

Dossier on the Ancient History of the Jews

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*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.
~ Psalms 137:1*

The country of Israel is a small area only sixty miles wide and one hundred fifty miles long. It is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea on the west and the Arabian Desert on the east, and therefore is a land bridge of relatively fertile ground between Asia Minor to the north and Egypt to the south. This strategic position made the country a battleground throughout the centuries, and the land has been fought over and held by many different nations and peoples: the Canaanites, Hittites, Israelites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Syrians, Romans, Arabs, and Jews.

Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac

The Book of Genesis tells the story of a Chaldean man named Abraham, who lived around 1900 BC. He dwelt in the city of Ur in Babylonia (modern-day Iraq), and received a call from God to leave Ur and move his family to what was then known as the land of Canaan. Genesis describes how Abraham, whose name means “father of multitudes,” was blessed by God because of his faith and obedience. Abraham was told that through his bloodline the Messiah, “The Anointed One,” would come. All of the peoples of the earth would be therefore be blessed through his descendents.

After arriving in Canaan, Abraham settled in the area of Hebron, and he purchased the Caves of Machpelah as a burial place for himself and for future generations of his family. This site is now known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and is one of the oldest identified graves in the world. With this purchase Abraham gave both the Arabs and the Jews, his descendents, a stake in the land.

The internecine war between Arabs and Jews dates back to Abraham. His two sons—Ishmael whose mother was Hagar, and Isaac whose mother was Sarah—are respectively the fathers of the Arab and the Jewish races. Abraham is therefore revered as the father of both peoples, and the bitter conflict between them began as a struggle between his sons and their mothers.

Genesis indicates that Hagar was a servant woman who Abraham acquired for his wife on one of their sojourns in Egypt. When Sarah was unable to bear children she later gave Hagar to Abraham as a concubine. This was a common practice of childless women in those times, as barrenness was considered a deep disgrace. After Hagar became pregnant with Ishmael, she began to despise Sarah, who then dismissed her and sent her off into the wilderness where Hagar and her baby son Ishmael almost died of thirst before being rescued by an angel, and eventually returning to Abraham.

Mohammad, the founder of Islam, was an Arab, and therefore a descendant of Ishmael. He was born in AD 570, around 2,500 years after the time of Abraham. Through

his wife, Mohammad owned a caravan trade, and therefore met many Jews and Christians, and became familiar with the Bible. In AD 610 at age forty, he began to experience a number of visions that he attributed to the angel Gabriel. Although he was illiterate, he committed the visions to memory and told his wife and others to do the same. These eventually became the Quran, the Muslim holy book.

Sarah and Hagar are not named in the Quran, but according to Islamic tradition, their roles were reversed; Hagar was said to have been a princess of Egypt, and was given to Abraham as a wife, and Ishmael was therefore “the son of the promise” instead of Isaac. The Bible and Islamic tradition do, however, agree that Hagar was sent away. Part of the “hajj,” the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage that the Muslim faithful make to Mecca, involves running seven times between two hills near the center of Mecca, as Hagar was said to have done, seeking water to sustain her son.

It is unclear why Abraham would have allowed Hagar to be sent away if she had indeed been his wife, and if Ishmael had been the promised child. This is especially problematic when the importance of children and genealogy in those times is considered. Furthermore, with Abraham’s character and his concern for following what he considered to be the will of God, why would he allow the son who had been promised to him to be sent away? It is also unclear why and how Hagar could have traveled alone with a baby all the way from the Hebron area to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, a distance of over 700 miles, through a wasteland of mountains and desert. She was originally from Egypt, an area much closer to Israel (she and her son Ishmael later settled in the area of Paran, which is part of the Sinai Peninsula, and on the way to Egypt). There is no historical evidence whatsoever that Abraham and Ishmael ever were in Mecca, and given the challenging geography of the area between Israel and the central Hijaz where Mecca is located, it is unlikely that Abraham would have gone there.

Thus it was Isaac, the son of Sarah, born years later when Sarah was ninety years old, who was given Abraham’s birthright. Isaac had twin sons—Esau and Jacob, both of whom became fathers of nations. Esau’s descendants were the Edomites (Idumeans), who lived in the area south and east of Israel, while Jacob’s descendants became the Israelites. Jacob was the man who wrestled with an angel of God and who refused to let go until the angel blessed him. He was then given the name “Israel,” meaning “he who struggles with God,” and which became the name of the nation that ultimately descended from him. The name was full of irony, as the Israelites have struggled with God throughout their history.

Jacob, in turn, had twelve sons, and these became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribe of his son Judah later became the leading group, and “Judea,” the southern portion of the land of Israel containing the city of Jerusalem, was named for Judah. His name was also the source of the appellation given to all of Jacob’s descendants, who later were called “Jews.”

Jacob lived around 1700 BC, when the Israelites were still a small clan. The family migrated to Egypt during a famine, where Joseph, one of the Jacob’s sons who had been sold into slavery by his brothers around 1680 BC.

The Wealth of Egypt

The first pharaoh of the Egypt’s twelfth dynasty was Amenemhet I, who had served as the vizier of Nebtowy Mentuhotep IV, the last ruler of the eleventh dynasty.

After leading the Egyptian army in a successful campaign, Amenemhet seized power and usurped the throne in 1688 BC.¹

Twenty-one years later Amenemhet was himself the target of an assassination attempt as part of a palace coup. He was wounded, but the coup attempt was defeated, and the perpetrators, who included pharaoh's baker and cupbearer, were imprisoned. Both of them there met Joseph, who had also been thrown in prison. After getting to know them, Joseph correctly interpreted their dreams, indicating that the cupbearer would be exonerated, whereas the baker would be found guilty and sentenced to death. The baker was killed, and the cupbearer returned to the palace, vowing to remember what Joseph had done, but then forgot about him.

Due to the injuries Amenemhet had sustained in the coup attempt, his son ruled with him as co-regent. The son became known as Sesotris I, the second ruler of Egypt's twelfth dynasty of pharaohs.

Two years later Sesotris also had a dream in which he saw seven fat and seven lean cows. The royal magicians were having trouble understanding this dream and Sesotris became angry with his entire cadre of interpreters. In a panic, the cupbearer suddenly remembered Joseph and quickly had him brought out of prison and presented to pharaoh. Joseph then interpreted pharaoh's dream as a prophesy of what would happen in the near future—there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of intense famine. Disappointed by his own staff, and impressed by Joseph's forthrightness, Sesotris appointed him to organize Egypt to prepare for these coming events.

In 1665 BC Joseph went to work as vizier, the top official of the realm, organizing the storage of grain during the seven year period of plenty. Extensive storage facilities were constructed in various parts of Egypt, and a large lake and a 200 mile-long canal was also dug to store water from the Nile River for irrigation purposes. The canal still exists and is known as the *Bahr Yusef*—the “Joseph Canal.”

When the years of famine began in 1658 BC, Joseph opened the granaries and began selling grain, not only to the people of Egypt, but eventually to the peoples from the surrounding lands as well. As the drought and famine continued, both the Egyptians and other peoples eventually traded everything they had in exchange for food—gold, silver, and livestock. Virtually everything of value in Mesopotamia including all land in Egypt became the property of pharaoh in a huge transfer of wealth. In the last years of the famine, the people, having nothing else, gave themselves as slaves to pharaoh in order to survive. But despite their status as slaves, no longer owning any land, Joseph shrewdly limited taxes to 20% of the produce, which forestalled rebellion and put the people to work. Joseph also decentralized the administration of the kingdom and encouraged independent action, creating a freer environment with less governmental controls; after the famine was over Egypt's economy boomed. Sesotris I was thus held in great awe and respect, and the Egyptians worshipped him as a god.

Immense wealth flowed into the royal treasuries, and Sesotris I became one of the greatest and wealthiest ruler in the entire history of Egypt. He financed construction projects all over the country, and welcomed Joseph's family when they came to live in Egypt, not only because of what Joseph had achieved, but also because the Israelites were

¹ For more information on the amazing harmony between the history of Egypt and the Biblical account in the book of Genesis, see Ted Stewart, *Solving the Exodus Mystery*.

shepherds. Sesostris now had huge flocks of cattle to tend, and it was beneath the dignity of native Egyptians to be shepherds.

The Exodus and the Destruction of Egypt

The liberal economic policies and the prosperity of Egypt continued throughout the days of the son and grandson of Sesostris I (Amenenhet II and Sesostris II). But one hundred and fifteen years later, in 1550 BC, Sesostris III, the great-grandson of Sesostris I, came to the throne. He was a cruel, brutal, and suspicious man who reversed all of the liberal policies of the prior rulers and centralized all power into his own hands. Having been prosperous for over a century, Egyptian wealth was taken for granted and came to be seen as a divine right. Sesostris III forgot what Joseph, who had died thirty-five years earlier, had done for Egypt with his policies of economic liberalization.

Sesostris III was especially vicious toward foreigners, invading both Libya and Nubia, enslaving the populations, and treating them with great cruelty. He commanded that curses against his enemies be inscribed on pieces of pottery, which were then smashed. These voodoo-type curses became known as the *Execration Texts*, and many shards containing these curses have been found and dated from the time of Sesostris III and his son (Amenemhet III) and grandson (Amenemhet IV), who shared their forebear's brutality and xenophobia.

The Israelites, who had been given the land of Goshen near the Nile delta by Sesostris I to tend the royal cattle herds, had grown considerably in population and wealth over the one-hundred year period they had lived there. Sesostris III hated them as well and became paranoid about this large non-Egyptian population. Therefore he also enslaved the Israelites, and tried to have their babies killed to prevent further population growth.

The Egyptians buried their dead in tombs, as this was necessary in their belief system in order for the deceased to be raised to eternal life. The tomb would be their future home, and thus all of the pharaohs built elaborate sepulchers for themselves. Sesostris III ordered that the Israelite babies be drowned in the Nile, not only killing them physically, but according to Egyptian religion, also annihilating their souls.

Moses was born around 1526 BC. He was one of the infants who would have been killed under pharaoh's order, but was saved from death, ironically by Sesostris III's daughter, who raised Moses in the palace right under her father's nose. Moses was thus educated as an Egyptian nobleman, and lived in the palace until he was forty years old. Sesostris III had died and his son Amenemhet III was ruling Egypt when Moses committed a crime, and fled to the wilderness of Midian. He remained there for forty more years, and when he was eighty years old, God called him to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of the slavery into which Sesostris III and his descendents had forced them.

The account of Moses and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. Amenemhet III had died, and his arrogant and cruel son Amenemhet IV, grandson of Sesostris III, was ruling Egypt. Because of this pharaoh's intransigence and refusal to let the Israelites leave, ten plagues were successively visited on the Egyptians. The Nile became polluted and undrinkable, frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts devastated the land and crops, their livestock died, the people were afflicted with

boils, huge hailstones fell on the land smashing houses and trees, and then the sun was darkened. This was a defeat for Ra, the god of the sun, who was the greatest of the Egyptian gods.

Pharaoh's advisors pleaded with him—"How long will this man (Moses) be a snare to us? Let the people go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" (Exodus 10:7) But even after all of these disasters, Amenemhet IV still refused to let them go. Then came the final plague, in which the angel of death slew the first-born of every Egyptian household, but the death angel "passed over" the Israelites, sparing them. To this day the Jews celebrate Passover and consider it the most important of all of their holy days.

After the Passover, with their country ruined and their children dead, the Egyptian people finally rose up. Ignoring their ruler, they threw out the Israelites, and the entire nation of Israel left Egypt.

Moses led the people on a route across the Sinai Peninsula. The exact route of the Exodus has long been a mystery studied by archaeologists and historians. Some have contended that the Israelites merely crossed one of the lakes in the Sinai region, but that explanation does not square with the Genesis story—they must have crossed the Gulf of Aqaba, the north-eastern finger of the Red Sea. There are two explanations as to where this crossing could have taken place:

1. The valleys or *wadis* on the Sinai Peninsula lead through the mountain wilderness to a large beach, now called Nuweiba, on the western shore of the gulf. From this beach the Gulf of Aqaba a deep body of water that is ten miles across to the shores of Arabia. However, the seabed between Nuweiba and the eastern coast of the Gulf is significantly shallower than to the north or south, and forms an underwater land bridge across the gulf. This area could have been exposed by wind shear from very strong winds, which blew all night before the Israelites crossed.²
2. The crossing may instead have taken place near the top of the Gulf. This explanation is more reasonable, because Moses was familiar with the area, having traveled from Egypt to the land of Midian and back, and therefore he knew the route. It is much less likely that he would have led the people to Nuweiba, from which there was no possible escape. God had commanded him to lead the people to Horeb, the mountain of God, which was located in the land of Midian, in northwestern Saudi Arabia, where Moses had lived for forty years. The main route to that region led around the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. Pharaoh was known to have troops in the Sinai region who could have attacked from the northwest, while the main body of the Egyptian army came from the southwest. The children of Israel therefore had nowhere to turn, as the mountains of Sinai come down to the western shore of the Gulf, and there is no coastline.³

² For more information on this theory of the crossing site, as well as a theory on the location of the real Mount Sinai, see Wyatt Archaeological Research, www.wyattmuseum.com/red-sea-crossing.htm.

³ For more information on this theory of the crossing site, as well as details on the subsequent travels of the children of Israel, see *The Miracles of the Exodus*, by Colin J. Humphreys, Harper, 2003. In the opinion of this author, Colin's theory of the crossing site, his identification of Mount Bedr as the actual Mount Sinai, as well as his harmonization of locations in Midian with the Biblical story of the Exodus, is the best and most compelling theory ever presented.

In either case the Israelites were being followed by the armies of an enraged Pharaoh, and the people were about to kill Moses for leading them into a trap. But to the amazement of everyone, the sea was parted by a strong wind, and the Israelites were able to cross to the eastern shore on relatively dry land. But when the army of Egypt attempted to follow them, the pursuers were swallowed up as the waters rushed back into place.

Amenemhet IV, the pharaoh of the exodus, had no tomb, and his death in the water was especially ironic because dying in the water without a tomb, and possibly being eaten by crocodiles, was the worst possible fate that could befall an Egyptian, and especially a pharaoh. This is exactly what Sesostriis III had sought to do to the Israelite babies, such as Moses, in order to annihilate them.

Amenemhet IV was the fifth generation after Sesostriis I, and the last ruler in Egypt's twelfth dynasty. He died in 1446 BC, the year of the exodus, after ruling for only nine years. He perished without an heir—any son he had would have been killed in the Passover. His dynasty, which had been the most prosperous in Egyptian history, died with him, dragging the country far below where it had been even at the start of the twelfth dynasty.

The plagues had devastated Egypt, and every soldier of the Egyptian army had died in the waters of the gulf. With no pharaoh, no army to maintain order, and the economy in shambles, Egypt descended into chaos. The pharaoh's queen tried to rule, but she was soon thrown out of power and had to flee for her life as the Egyptian government foundered under both internal revolts and invasions from external enemies.

The peasants, who had been ground down under the harsh domestic policies of the last three pharaohs, revolted and looted the palaces and royal treasuries, killing every Egyptian official they could find. The Nubians and Libyans, who had suffered severely under the hands of Sesostriis III and Amenemhet III and IV, now took their revenge. A series of weak dynasties followed (the thirteenth through the seventeenth), during which the country was dominated by outsiders, such as the Hyksos. Egypt did not recover until the eighteenth dynasty, several hundred years later.

Mount Sinai and the Ark of the Covenant

Meanwhile the Israelite nation had miraculously survived, but despite their astonishing victory at Aqaba, they were now faced with the wastelands of Midian in the Arabian Desert, with few sources of food or water. But they had been hardened by their long years of slavery in Egypt, making mud bricks for Pharaoh's cities, and they were further toughened by their long trek, which involved not just an army of men, but also a large populace of women and children.

Their initial destination was Mount Sinai, the "mountain of God." At the top of this mountain, blackened by fire and wreathed in clouds and smoke (i.e., this mountain was most likely a semi-active volcano), Moses received the Ten Commandments from God, written on tablets of stone. The tablets were placed in a golden chest known as the Ark of the Covenant—the most famous and mysterious religious object of all time.

The Ark of the Covenant was a box made of acacia wood, measuring approximately four feet long, two feet wide, and two feet high. The wood was overlaid with pure gold, both inside and out. The lid of the chest was known as the "mercy seat,"

and it was here that the high priest of Israel would sprinkle the blood of the offering as an atonement, or covering, for the sins of the people, so that they would receive God's mercy. Two angels made of hammered gold were placed on top, as if guarding the ark and overlooking the mercy seat. The Ark, which represented the presence of God and the covenant he had made with his people, was carried by the priests in front of the multitude as they marched.

Centuries later, in the time of King Solomon, the Temple was built in the city of Jerusalem, and the Ark was placed in the innermost part of the Temple, known as the "Holy of Holies." No one was allowed to enter that room except the high priest, and even he went in only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat on behalf of all of the people.

But all of that lay ahead. To the Israelites in the days of Moses, their ultimate destination was the "Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey"—the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which had been promised to Abraham by God, and to which they returned centuries later. Due to their disobedience and stubbornness, however, God did not allow the older generation to enter, and instead they remained in the wilderness for forty years. At the end of this time, Moses, who was then 120 years old, died on the eastern shore of the Jordan River, never having entered the land that was promised to his people.

The Conquest of Canaan

Joshua, Moses' servant and deputy, became the next leader of the Israelites, and under his leadership the entire nation crossed the Jordan River and embarked on a systematic conquest, taking over the land from Lebanon in the north to Beersheba and the Negev in the south. After fighting many battles over a five-year period and subduing many of the Canaanites, warfare was halted around 1400 BC, and each of the twelve tribes was assigned a portion of the land. The descendants of Israel, who for such a long time had traveled, eaten, starved, fought, bled, and died together, now went their separate ways to take possession of the land and dwell in it.

The central portion of the land of Israel—where Jerusalem is located—was given to the tribe of Judah. This territory also included Hebron, the original dwelling place of Abraham and his sons, as well as the nearby town of Kerioth, now el-Kureitein, with which the first part of this novel is concerned.

After a lengthy time of self-rule, which included a tribal period followed by the kings of Israel—Saul, David, Solomon, and others—the land of Israel was overrun a number of times and became a weak pawn, subject to the whims of other nations. The Assyrians conquered part of the country, followed by the Babylonians, who in turn were conquered by the Persians and later the Greeks under Alexander the Great. When Alexander died, his kingdom was divided among his four generals. The successors of Ptolemy in Egypt and Seleucus in Syria periodically fought over Israel. But each nation had its own internal problems, and in 163 BC the Jews saw their chance and reassumed partial control under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus and his family. This family became the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled Israel for several generations. But one hundred years later, after many intrigues and reverses, the Roman army under General

Pompey defeated them in 64 BC. The Romans then occupied the land and exerted their crushing rule.

The Hasmoneans

Before the Romans arrived in Israel, the Jews had high hopes for future freedom and peace, because in the early days of Hasmonean rule the Maccabees had striven for freedom and independence from the oppression of others. The Jewish holiday Chanukah, the festival of lights, celebrates their initial victories over the Syrians and the retaking of Jerusalem. The Temple had been desecrated by the Syrians—pigs had been sacrificed on the altar in order to blaspheme it, and the building was turned into a trash dump. But after the Syrians were ousted, the Temple was cleansed and renewed, and in 164 BC the Jews celebrated Chanukah for the first time.

In later years, however, the successors of Judas Maccabeus degenerated, indulging in self-seeking quests for power and wealth. They became focused on establishing the Hasmonean dynasty and legitimizing it as the rightful successor to King David and his son Solomon, despite the fact that the Hasmonean family was not from the royal tribe of Judah. They also insisted on taking unto themselves the office of high priest. Therefore, they were strongly opposed by many influential Jews who believed that the Kingship and the Messiah must come from the royal line of Judah and David as the Scriptures foretold, and that the high priest must come only from the line of the tribe of Levi. This atmosphere of selfishness and conflict divided the Jews and eventually proved to be a fatal weakness.

Religion and worship were central in importance to the Jews. They worshiped Yahweh or Jehovah, the God who “in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth,” as told in the opening line of the book of Bereshit or Genesis. There were a number of religious factions during the Hasmonean period, but these were broadly divided into two groups: the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees, intellectual ancestors of the Conservative and Hassidic Jews of today, were legalistic conservatives, keenly interested in knowing exactly what God required of them, and devising rules to compel the rest of the Jewish people to meet these requirements. For example, they took the commandment regarding not working on the Sabbath and calculated exactly how far a person could travel before it was considered to be “work.” They were also punctilious in their tithes and offerings, down to the point of giving even a tenth of their herbs and seeds.

In contrast, the Sadducees were at the other side of the spectrum—aristocratic, materialistic liberals who often scoffed at what they saw as naïve fundamentalism and ignorant religious zeal of the Pharisees. They discounted miracles and were interested primarily in philosophy and the wisdom and power of man. The secular and possibly the Reformed Jews of today are the Sadducees’ intellectual children.

Their were also class elements in the division between these two groups—the Sadducees tended to be wealthy, politically well-connected, and interested in other cultures and modes of thought, whereas the Pharisees were poorer nationalistic populists who felt that contact with other nations, particularly in the area of religion and ethics, was essentially moral pollution.

The Hasmonean dynasty had been beset by both external and internal strife almost since its beginning—extreme cruelty and even matricide and fratricide became typical. Hyrcanus I, the Hasmonean king who died in 104 BC, gave the throne to his wife through his last will and testament. But as soon as he was dead, his oldest son, Aristobulus I, seized power. He deposed his mother and had her thrown into prison, where soon afterward she died of starvation. Then he incarcerated his brothers, murdering the most influential one who had fought side by side with him. He died a year later, and was replaced by Alexander Jannai, one of his imprisoned brothers.

Alexander was even worse, being largely responsible for the civil wars that marred his reign and continued after his death. Throughout his rule he was supported by the Sadducees but was opposed by the Pharisees for his womanizing, carousing, violence, ruthlessness, and disrespect of religion, especially because Alexander had appointed himself to be high priest. At one point, after he tried to change some of the Jewish religious laws, a mob pelted him with lemons. His response was exceedingly harsh—his soldiers attacked the crowd, killing around 6,000 people. Blaming the Pharisees, who were led by one of his brothers and a rival to the throne, Alexander had 800 of them crucified on crosses set up around his garden. As they were dying, he had their wives and children killed before their eyes by slitting their throats. Furthermore, this spectacle served as dinner entertainment for himself and his concubines, and may have inspired Nero, the Roman emperor, who provided similar torture-as-entertainment spectacles one hundred years later.

These atrocities severely polarized the Sadducees and Pharisees, galvanizing the Pharisees to move beyond religion and become a potent political force. Alexander died after a long illness caused by excessive drinking, and on his deathbed he bequeathed the throne to his wife, Salome Alexandra, urging her to make peace with the Pharisees in order to retain power.

The sons of this couple were Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. These two were princes and leaders of Israel, but because of mutual jealousy they started a civil war that ultimately destroyed both of them, brought ruin and devastation to their country, and enslaved their people to the Romans.

The Civil War of Hyrcanus and Aristobulus

Hyrcanus was the older son of Alexander Jannai and Salome. He impressed people with his fancy and elegant clothes, and he was also physically striking—a long face with deep-set eyes, a prominent hooked nose, a high forehead—a tall man with a commanding appearance. But having grown up in wealth and indulgence, he was weak, and vacillating, completely unlike his namesake, Hyrcanus I. Rather than attempting to overcome these defects, he covered them over with haughtiness and arrogance. Outwardly he seemed pious, and therefore gained the support of many religious people who had felt betrayed by the sordid and disgusting behavior of previous Hasmonean rulers. Throughout his life he was the hope of many, but repeatedly betrayed that hope.

These deficiencies made Hyrcanus feel inadequate and defensive, particularly in comparison to his brother, Aristobulus, who was everything that Hyrcanus was not. Aristobulus was shorter and did not have Hyrcanus' commanding presence. But what the younger brother lacked in physical appearance, he more than made up for with his

energy, impetuosity, tenacity, and fiery spirit—very much like Aristobulus I. The brothers had never gotten on well with each other. Unlike many siblings who overcome childhood animosities and become close friends as adults, with these two it was just the opposite. They grew to hate each other more as they grew older.

Queen Alexandra, the boys' mother and nominal ruler of Judea, ceded more and more power to the Pharisees and became essentially a puppet. She "ruled" for nine years after the death of her husband, but as her own death approached, she was persuaded by the leaders of the Pharisees, against her better judgment, to give the kingship to Hyrcanus, because they were concerned about losing power if Aristobulus gained the throne. Being king appealed to Hyrcanus' vanity, but even before his mother died, he found himself in the middle of a civil war with his brother. Aristobulus had been carefully preparing for this and had a large pool of disgruntled influential people in the Sadducees, who were determined to regain the former positions of influence taken from them by the Pharisees. But Aristobulus' supporters were much fewer in number than those of Hyrcanus, and most people nominally supported the older brother, until they fully realized his character under stress. When the revolt began, Hyrcanus panicked and stayed behind while his supporters went out to fight against Aristobulus. His absence was quickly noticed, and sensing the inevitable, most of his people defected to Aristobulus in order to avoid being on the losing side. The conflict ended when Hyrcanus surrendered and gave the kingship to his brother. The two embraced in the portico of the Temple in Jerusalem, Hyrcanus was given back his title and position as high priest, and apparently the civil war was over. Unfortunately, it had just begun.

Despite gaining back his priestly position, Hyrcanus had been deeply humiliated and wanted revenge. He did not, however, have the chutzpah to take any real action, and the peace probably would have continued, except for one man who saw an opportunity in Hyrcanus' humiliation.

That man was Antipater II, a clever, devious, and highly political man, but one who could also be charming and winsome; a schemer who was able to conceal his own voracious ambition under the guise of friendship. He was the grandson of Antipater I, who had been a military leader under Alexander Jannai and a governor of Idumea, which is the southern part of Israel, also known as Edom. Antipater's family, therefore, had many political connections with the Hasmoneans, and Antipater carried the additional influence of marriage to an Arabian princess.

Antipater knew Hyrcanus well. He knew that Hyrcanus was weak and vain, and he began to stoke Hyrcanus' resentments against Aristobulus. He also spent time with the Pharisees, magnifying their fears about Aristobulus' support of their rivals, the Sadducees. Antipater's propaganda campaign bore fruit, especially after he secretly arranged for military help from Aretas, his father-in-law, to invade Jerusalem and overthrow Aristobulus. The goal was ostensibly to put Hyrcanus back on the throne in place of his brother.

In a military action organized by Antipater, the Arabian army attacked at a time when conflict was least expected, during a Passover celebration. Hyrcanus objected to the timing of the attack during the high holy days, fearing that they were committing a sacrilege and that the people would denounce him as a crass hypocrite and a desecrator of Jewish religion, but he was ignored.

The attack took Aristobulus and his supporters completely by surprise, and his forces were quickly defeated, but he escaped from Jerusalem, taking much of the treasury with him. He immediately appealed to a Roman officer named Scaurus, a minor general in Syria, offering him 300 talents of gold (approximately 3,000 pounds) for his military assistance. Scaurus readily accepted the gold and simply wrote a letter to the Arabians, threatening to wipe them out if they remained in Jerusalem. Having little reason to stay, the Arabians returned to their homeland. Aristobulus then re-gathered his supporters and attacked Jerusalem, mauling his leaderless enemies, since Hyrcanus was not capable of taking charge, and trust in Antipater had faded after the Arabian army left. Aristobulus easily retook the city and imprisoned Hyrcanus. But Antipater escaped and, taking his cue from Aristobulus, he wrote a letter under Hyrcanus' signature to the Roman general Pompey, Scaurus' superior, requesting military help and offering even more gold.

The situation was thus rich in irony. The two brothers—exploiting religious divisions—had led their people into killing each other, and then both felt compelled to spend the accumulated wealth of the country in trying to buy help from the Romans. Pompey obliged them, but rather than supporting either of the brothers, he led his troops to Jerusalem to conquer and take it for Rome. He quickly assessed the political situation—Hyrcanus was easily manipulated and unimportant; Antipater was a clever man, but one who would follow Roman rule if properly leashed; and Aristobulus was a mad dog that had to be destroyed. Antipater opened Jerusalem to Pompey, and the latter organized his troops to attack Aristobulus, who—along with his supporters—had blockaded themselves in the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, one group of Jews betrayed the other, generating a bitterness that would last for generations.

Although the Jerusalem Temple at that time was smaller and much less ornate than the original Temple built by Solomon, it was surrounded by high stone walls and was essentially a “city within a city.” The Jews in the temple area put up such a fight that the Temple became the focal point of the Jewish resistance, and the Romans quickly surrounded it to cut off all escape or reinforcement. Siege engines were constructed to smash the walls, but the Jews fought with such desperation that the Romans were initially beaten back with many losses. The Jews of Aristobulus in the Temple were extremely bitter at the betrayal of their brethren who had opened the rest of the city to the Romans, and they determined that they would fight to the death.

Aristobulus' forces, however, could not hold off the Romans forever, and eventually a breach was made in the wall and the legions poured in.

The Jewish soldiers from the Temple fought to the death, while their families jumped from the top of the wall and died, or set fire to the buildings along the edge of the wall and burned to death inside. To these bodies were added many more as the soldiers swarmed through the temple area in a frenzy, killing people because of their refusal to surrender. Blood and body parts were everywhere.

After the Romans defeated the Jewish resistance, the remaining Jewish guards committed suicide to avoid seeing the Temple defiled when Pompey went into the Temple and entered the Holy of Holies. General Pompey was surprised to find that it was an empty room; the Ark of the Covenant and all of the other precious religious objects had disappeared during the Babylonian invasion five hundred years before. He then left Jerusalem, taking Aristobulus as prisoner, assigning Antipater as governor, and Hyrcanus as high priest—a desecrated man serving in a desecrated Temple. But Hyrcanus and

Antipater were merely puppets; from that time on virtually all aspects of government in Jerusalem were dictated by Rome.

Much later Hyrcanus would be castrated and have his ears cut off by Aristobulus' son Antigonus, rendering him unfit even to be high priest, and he was eventually put to death by Herod, Antipater's son. But Antipater, the former friend of Hyrcanus, prospered as the puppet ruler of Israel. It was highly ironic that Antipater was not even Jewish. He was Idumean—a descendent of Esau, the brother and rival of Jacob, and he founded what later became known as the Herodian dynasty, which ruled Israel for several generations. It seemed to many as if the Israelites had proven unfit to rule themselves and were being chastised.

The Hasmonean line of kings thus ended in disgrace, having depopulated and impoverished the entire country with them. Antigonus, the last of the Hasmoneans who disfigured Hyrcanus, lost Jerusalem after a long siege and was beheaded by the Romans in 37 BC. As the BC era ended, the Jews were an angry and frustrated people—betrayed by their own rulers, beset by deep socio-political divisions, and enslaved to Rome.

The Jews were desperately looking for a military Messiah, spoken of in the Torah, who would deliver them and establish a lasting kingdom of justice and peace. Instead the temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, and after Roman armies crushed the Jewish Bar-Kokba rebellion in 135, the Jews were forbidden to live in Jerusalem and forcibly resettled among other nations. The Roman emperor Hadrian burned a copy of the Torah on the temple mount, built a temple to Jupiter there, and had the name of country changed from Judea to Palestine in order to wipe out its existence. The Jews did not regain control of Israel, the land of their forebears, until 1948, two-thousand years later.