸ Bilde argues that Josephus explains the revolt on three different levels: the "immediate releasing causes," the "more fundamental causes," and the "abstract level." The first level, the immediate releasing causes, and the associated accelerating process were events connected with the year 66 CE. The dispute in Caesarea, the response of Florus-particularly his demand for funds from the temple and the cessation of the daily sacrifice-were the various immediate releasing causes for the revolt.¹⁹⁹ They were the specific events that explain the timing of the revolt. That these events developed into a full blown rebellion when they did are explained by an accelerating process, which included the murder of the Roman garrison at Jerusalem and the defeat of the legate Cestius.²⁰⁰

The more fundamental causes explain why the immediate releasing causes and accelerating processes were able to become a revolt. Here Bilde argues that Josephus establishes a context for the revolt. Bilde identifies five fundamental causes within Josephus's narrative, including: the activities of the Jewish Zealots, also known as the "fourth philosophy"; the Roman administration; a combination of these first two factors; the Jewish-Greek conflicts; and internal division among the Jews.²⁰¹ Rogue Jews with aspirations of kingship actively promoted the cause of rebellion, bringing disruption and conflict wherever possible. The ineffectiveness and, in some cases, deliberate provocation of Roman administrators also created an environment ripe for

¹⁹⁸ P. Bilde, "The Causes of the Jewish War according to Josephus," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10 (1979).

¹⁹⁹ Bilde, "The Causes of the Jewish War," 184-85.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 187-190.

revolt. For Josephus, under the governorship of Albinus these two factors combined-government and rogue Jews together pushed the people towards revolt.²⁰² Further constant factors were the conflicts between Jewish and Greek residents in Judea and civil strife among the Jews. The trouble in Caesarea during 66 CE merely echoed a long standing hatred between the Jewish and Greek residents in the city.²⁰³ Added to this constant tension was the increasing level of internal division within the Jewish population. This conflict, which reached its zenith during the revolt, was evident between classes and within class groups prior to the revolt.²⁰⁴ These explanations made the revolt a predictable event, with conditions integral to the existence of first century Judaea pointing to an explosion at some point in time.

A sense in which the revolt is inevitable, according to Bilde's view of Josephus's interpretation, is obvious in the third level of explanation. Here, in the abstract level, Josephus places the immediate and more fundamental causes in a theological explanation for how the Jews would suffer defeat, especially the loss of the temple. The civil strife, the transgressions of rebels, the populace and the aristocracy should all be views as actions that required a response from God.²⁰⁵ The defeat of the Jews and the destruction of the temple became that response. They were, therefore, God's punishment of Israel. The lack of unity within the Jewish community and the various transgressions of the law, although explainable in human terms, were of more profound significance.²⁰⁶ They were part of the divine will; they were an expression of God's plan. Here Josephus has removed the events from human control. What took place was inevitable. and it had to be accepted and incorporated in the psyche of post-70 CE existence.

One should not, however. interpret Josephus's pro-Roman point of view as an abandonment of Judaism. In fact, irrespective of how his contemporaries interpreted Josephus's

²⁰² Ibid., 188.

²⁰³ Ibid., 190.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 191.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 193.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 196-98.

career changes, he continued to perceive himself as a Jew. Throughout his narratives, Josephus remains faithful to the Jewish faith and demonstrates great pride in his people. The two earlier texts, *War* and *Ant.*, clearly express Josephus's allegiance to his heritage in the themes and subject matter presented. In the 90s CE, as Josephus constructed his defense in *Life*, the bulk of the details regarding his heritage clearly locate him within Jewish society in Jerusalem. Thus, even after facing harsh criticism from Jewish circles for over two decades, Josephus appears to have lost none of his desire to promote his prominent heritage within Judaism.

Furthermore, in an observation central to our understanding of the marginalization of messianism, Josephus defends Judaism in *War* by placing the blame for the war not on the whole nation but on those misguided revolutionaries among the Jews who had instigated the war and pressed it to its bitter end (*War* 1:27; 5:444; 6:251). This was a convenient assignment of blame, for the rebels were at odds with him, and they destroyed the traditional dominance of the aristocratic class, of which he was a part. These he depicted as brigands and tyrants who had essentially duped the peasants into supporting their cause. According to Josephus, whatever religious motivations they had embraced were either misinterpretations of Jewish prophecies (*War* 2:651, 6:315) or innovations in their traditions (*Ant.* 18:9; *War* 2:414), both of which led to the war. By contrast, he portrayed the general Jewish populace as moderate and peace-loving people who were at the mercy of the revolutionaries, unwilling victims of their rhetoric (*War* 1:9; 4:397, 564). Nevertheless, Josephus states, all the people of Israel were condemned by God to undergo the catastrophe of judgment upon them at the hand of the Romans (*War* 5:442, 559, 566).²⁰⁷

Based on this unusual patriotism, it becomes clear why messianism was given so little attention by Josephus throughout his historical accounts. Josephus thought of himself as presenting Judaism to a pagan audience, and the identification of such a fanatical element within

²⁰⁷ Rajak, *Josephus*, 185-222.

mainstream Jewish ideology would have only strengthened the prevailing Roman perception of the Jewish belief system as superstitious and irrational. Furthermore, Josephus, by failing to attribute messianism as a popular movement, protects the increasingly strained relationship the Jews of Judaea had with the Roman empire. With increased hostility already expected from the Jews after their defeat, there was a greatly increased military presence, with a legion permanently stationed in Jerusalem. Josephus, then, wisely downplays the role of messianism so as not to exacerbate further hostilities. If the Romans were given cause to believe the Jews were going to rebel again, they would come down much harder on the province. Thus, if we were to take Josephus's account at face value, as modern scholars have done, we would have no reason to think that messianism played a role in Judaea's attempt to revolt against Rome or, for that matter, that it was an important doctrine at all.

CONCLUSION

The apocalyptic writings examined in Chapter Two put us in touch with a messianic expectation that was well known in the Judaism of the first century CE. Not only did parts of the sacred Hebrew scriptures contain messianic hope, but so too did many of the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic texts that were in circulation during the decades leading up to the First Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE. This time was also when the Qumran Scrolls, so many of which were charged with an intense eschatological fervor, were presumably being composed or copied and studied.

A survey of these texts demonstrates the relatively unified and cohesive messianic belief held by many Jews, even when members of different sects or stratas of society. This is not to say that there was no diversity or that all Jews embraced messianism. But sometimes the diversity of Jewish messianism is exaggerated in scholarship, leaving the impression that no two groups held common views. In fact, many Jews in the late Second Temple Period longed for the coming of a king, anointed by God, to aid them in their bid to expel gentile rule and recover the independence and glory they had enjoyed during the Golden Age.

As Roman rule became increasingly oppressive following the death of Herod in 4 BCE, the period witnessed an unprecedented surge in messianic and eschatological concerns among the Jews of Judaea. While such beliefs had previously held a place in Jewish literature, the fervent eschatology of this period represented a new phenomenon. The messianic zeal of the apocalypses was no longer an abstract theological concept, but a political reality that was actualized as a doctrine of violent revolution. Many movements attached themselves to this new distillation of political messianic hopes and began to actively revolt in hopes of hastening the final eschatological battle.

It is important to recognize that these messianic movements were not the only possible manifestations that Jewish resistance could have taken. Indeed, during the years leading up to the revolt of 66 CE, there were also other distinctive forms of popular discontent, although they were much less widespread and developed. These include, but are not limited to, banditry, general peasant uprisings and urban demonstrations and riots.²⁰⁸ But for so many movements to have taken the particular form of a messianism, as opposed to one of these alternative forms of expression, there had to have been a level of messianic consciousness among a large enough numbers of peasants for the leaders to appeal to, and manipulate, that world view toward common action against the Romans.²⁰⁹

That such a particular eschatological world view was popular among Jews during the first century CE is attested to not only by its pervasiveness in the literature and in the popular movements of the period, but also by all of the pertinent ancient historians--Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Tacitus and Suetonius confirm Josephus, that there had been an old prophecy in the "priestly scriptures" saying that from Judaea a world reign would begin. Josephus, after providing an exhaustive catalogue of the causes of the revolt, admits his account is deficient and asserts that, above all, what incited the Jews to war was "an ambiguous oracle, likewise found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world. This they understood to mean someone of their own race, and many of their wise men went astray in their interpretation of it (*War* 6.54)."

This is a remarkable admission on the part of Josephus, for as we have seen in Chapter Four, he carefully avoids the subject of messianism throughout his voluminous works. In several places, Josephus describes Jewish beliefs to his readers, often times even presenting the differing views of the various prominent sects of the time, but never does he discuss messianism. In fact,

²⁰⁸ Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 120-27.

²⁰⁹ Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. 64-79.

the word “messiah” only occurs in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, not to a tenet of Jewish faith. Josephus’s curious admission, though, is carefully camouflaged, for he claims that the prophecy of Jewish scripture was in fact fulfilled by the acclamation of Vespasian as emperor while on Jewish soil (*War* 6.54-55). Notwithstanding Josephus’s clever strategy and resignification of sacred scripture, this passage, from the most unlikely of sources, confirms that the years leading up to the war were pregnant with messianic expectation.

Tacitus, whose familiarity with Josephus’s writings is far from certain,²¹⁰ similarly recounts the high Messianic expectation, based upon an authoritative tradition, held at the time of the destruction: “The majority firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judaea should possess the world (*Histories* 5.13:2).”²¹¹ So also Suetonius: “There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world (*Vespasian* 4.5).”²¹²

Thus, taking all the evidence together we have a rich corpus for understanding the immense importance of messianic expectation among the Jews before and during the revolt of 66-70 CE. Unfortunately, however, modern scholars have not only downplayed the role of messianism in the revolt, but they have essentially ignored its existence during the period all together. Whether this is due to a genuine misunderstanding of the ancient sources or to a refusal to acknowledge such fanaticism as a central aspect of early Judaism or formative Christianity is hard to say. But whatever the reason may be, the fact remains that such an omission renders an interpretation of the events incomplete. Certainly, traditional causes cited by scholars, such as the failure of Roman policy, Jewish nationalist aspirations, the deterioration of Jewish-pagan

²¹⁰ Hayes and Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity*, 204.

²¹¹ Translation according to C. H. Moore, ed., *Tacitus: The Histories* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

²¹² Translation according to J. C. Rolfe, ed., *Suetonius. With an English Translation* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

relations and the inability of the Judaeen elite to rule effectively are instrumental in providing a context for understanding the revolt. These factors, however, while they can explain the Jewish motivations for war, cannot account for the supreme confidence of the Jews in their ability to wage a war with the most powerful army of the ancient world. The answer to this question, as I have demonstrated, can be located within the expectation that a supernatural figure, a messiah, would descent from the clouds, vanquish the Romans and bring about the kingdom of God.

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