

## Chapter Seven

### The Remarkable Story of Hellenistic Judaism

Perhaps the most consequential of the religious developments that took place in the Hellenistic period were the dramatic growth of Judaism in the Greek-speaking world, and in Judaea itself the beginnings of both Pharisaic and Messianic Judaism. The circumstances of Judaea were very different from those in the Judaeian Diaspora, but the two were closely intertwined.

#### Judaea under the Ptolemies (323-200 BC)

Judaea was under the control of one or another of the great Hellenistic kingdoms from the death of Alexander in 323 until 129 BC, when it became for a brief time an autonomous state. In the early years no fewer than four of Alexander's successors claimed Judaea and the rest of the southern Levant as their own, but in 312 BC the matter was settled, at least for a while. At the Battle of Gaza in that year Ptolemy I Soter defeated the Antigonid army and united the southern Levant to Egypt. Thus began the Ptolemaic era of Judaea, which was to last for more than a century. When Seleukos, one of Ptolemy's early allies, established his capital (Antioch) on the Syrian coast in 301 BC, the southern Levant - or "Hollow Syria" as it was called by them - became a bone of contention between Ptolemies and Seleukids. Until 200 BC and through the first four "Syrian wars" the Ptolemies were nevertheless able to hang on to their holdings in Palestine, Judaea and Phoenicia.

The Ptolemaic era is one of the most obscure in the long history of Judaea. One reason for the obscurity is that despite the chronic "Syrian wars" this period - from 312 to 200 BC - was peaceful for the Jerusalem temple and therefore "uneventful" in the minds of the religious establishment. The Ptolemies, like the Persian kings from the sixth to the late fourth century BC, were happy to put the local government of Judaea in the hands of the high priest at the Jerusalem temple and perhaps a council of elders, later called the sanhedrin (*synhedrion*). The Ptolemies farmed out the tax collection to private contractors, usually prominent families. From Judaea the Tobiad family apparently collected 300 silver talents a year.<sup>1</sup> So long as the taxes were collected and forwarded to Alexandria, the Ptolemies had no need and no wish to interfere in the local administration of Judaea, and the high priest maintained law and order on the basis of the traditional "laws of Moses." During the Persian period Judaea had been the province of *Yehud*, one of the subdivisions of the Persian satrapy called "Beyond the (Euphrates) River." The Persian kings had treated Yehud much like the temple-states of Anatolia, and the Ptolemies continued this lax arrangement.

Because of military and economic considerations, however, outside of Jerusalem the Ptolemaic presence was more conspicuous. The city of Samaria, 35 miles north of Jerusalem,

was a strongly fortified Ptolemaic center, with stout walls and well constructed towers. An important element in the population of Samaria were people who called themselves “Israelites,” whom the Judaeans called “Samaritans,” and who worshiped Adonai on Mt. Gerizim rather than on Mt. Zion. Archaeologists have found thousands of Rhodian pots at the site, suggesting that many of the inhabitants of Samaria were Hellenes or Macedonians. Another major Ptolemaic center lay on the bay just north of Mt. Carmel, the southernmost harbor of Phoenicia. Here the old city of Akko (Acre, during the Crusades) was refurbished by the Ptolemies, who changed its name to *Ptolemais* and made it the seat of their military governor, the *strategos* of “Hollow Syria.” From Ptolemais they built a road running east through Galilee, skirting the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee and then heading southeast through the semi-desert. Along this route the Ptolemies encouraged the growth and Hellenizing of a string of ten cities eventually known as just that: the *deka poleis*, Anglicized in the New Testament as “the Decapolis.” Several of these cities served as way-stations for caravans traveling between the Red Sea port of Elat, on the Gulf of Aqabah, and the harbor cities of Ptolemais, Tyre and Sidon. The most important of the Greek or Hellenized cities were, from south to north, Philadelphia (ancient Rabbath Ammon, and today Amman), Gerasa (Jerash), Gadara, and Sepphoris in Galilee, which was situated only four miles from the village that in Late Antiquity was called Nazareth. A few of the cities of the Decapolis were new foundations, but most of them were old cities that were improved and Hellenized with Ptolemaic assistance.<sup>2</sup> In the Decapolis the Aramaic-speaking natives mixed readily with Hellenic immigrants, and joined in the construction of Greek theaters, gymnasia, music halls and libraries.

Cities of the Palestinian coast (the coast south of Mt. Carmel) were also much Hellenized during the Ptolemaic era. Gaza, where Ptolemy Soter had won his great victory, was one of these. Travelers and traders going north along the Via Maris from Egypt to Phoenicia passed through other coastal cities of the Palestinians: Ashkelon (Ascalon), Ashdod (Azotos), Joppa, and Dor. Farther north along the Via Maris, and a half day’s walk past the city of Ptolemais, were the great cities of Phoenicia. Tyre, destroyed by Alexander, was rebuilt but never became what it once had been. Other Phoenician cities - Sidon, Byblos and Berytos (Beirut) - were fully involved in Hellenistic trade. Although they continued to be proud of their “Canaanite” past, almost all Phoenicians learned Greek and by the second century BC were thoroughly bilingual.

In contrast to the Palestinians and Phoenicians on the coast, the population of Judaea was traditionally rural. Judaea had only one large city, Jerusalem. For seven hundred years Jerusalem had been both the political and the religious center of the land and had grown large and relatively prosperous. Its population in the third century BC seems to have been somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000. Other Judaeans “cities” - Jericho, Hebron, Engedi, Emmaus, Beth Gabra (Eleutheropolis) - were towns, each with a few thousand inhabitants. The countryside was dotted with villages, each of which was home to a few craftsmen and to several dozen families that worked the land, tended vineyards and olive trees, and cared for poultry and livestock. It is therefore not surprising that sociologically Judaea was divided between two poles: the urban population of Jerusalem and the rural population of the villages. Like other Hellenistic rulers, the Ptolemies were solicitous of cities and ignored the villages, which in this case meant that Jerusalem and its great temple monopolized the Ptolemies’ Judaeans policies.

By the end of the Ptolemaic period the Jerusalem temple had become rich. By the third century BC Judaeans of the Diaspora had already begun the practice of sending to the Jerusalem temple an annual gift of half a shekel, the equivalent of two silver drachmas. This “temple tax” was collected from Judaeans between the ages of 20 and 50, and was initially seen as a substitute for the animal sacrifices that Adonai required from all adult Judaeans. Judaeans living near Jerusalem continued to make three visits to the temple every year and to perform the required sacrifice, but those who lived in other lands were encouraged to fulfill their obligations with coins rather than with animals. The contributions in silver of course enriched the temple in a way that animal sacrifices did not, and by 200 BC must have amounted to at least a hundred talents a year. Although some of the money was used to embellish the temple and its precinct, much of it supported the growing priesthood and the rest of the temple personnel residing in Jerusalem.

How widespread the Greek language was in Judaea during the third century BC is uncertain. The few public inscriptions that have been found are in Greek, but that is not surprising since Greek was the official language of the Ptolemaic state. The scarcity of private inscriptions in Aramaic may reflect the fact that Aramaic speakers were not in the habit of setting up inscriptions, whether at burial sites or elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> It is nevertheless possible, as Martin Hengel has concluded, that “anyone who could read and write also had a command of Greek. Aramaic became the language of the illiterate, who needed no written remembrances.”<sup>4</sup> The incidence of Greek names among the Judaeans of Judaea itself is also difficult to ascertain, because documents from the Ptolemaic period are very rare. In Egypt the trend toward Greek names is demonstrable: in the fourth century BC most Judaeans living in Egypt had Hebrew names, but by the end of the third century BC the majority had Greek names.<sup>5</sup> For Judaea itself our evidence for the second century BC is much fuller than for the third, and it shows that at least in Jerusalem, although perhaps not in the villages of Judaea, Greek names were common for upper-class Judaeans in the 180s and 170s BC.

A remarkable although bizarre indication of the extent of Hellenization in Judaea is that from the third until the first century BC many Judaeans believed that they were, somehow, akin to the Spartans (we do not know whether the Spartans were under the same impression). The most detailed evidence for the belief is I Maccabees 12:6-18, where the author transcribes a letter purportedly written by the high priest Jonathan to the Spartans. In his letter Jonathan seeks to renew the pact of brotherhood and assures the Spartans that sacrifices and prayers on their behalf are continually offered at Jerusalem. The author of I Maccabees goes on to quote a letter that supposedly had been sent by Areios, a *basileus* of Sparta in the early third century BC, to the high priest Onias. In this letter Areios writes that a recently discovered document has shown that the Spartans and Judaeans were both descended from Abraham. This belief in the Judaeans’ kinship with the Spartans is echoed at II Macc 5:9 and was taken seriously even by Josephus.<sup>6</sup> The belief was groundless but is nevertheless informative, demonstrating for us that in the third and second centuries BC many educated Judaeans were pleased to attach themselves to Hellenism in general and to one of the most illustrious Greek city-states in particular. The military glories of the Spartans may have encouraged the notion of a Spartan-Judaeans kinship because, as we shall see, the Judaeans too were proud of their military tradition.

## **Beginning of the Hellenistic Diaspora: Judaeans as professional soldiers**

The role of Judaeans as professional soldiers under the Hellenistic kings has not received the attention it deserves, perhaps because that role does not fit well with modern Jewish and Christian prejudices. An article of faith for many people is that the Judaeans Diaspora was a result of a forcible “scattering” of Judaeans from their homeland. In a corollary assumption, ancient Judaeans are often supposed to have been adamant in keeping their distance from Gentiles and to have been as scrupulous in following the Torah as were rabbinic congregations of a much later time. In fact, the Diaspora into the Mediterranean began with the voluntary movement of thousands of people from Judaea to distant lands, and most of this emigration was the result of Judaeans men volunteering to serve the Hellenistic kings as professional soldiers.<sup>7</sup>

By the beginning of the Hellenistic period the countryside of Judah and what had once been Israel had been supplying Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian kings with troops for over two hundred years, the kings permitting units of these troops to worship Adonai and to absent themselves from Gentile rites. Dozens of papyri from the Nile island of Elephantine, gradually discovered and published, have shed a bright light on a garrison of such troops in Egypt. Elephantine lies near Aswan and the First Cataract, and the garrison was thus employed to guard Egypt’s southern border.<sup>8</sup> The relevant papyri, written in Aramaic, came from three archives, one of them dating from shortly before 400 BC and belonging to a Levite or low-level religious functionary named Hananiah. In his time the garrison was in the employ of the Persian kings Darius II and Artaxerxes II. Hananiah assisted in the sacrificing of animals and in other forms of worship at the altar and shrine of Yahweh, which had been built at Elephantine many generations earlier. According to one of the papyrus documents, the garrison and its shrine to Yahweh had been there already when Cambyses conquered Egypt (525 BC). So it appears that the Saite kings of Egypt had initially recruited soldiers from Judah or more likely from Israel (Samaria), and had located them and their families in a permanent settlement on the Nubian frontier. When the Persians defeated the Saites, the descendants of the original garrison simply transferred their allegiance to the new rulers of Egypt. None of the papyri indicates observation of the Sabbath, and intermarriage between the Egyptians and the garrison community was not uncommon. Although the troops restricted their own worship to Yahweh, they evidently coexisted comfortably with the Gentiles and their gods.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander the Great appears also to have had at least a few Judaeans units in his army after he took control of the Levant in 333 BC. The historian Hekataios of Abdera, whose history of Egypt we glanced at in Chapter 5, reported an incident showing Alexander’s sensitivity to the monolatry of his Judaeans soldiers. When Alexander entered Babylon and saw the ruined state of Esagila, the great temple of Marduk, he decided to gain the goodwill of the city by rebuilding the temple. In order to get the project under way, Alexander ordered his army to assist in carrying to the temple-site the materials needed for the rebuilding. For religious reasons Alexander’s Judaeans troops objected to the order, and he excused them from the assignment.<sup>10</sup>

After Ptolemy I Soter won his great victory over the army of Antigonos the One-Eyed, at Gaza in 312 BC, Ptolemy was clearly the ruler of all Egypt and of the southern Levant, including Judaea. This was a vast kingdom, and to control it Ptolemy needed a large professional army.

Unlike Antigonos, Seleukos, and other Diadochs, Ptolemy did not have many Hellenic subjects (the Alexandrians were an exception) and so lacked the military manpower pool that his rivals took for granted. Ptolemy Soter did not think it wise to recruit Egyptians into his army, perhaps because the Egyptians were notorious for rebelling against their imperial rulers. Ptolemaic recruitment policy continued to exclude native Egyptians for over a century: the Battle of Raphia, in 217 BC, is the first in which native Egyptians are attested in the Ptolemaic army. Not having enough Greco-Macedonian troops at his disposal, and not fully trusting his Egyptian subjects, Ptolemy Soter looked for soldiers among the smaller nations of the southern Levant, and especially in Judaea.

The Judaeans were happy to cooperate with Ptolemy, and because he paid well he was able to recruit thousands of young men from Judaea to serve in his professional army. Possibly the myth of the Judaeans' Spartan connection arose from this event. According to *The Letter of Aristeas to Philokrates*, a late Hellenistic text, Ptolemy enlisted 30,000 Judaeans for military service and "brought a hundred thousand people from the land of the Judaeans to Egypt." Those figures may be an exaggeration, but the fact of Ptolemaic recruitment in Judaea is clear, as is also the Ptolemies' permission for the Judaeans to worship in their own way. An Aramaic papyrus from the late fourth century BC locates Judaeans at ten Egyptian towns from the Delta to the First Cataract, and for two of the towns mentions the presence of a Judaeon "priest."<sup>11</sup> Greek papyri from the third and second centuries BC refer to Judaeon units serving at various places in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> We must therefore reckon with at least thousands of men emigrating from Judaea to Egypt under the early Ptolemies, and we may assume not only that many of these men brought wives and children with them, but also that the various military units were accompanied by a few Levites and *hazzanim* who at worship could lead the Judaeans in song and prayer. Because Greek was the language of Ptolemy, and of the army and government, the Judaeon immigrants in Egypt had to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of Greek, although initially they may have spoken Aramaic among themselves.

### **The Diaspora in Cyrene and elsewhere in the Ptolemaic empire**

Egypt and the southern Levant were the principal places ruled by the Ptolemies, but Ptolemaic control extended well beyond those lands. On the coast of North Africa, five hundred miles west of the Nile delta, lay the city of Cyrene. The fertile territory around this city was called Cyrenaica, and Ptolemy I Soter easily incorporated the city and its territory into his empire. Although he was fairly confident that the people of Cyrene would not revolt against him, he placed a garrison in the city both to make certain of its loyalty and to protect it against an intrusion by one of the other Hellenistic rulers. Judaeans were reliable troops for this mission, and a Judaeon garrison sent to the city by Soter evidently launched the Judaeon Diaspora in Cyrenaica.<sup>13</sup> An important Judaeon writer late in the second century BC was Jason of Cyrene, whose fabulous history of the Maccabean revolt underlies II Maccabees. By the time of Jesus the city of Cyrene had a large Judaeon population (it was a Passover pilgrim from Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha), and by the beginning of the second century CE almost half of the inhabitants of the Roman province of Cyrenaica identified themselves as Judaeon.

Cyprus too was part of the Ptolemaic empire. Ptolemy Soter first conquered the island in

318 BC, but soon lost it to a rival. In 295, however, he retook Cyprus, and the island remained in Ptolemaic hands for more than two centuries: not until 58 BC did Ptolemaic control of Cyprus come to an end, when M. Porcius Cato organized the island as a Roman province. We have no documentary evidence that Judaeans were used by the Ptolemies to garrison the Cypriote cities, but chances are that such military service marked the beginning of the Diaspora in Cyprus. In 308 BC Ptolemy I made Delos the center of his “island league” and it may be that a Judaeans garrison was part of his investment there. In any case, it was on Delos that archaeologists have found the earliest known synagogue: in the late second or early first century BC a house in the city of Delos was converted to serve as a synagogue for a local Judaeans congregation.

## Septuagint and synagogues

Although sacred texts had been central to Mesopotamian Judaism since the sixth century BC, their role there was to provide law and instruction (*torah*) for daily life. It was in Egypt that for the first time the texts began to play an important role, and soon the leading role, in the *worship* of Adonai. What brought this about was the Septuagint, and the creation of the Septuagint was itself an interesting story, mythicized over the centuries.<sup>14</sup> The author of the pseudonymous *Letter of Aristeas* says that Ptolemy II Philadelphos decided to obtain copies of all the world’s books for the library in Alexandria. When he was told by Aristeas that old scrolls written in Hebrew were kept in the temple in Jerusalem, Ptolemy arranged for seventy-two Judaeans scribes and priests to bring the scrolls to Alexandria and there, supported by handsome royal subsidies, to translate the Hebrew texts into Greek. All seventy-two translations, so the story goes, turned out to be identical and so were obviously inspired by God himself. Their mission accomplished, the seventy-two returned to Judaea and placed the Hebrew scrolls back in the Jerusalem temple. The Greek translation of the Hebrew texts is called the Septuagint, *septuaginta* being the Latin word for “seventy.”

Whatever the facts about the translation may have been, it is true that around the middle of the third century BC Judaeans resident in Egypt had access to a Greek version of at least half of the books now contained in the Hebrew Bible. A group of Judaeans who acquired several of the Septuagint scrolls would purchase a fairly large house, and by removing one or two interior walls would convert it into a place of assembly that the community called - in Greek - a *proseuchē* (House of Prayer) or less often a *synagogē* (Congregation). The term *proseuchē* was appropriate because prayers, long and prescribed, were one of a Judaeans’ principal religious duties. In their House of Prayer some of the community’s Judaeans would gather every day of the week for noon and evening prayers, and on Sabbath days the entire community would come together to pray, to listen to a reading from the scrolls, to hear the most learned man in their midst expound the meaning of the reading, and to worship Adonai with psalms, music and thanksgiving. As we have seen, Judaeans in Mesopotamia seem to have begun gathering together for Sabbath worship already in the sixth century BC, but it is not known whether they purchased a building for this purpose. As a place to keep the sacred books, however, Judaeans in an Egyptian city needed some sort of communal building. Such were the beginnings of the synagogue.<sup>15</sup>

Inscriptional evidence for a Judaeian congregation in Egypt, whether called a *synagogē* or a *proseuchē*, carries us back to the third century BC. An inscription found at Schedia, a suburb of Alexandria, celebrates the *proseuchē* in which it once stood and reads, "In honor of King Ptolemy and Queen Berenike, his sister and wife, and their children."<sup>16</sup> The Ptolemy in question was Ptolemy III Euergetes, who ruled from 246 to 221 BC. Another inscription with the same text was found at Crocodilopolis (Arsinoe), just south of the Fayyum. Whether a gift from Ptolemy Euergetes or Berenike helped the Judaeian soldiers in these cities to purchase their houses of worship is uncertain, but the inscriptions are clear testimony to the goodwill that characterized the relations between the Ptolemies and their Judaeian employees. In contrast to the strictness of rabbinic Judaism in such matters, it is remarkable that the inscriptions advertise the synagogues' support for Gentile rulers who claimed - as all Egyptian rulers before them had done - to be gods themselves. More than that, the royal couple was incestuous: the marriage of Euergetes and Berenike endeared them to their Egyptian subjects, who regarded brother-sister marriages as not only proper but - as the marriage of Isis and Osiris showed - divinely ordained.

### **Holy scriptures and a holy history**

The books of the three major and the twelve minor prophets had been narrowly circulating all along, but few copies had been made. The prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve - had prophesied in Hebrew but by the fourth century BC Hebrew was no longer in use as a spoken language in the southern Levant, having been displaced by Aramaic. As a result, few people in Judaea or anywhere else had acquired copies of the *nebiim*, even though they were available. Unlike these prophetic books, the books of the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy, otherwise known as "the five books of Moses") and of "the Former Prophets" (Joshua through Kings) had not been accessible for the public at all until their translation into Greek. They had been part of the temple archive in Jerusalem, available for the scribes and higher priests but not something that the laity or the lower priesthood needed to know.<sup>17</sup> This was a sensible arrangement, since these books too were entirely in Hebrew and even most of the literate inhabitants of Jerusalem would not have been able to read or understand them.

Although we may say that the centrality of Biblical texts in Jewish worship began with the creation and publication of the Septuagint, it is anachronistic to think in terms of "the Bible" - singular - in the third century BC, or even of "sacred texts." Some books that eventually were canonized in both the Jewish and Christian tradition - Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, and perhaps Job - had not yet been written in the third century BC.<sup>18</sup> As for the conceptualization of "sacred texts," perhaps Judahites in Mesopotamia and then the proto-Pharisees in Judaea had taken the lead in categorizing certain books as "holy." It was not until Late Antiquity, however, that most Judaeians accepted the Pharisaic definition: a "holy" book was a Hebrew scroll in which the Tetragrammaton - the four-letter name of Yahweh (YHWH) - appeared. The name had long been regarded as too holy for the average Judaeian to utter. In his Second Commandment, at Exodus 20:7, Yahweh threatened to punish anyone who used his name "in vain." The name had therefore gradually dropped from usage, and in the Hellenistic period seems to have been pronounced only by the high priest at the Jerusalem temple, and only at the most ceremonious occasions (in place of the name Yahweh the title *Adonai* - "My Lord" - was employed).<sup>19</sup> Thus a holy book was one of the old ones, written in Hebrew, in which the divine name boldly stood.

Such a book “defiled the hands,” because it was so supremely holy that the hands that held it were by contrast defiled.

The Septuagint greatly increased Judaeans’ interest in what they believed was their past. Until the third century BC most worshipers of Adonai would not have been able to recite a *narrative* of Adonai and Israel. It was just such a narrative, or a sacred history, that the synagogues now provided: religious texts that were read and re-read, the texts and the characters in the texts becoming more familiar and beloved with each reading. Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Jonah, and many other figures of the Tanakh all began their long careers as literary prototypes. Who would not pay rapt attention to the story of Joseph and his Brethren in Egypt?

Most conspicuous in this cast of characters was Adonai himself. The Septuagint translation for *elohim* was simply *ho theos*, “the god,” and the Hebrew *adonai* became *kyrios* (usually translated as “the Lord,” although the Greek term had no definite article). The Lord was shown continually as either helping or chastising his people. Each of the myths was a single chapter of one great myth: the story of Adonai and Israel, his beloved. This was a narrative that extended over thousands of years, beginning when the Lord chose Abraham as his one and only partner, and then made a covenant with Abraham and his seed forever. The story and the covenant had no end, as the Lord’s priests and publicists continually recast events recent enough to be remembered, but remote enough to be mythicized.

The great story of Adonai provided many details about his dealings with individuals: the patriarchs, Moses, Samson, Gideon, Elijah, Jonah and many others. But Adonai’s ultimate concern was not with the individuals themselves but with the corporate entity of Israel (the only survivors of which were the Judaeans, since all other Israelites had been re-branded as “Samaritans”). Thus the Judaeans of Alexandria learned to see themselves as merely the most recent generation of a nation that had always worshiped the Lord and only the Lord, and that had regularly felt the alternations between his grace and his wrath. The history of Israel and Judah, with special attention to the temple in Jerusalem, was synonymous with the pseudo-history of the Lord’s acts and scarcely extended beyond them. When the Septuagint was read the Judaeans could picture the Lord helping the people of Israel and devastating their enemies, displaying his limitless power by making the sun to stand still, or by sending an angel to slay 185,000 Assyrians in a single night. The miraculous stories of Noah’s Flood, Moses’ parting of the Red Sea, Jonah and the whale, Elijah’s ascent into Heaven on a chariot of fire - these tales and many more enchanted the congregation. The Septuagint provided Judaeans with a history - however fictitious - that stretched from the creation of the world to their own time. Neither the Hellenes nor the Egyptians nor anyone else had so interesting and so continuous a history. It quickly became the armature of Judaism and then of Christianity, and would prove to be an invincible weapon in the Lord’s victory over the gods of the Gentiles.

### **The beginning of Seleukid rule over the southern Levant (200-175 BC)**

Although through the first four “Syrian wars” the Ptolemies had maintained control of the southern Levant, a decisive turning point was the Battle of Panion in 200 BC, which ended the

Fifth Syrian War. Here, in the shadow of Mt. Hermon and at the headwaters of the Jordan, the Seleukid king Antiochos III (“the Great”) won a crushing victory over the forces of the boy king, Ptolemy V Epiphanes. After Panion the Ptolemies not only had to give up their chronic ambition to acquire Syria, but also had to concede the southern Levant to the Seleukids.

Like his Ptolemaic predecessors, Antiochos III (ruled 223-187 BC) allowed Jerusalem and its immediate environs a certain degree of autonomy, only making sure that taxes were collected annually. These were supervised by the high priest, whose appointment and tenure were of course dependent on Antiochos. The Seleukid king, as we shall see, already had a highly favorable opinion of the many Judaeans whom he ruled in Mesopotamia. For the first ten years Antiochos the Great could afford to be generous to the Judaeans temple-state: with the addition of Hollow Syria, the Seleukid kingdom had reached the height of its power and prosperity and Antiochos had no trouble paying the huge professional army on which he depended. In a decree issued immediately after his acquisition of Judaea, Antiochos III declared tax immunities for all the priests, scribes and singers of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>20</sup> He also reduced the annual tribute of Judaea.

The very successes of Antiochos the Great, however, attracted the fears and envy of the Roman senate, which coaxed him into a war that he could not win. In 190 BC the Roman legions slaughtered Antiochos’ army at Magnesia, in southwestern Anatolia, and in the following year the Roman senate ordered Antiochos not only to pay Rome a huge indemnity in reparations for the war, but also to give up all of his Anatolian possessions. This brutal Roman policy effectively cut in half Antiochos’ economic and military base while saddling him with enormous obligations. The annual tribute from Jerusalem was therefore increased, to the dismay of the high priest and worshipers of Adonai. Antiochos left to his son Seleukos IV (ruled 187-175 BC) a kingdom considerably weaker than the one he had inherited. One of the few facts reported about Judaea under Seleukos IV is the increase of tribute, back to 300 talents a year.<sup>21</sup> We also have, in Second Maccabees, a fabulous story about Heliodoros, the treasurer (and eventually the assassin) of Seleukos IV, attempting to take yet more money from the Jerusalem temple. As he approaches the temple Heliodoros and all of his military retinue are struck to the ground by the apparition of a pair of mighty angels, flanking a heavenly horseman clad in golden armor. The horse rears in levade and with its hooves strikes at Heliodoros, terrifying the wicked man and convincing him that Adonai is indeed the mightiest god of all.<sup>22</sup>

### **The beginning of the Judaeans Diaspora in Anatolia under Antiochos the Great**

During all of the third century BC and through the first decade of the second, the Seleukid kings ruled over most of the lands from the Aegean sea to western Iran. Mesopotamia, with its growing Judaeans population, was part of this Seleukid empire but so was western Anatolia, with its many Greek and Hellenizing cities. This combination seems to have provided the framework within which the Judaeans Diaspora began in Anatolia. We have fairly good evidence that Antiochos III played a key role in expanding the Diaspora to Anatolia. He was also - as it happened - the last Seleukid who ruled both Mesopotamia and Anatolia (in 189 BC, as we have seen, the Romans forced him to withdraw from Anatolia). By the first century CE, when Paul preached his gospel to Judaeans and Gentiles in the cities of central and western Anatolia, the

Diaspora there was already more than two hundred years old, well established, and very far-flung. Its beginnings are therefore of considerable interest.

In the twelfth book of his *Judaean Antiquities* Josephus quotes from a letter sent by Antiochos III to Zeuxis, his top general (*strategos*), whom Antiochos affectionately addresses as his “father.” The Seleukid king instructs Zeuxis to collect two thousand Judaeen men, evidently active soldiers or recent veterans, from Mesopotamia and transfer them and their families to western Anatolia, where they will counteract and help to contain a sedition that was plaguing that area. Although once thought to have been a Judaeen invention, the letter now seems to be at least a rough copy of what King Antiochos wrote.<sup>23</sup> According to Josephus the letter ran as follows:

King Antiochus to Zeuxis, his father, greeting. If you are in good health, it is well. I also am in good health. Learning that the people in Lydia and Phrygia are revolting, I have come to consider this as requiring very serious attention on my part, and, taking counsel with my friends as to what should be done, I determined to transport two thousand Jewish families with their effects from Mesopotamia and Babylonia to the fortresses and most important places. For I am convinced that they will be loyal guardians of our interests because of their piety to God [*or* “the god”], and I know that they have had the testimony of my forefathers to their good faith and their willingness to do as asked. It is my will, therefore - though it may be a troublesome matter - that they should be transported and, since I have promised it, that they should use their own laws. And when you have brought them to the places mentioned, you shall give each of them a place to build a house and land to cultivate and plant with vines, and shall exempt them from payment of taxes on the produce of the soil for ten years. And also, until they get produce from the soil, let them have grain measured out to them for feeding their servants and let there be given also to those εἰς τὰς χρείας ὑπηρετοῦσιν sufficient to their needs in order that through receiving kind treatment from us they may show themselves the more eager in our cause. And take as much thought for their nation as possible, that it may not be molested by anyone.<sup>24</sup>

It is especially interesting that Antiochos tells Zeuxis that the Judaeans are to be allowed to live under their own laws. Zeuxis is also to see to it that the necessities of life are supplied to those εἰς τὰς χρείας ὑπηρετοῦσιν, a phrase that seems to mean “to those engaged in religious duties.” These would perhaps have been low-level Levites, singers, or *hazzanim* brought along to serve at the Sabbath assemblies of the veterans and their families.<sup>25</sup>

Practical policies such as those followed here by Antiochos the Great are likely to have planted the seeds from which grew the Judaeen Diaspora in Anatolia. By the late third century BC the provinces of Lydia and Phrygia were mostly Greek-speaking, and we must suppose that the Judaeen soldiers or veterans selected to garrison the cities here knew at least some Greek, although they may have usually spoken Aramaic. In their new settings the men and their families would increasingly have used the Greek language and after a generation or two the Judaeans of western Anatolia would have forgotten Aramaic. They were now a part of the Hellenistic Diaspora, and in their Sabbath worship the Septuagint would have been central.

If the two thousand families transferred to western Anatolia by Antiochos III were distributed as garrisons over a dozen fortress-towns, in each of a dozen towns one or more houses would have been purchased and converted into synagogue-houses.<sup>26</sup> From small beginnings grew an enormous Diaspora. By the first century BC, as we shall see, synagogues could be found in almost every city of western Anatolia, and the population of the main Roman province in western Anatolia included some three hundred thousand Judaeans.

### **Synagogues: the physical and literary evidence**

From the entire ancient Judaeen Diaspora only fourteen synagogues have been excavated, and of these only one or possibly two can be dated before the first century CE.<sup>27</sup> Thanks to literary evidence, however, we know that by the first century CE synagogues were to be found in cities all over the Greek-speaking world. Paul found several synagogues at the harbor-city of Salamis in Cyprus. The modest cities of Antioch in Pisidia and Ikonion in Phrygia had each a synagogue. Even the little neighboring cities of Derbe and Lystra had Judaeen communities and presumably small synagogues. A Greek inscription dating from the first century CE shows the presence of a “synagogue of the Judaeans and the *theosebeis* (“God-fearers)” far to the north of Anatolia, in the city of Pantikapaion (today, the city of Kerch, on the eastern tip of the Crimean peninsula).<sup>28</sup>

Until the third century CE the synagogue was seldom a building erected specifically for religious purposes, and was usually a congregation of people gathered together in whatever building could accommodate them.<sup>29</sup> The lone building from the Hellenistic period that has been certainly identified as a synagogue is the house, mentioned above, on the island of Delos. Four inscriptions, dating ca. 100 BC, proclaim that this building was dedicated to “the highest god” (*theos hypsistos*), one of the titles given to Adonai in the Hellenistic Diaspora. Although the structure in which the Delos congregation met seems to have been built as a private house, after its purchase by Judaeans and its conversion to a synagogue it featured two spacious rooms, each of them about 7 m wide and 13m long.

Occasionally, however, even in the Hellenistic period some synagogues must have been purpose-built. A large synagogue has been excavated at Ostia, the harbor city of Rome. Although the final form of the Ostia synagogue dates to the fourth century CE, the building seems to have been constructed - more or less with its later dimensions - in the first century CE, and may from the beginning have served as a synagogue. Its assembly hall, 25 x 12.5m, was large enough to accommodate several hundred worshippers.<sup>30</sup>

Although most synagogues may have originally been small, some of them grew to be their respective cities’ most spacious and impressive religious structures. They included dining rooms and sleeping rooms for visitors. The huge synagogue that archaeologists have found at Sardis, directly facing the city’s agora, dates from Late Antiquity, but some synagogues of a much earlier date must have been buildings considerably larger than a private house. When Paul made his evangelizing journeys through southern and western Anatolia the typical synagogue in the area seems to have been attracting fairly large crowds for Sabbath worship. Luke says that

when Paul came to Antioch in Pisidia and went to the synagogue for Sabbath worship he was invited by the president of the synagogue to give the congregation news from Jerusalem. Paul told them of the resurrection of Jesus. On the next Sabbath, so Luke says (Acts 13:44), “the whole city” gathered to hear more about this latest and greatest of the Judaeans’ miracles. We can hardly suppose that the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia could accommodate the entire population of the city, but clearly we are to imagine a building familiar to the townspeople. In the very largest cities, such as Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt, synagogues eventually were enormous in size and splendid in their architecture and appointments. In rabbinic lore (of dubious credibility) about the Second Temple period, the great synagogue at Alexandria was so large that kerchief signals were required to keep the congregation coordinated for “Amen” and for other responses.<sup>31</sup>

In the earliest synagogues little or no congregational organization was required. The heads of the families who had purchased the building supervised the conduct of worship services and the performance of rituals. When a congregation became larger, it set up a board of elders (*presbyteroi*) and an executive who held the title of *archisynagogos*: “leader of the synagogue.” In a small city in the Hellenistic Diaspora the *archisynagogos* was also regarded as the head of the city’s Judaeans minority in its more secular affairs. In some synagogues, not surprisingly, the position of *archisynagogos* became almost hereditary, especially if the family in question was very wealthy and well connected. This is exemplified in a Greek inscription from Jerusalem, apparently dating from the first century:

Theodotus, son of Vettanos, being a priest and an *archisynagogos*, son of an *archisynagogos*, grandson of an *archisynagogos*, built the synagogue for the public reading of the Law and for teaching the commandments. And the guest quarters, rooms, and the water facilities for those using the inn. Those who laid the foundation stone were his fathers, and the elders (*presbyteroi*), and Simonides.<sup>32</sup>

Leadership of a synagogue by a rabbi, schooled in the oral as well as the written Torah, was a much later development (it followed the Christianization of the Roman empire in the fourth and fifth centuries).

### **Strengthening Judaism: *Jubilees* and the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach***

An odd but important consequence of the Judaeans’ exposure to Hellenism was the composition of *Jubilees*, a Hebrew book that purports to have been written on Mt. Sinai, either by Moses as an angel dictated the book to him or by the angel himself (1:27). *Jubilees* is a reworking and rewriting of Genesis, the author attempting to strengthen Judaeans’ respect for the Torah. Hellenes criticized circumcision, which they regarded as genital mutilation. They were also puzzled at Judaeans’ utter idleness on the Sabbath, and at their various dietary restrictions. In the early Hellenistic period a few Judaeans in the large cities, including Jerusalem, began to relax their obedience to the Torah in order to make a better impression on the Gentiles.

The author of *Jubilees* responded by making the Torah much holier than it already was. As for the Sabbath, even Genesis told how, after creating the heavens and the earth and

everything in them, Adonai rested on the seventh day. *Jubilees* went further, asserting that Adonai and all of the angels continue to observe the Sabbath in Heaven. Circumcision too has its heavenly counterpart: both classes of angels - the angels of the presence, and the angels of sanctification - are circumcised (15:27). Finally, the Torah itself is divine: far from being created by or for Moses on Mt. Sinai, the Torah has existed from eternity, being written out - in Hebrew - on tablets that have always been kept in Heaven. This belief in the eternity of the Torah foreshadows a similar belief in Islam about the Quran.<sup>33</sup>

It is likely that *Jubilees* was composed in the 170s BC.<sup>34</sup> The Hebrew text quickly became accepted as a superior account of the events described in Genesis, from the Creation to the death of Joseph. At Qumran archaeologists found numerous fragments of the Hebrew text, and analysis of the hands in which the fragments are written concludes that at least fourteen copies of *Jubilees* were deposited in the caves. The book was also highly regarded by early Christians, who translated it from the Hebrew into Greek, Latin, Syriac and other languages. The rabbinic school at Jamnia, however, took a dim view of *Jubilees*. It was not included in the rabbinic canon, and by Late Antiquity it had also fallen out of favor in most Christian communions. In its entirety it survived only among the Christians of Ethiopia, and modern translations are based on the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) text, which in turn was based on the Greek version.

Another Hebrew composition dating to the early second century BC and reacting against Hellenism was the *Wisdom of Ben Sirach*. Jesus ben Sirach lived in Jerusalem, and was possibly a *sofer* (he had an impressive familiarity with the sacred books, which he quotes with great frequency). Wary of the wisdom of the Greeks, ben Sirach exerted himself to show that true wisdom comes from the Torah that Adonai gave to Moses. By ca. 100 BC the author's grandson, who lived in Alexandria, had translated the Hebrew text into Greek and the book was read in the synagogues of the Hellenistic Diaspora. For a time the Hebrew original also enjoyed some popularity: at least three Hebrew copies were deposited at Qumran. Like *Jubilees*, however, the *Wisdom of Ben Sirach* was not included by the rabbis in their canonizing of the Tanakh. It survived as part of the Christian canon.

## **Toward monotheism**

In the Hellenistic Diaspora the monolatry of some Judaeans took another step toward monotheism. In the late sixth century BC Deutero-Isaiah's parochial monotheism had mostly been restricted to the claim that only the Judahites' god - Adonai - was real, and that the many nations who worshiped images had no god at all. Deutero-Isaiah still imagined Adonai as the god of Israel, and not as the god of all humankind. In contrast, the Greek philosophers, beginning at least with Anaxagoras, had speculated about a single deity who had created the universe and who now governed it. This "philosophers' God" did not exclude a subordinate role for the Olympians and other gods. From the orderliness of the cosmos, that is, the philosophers concluded that the cosmos is controlled by a single and monarchical will, but they were willing to make room for the gods of popular tradition, if only in abstractions and allegories.

In the third or early second century BC educated Judaeans in Egypt began identifying their Lord with the philosophers' God. Genesis, in the Septuagint, begins with the sentence, "In

the beginning ὁ θεός made the heaven and the earth.”<sup>35</sup> The subject, *ho theos*, is literally “the god,” but because it has no antecedent, no proper name to indicate *which* god, it becomes virtually a proper name, not very different from “God” in English.<sup>36</sup> That some in the Alexandrian Judaeian community identified their *Kyrios* (“Lord”) as God, or as “the (one) god” about whom Greek philosophers had speculated, is shown most clearly in the *Letter of Aristeas to Philokrates*. Here “Aristeas” recounts his conversation with Ptolemy Philadelphos, who has already decided to provide for translating the Judaeans’ sacred books into Greek and who has selected Aristeas to head the delegation to Jerusalem’s temple. Aristeas suggests that in return for the favor of allowing the books to be brought to Egypt and translated, Ptolemy should release from slavery the Judaeans who had been made captive by Ptolemy Soter and his troops. In making his argument, Aristeas extols the merits of the Judaeans:

As I have been at pains to discover, the God who gave them their law is the God who maintains your kingdom. They worship the same God - the Lord and Creator of the Universe, as all other men, as we ourselves, O king, though we call him by different names, such as Zeus or Dis. This name was very appropriately bestowed upon him by our first ancestors, in order to signify that He, through whom all things are endowed with life and come into being, is necessarily the Ruler and Lord of the Universe.<sup>37</sup>

Although it pretends to have been written by the Gentile Aristeas who early in the third century BC had written a book on the Judaeans, the *Letter of Aristeas* was in fact written by a Judaeian ca. 130 BC. That God is one, but called by different names in different traditions, is a new and startling concept in Judaism. The equation of Adonai with Zeus, or more generally with “the Lord and Creator of the Universe,” is all the more noteworthy because in Judaea itself the followers of Judas the Maccabee had by that time rebelled against the Seleukids after Antiochos IV tried to equate Adonai with Zeus. In some synagogues of the Hellenistic Diaspora a syncretistic monotheism had evidently encouraged both Judaeans and Gentile visitors to identify the god of Israel with the creator and ruler of the universe posited by philosophers since Plato and Aristotle.

Pseudo-Aristeas was not the first Judaeian to identify Adonai with the ultimate power postulated by Greek philosophers. In the 170s or 160s BC Aristoboulos of Alexandria wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch and there made the claim - says Clement of Alexandria - that the Peripatetics were indebted to Moses and the other prophets (Clement was trying to make the same point). Aristoboulos dedicated his commentary to King Ptolemy, evidently Ptolemy VI Philometor (ruled 181-145).

All Judaeans were of course obliged to respect the traditional cults of the Hellenes and Egyptians, or at least to refrain from desecrating them, and the identification of Adonai with the philosophers’ God provided a rationale for living cheek-by-jowl with polytheists. The Lord, many Diaspora Judaeans declared, was in a class by himself, quite separate from the many gods of the polytheists. He was the *theos hypsistos*: “the highest god,” whom the Stoics, for example, posited as the divine Providence that controls the cosmos. While Judaeans restricted their worship to this “highest god,” most of them did not feel it necessary or even appropriate to deny the existence of Ptah, Osiris, Sarapis, Athena, Apollo and dozens of other gods who were

worshiped in Egypt. Such a hostile confrontation with the gods would come later, after violence had begun between Judaeans and the Roman empire, and it would culminate ca. 400 CE with Christianity's elimination of the gods. But in the third and second centuries BC a confrontation with the gods was not high on the agenda of Judaeans in the Hellenistic Diaspora.

## **Philo Judaeus of Alexandria**

The identification of the Judaeans' Lord with the philosophers' God is assumed in the voluminous writings of Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BC - 50 CE). Writing in Alexandria at a time when conflicts between Judaeans and Gentiles were increasing, Philo represents the most ingenious attempt to merge Greek philosophy and Judaism.<sup>38</sup> More specifically, Philo made it his life's work to present Judaeian religion in Platonic, Stoic and Pythagorean dress. He managed this by allegorizing the Septuagint, focusing on the Pentateuch and especially on Genesis. Neither the project (the harmonization of Judaism with Greek philosophy) nor the method (allegorizing) was original with Philo,<sup>39</sup> but most of what we know about them - and about Hellenistic Judaism in general - we owe to him. Philo based his interpretations entirely on the Septuagint, and it is unlikely that he could read Hebrew. His importance in the history of religion, however, is much greater than rabbinic Judaism and Christianity have admitted. Ideas about God that were formed within Christianity - including Gnosticism - in the second, third and fourth centuries were heavily indebted to Philo. Analyzing the interaction between Hellenism and Judaism that took place in Alexandria and other Hellenistic cities, Francis Peters concluded that "Philo of Alexandria... is a dazzling example of the promise of Hellenized Judaism and a counter to the heavyhanded Maccabean propaganda against the Hellenizers cringing in the Jerusalem citadel."<sup>40</sup>

Philo was born into one of Alexandria's most privileged and influential families. His brother, Alexander Lysimachus, was believed to be the wealthiest Judaeian of his generation and held an official position in the Jewish *politeuma* at Alexandria.<sup>41</sup> Alexander was also a friend of Herodes Agrippa, king of Judaea, and of the emperor Claudius. Alexander's son, Tiberius Julius Alexander, rose even higher in power and prestige: he was appointed prefect of Judaea and then prefect of Egypt. Although for that distinction he may have had to give up his Judaism and become a Gentile, Tiberius Alexander retained the prefecture of Egypt under five emperors. Unlike his brother and nephew, Philo did not pursue a political or military career. In 40 CE, however, he headed a delegation that the Judaeians of Alexandria - following a bloody riot with the Hellenes - sent to Rome in order to plead their case before the emperor Caligula. Philo's wealth may not have been so great as his brother's, but - as Samuel Sandmel pointed out - he could not have written all that he did write unless he was a man of leisure.<sup>42</sup>

Although they were Judaeian, his parents saw to it that Philo received a thorough Greek education, whether from private tutors or in the school of a Greek *grammatikos*. In his writings he mentions approvingly the "rounded education" (*paideia enkyklios*) that upper-class Hellenes in Alexandria provided for their sons,<sup>43</sup> and we may assume that he had received the same. Thanks to his training in Greek literature, he was throughout his later life able to quote Homer, Euripides, Plato and other Greek authors to good effect.<sup>44</sup>

His Greek education, however, was merely a preliminary to Philo's study of the Septuagint, and especially of the Pentateuch. Moses was for him the supreme sage, who had hidden away in the first five books of the Bible all the wisdom that humankind has ever had. A seemingly insurmountable obstacle for making that case was the Book of Genesis, laden as it is with stories that few educated Hellenes could take seriously: Adam and Eve, the apple and the serpent, Methuselah, Noah and his ark, the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, God's commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Jacob's wrestling God to a draw at Peniel, and many, many more. Philo proceeded to allegorize the stories: conceding that the literal meaning was impossible, he insisted that the true meaning was concealed beneath the literal.

As explications of the texts, Philo's allegories depend especially on a mystical meaning of numbers and of proper names. In Genesis 2:1-2, for example, we read that God completed all of his work on the sixth day, and that on the seventh day he did no more work. Bearing in mind that the philosophers' God is an Unmoved Mover, and that the universe - as Aristotle said - had no beginning, Philo explains that of course God does not work: the number 6 stands for perfection (because it is the product of 2 and 3), and therefore what Moses means in this story is that the universe is perfect. Nor does God quit working on the seventh day. The number 7 is divine (because it is the sum of the perfect number 6 plus 1), and Moses' message here is that God is the source of both earthly and heavenly reality.<sup>45</sup> One of Philo's longest allegories was required by the story of the serpent's beguiling conversation with Eve, and God's cursing of the serpent. The serpent, Philo explains, stands for Pleasure, and Moses's allegory - long antedating Plato's discourses on the tripartite soul - is therefore a warning that the cognitive part of our tripartite soul must never be subject to the appetitive part.<sup>46</sup> The story of Cain and Abel is not about a man killing his brother, but about the conflict between materialism and religious piety ("Cain," Philo erroneously explains, means "possession" and "Abel" means "referring to God"). By such allegorical reading of the Pentateuch did Philo transform Moses into Plato, and the Lord of the Septuagint into the philosophers' God.

As is to be expected from his mission, Philo was eager to bring Hellenes to Judaism as proselytes. "He exhorts the host people, that is, his fellow-Jews, that such proselytes be treated both with respect and also with special friendship and more than ordinary goodwill. All members of the Jewish nation are to love proselytes as themselves, as friends and kinfolk in both body and soul."<sup>47</sup> Philo explained (erroneously, again) that in Hebrew the name "Israel" meant "seeing God" (ὄρῶν θεόν), and he therefore concluded that proselytes who had come to know God were full members of Israel.<sup>48</sup>

Philo's many works - more than thirty are extant - were treasured by the early Christians, who welcomed Philo's identification of the philosophers' God with "the Lord" of the Septuagint.<sup>49</sup> Christians also recycled Philo's arguments to show that the wisdom of the Bible was superior to the wisdom of the Greeks. Although Philo never mentioned Jesus the Christ, Christians who read his works were persuaded that Philo had Jesus in mind in the many passages in which he refers to the *logos* of God.

In Late Antiquity the authority of Philo, along with his allegorical method, declined in the churches. The manuscript tradition of Philo's works was maintained by the Greek Orthodox

church, and during the Middle Ages a few of his writings were translated into Latin and Armenian, but his importance was not recognized. The first printed edition of the Philonian corpus was not published until 1552, long after ancient texts of much less consequence had been printed. Judaism preserved none of Philo's writings and even forgot his name. Hellenistic Judaism did not last much beyond the fifth century CE, and rabbinic Judaism paid no attention to Philo until the sixteenth century.<sup>50</sup> In modern times a growing number of scholars have studied Philo, and we are finally in a position to appreciate the large role he played in the evolution of monotheism.<sup>51</sup>

## **The attractions of Judaism for Gentiles**

Looking at the demographics of the Hellenistic Diaspora in Egypt and Anatolia, we find that altogether the number of Judaeans grew exponentially from the third century BC through the first century CE. Synagogues appeared in one city after another, first in Egypt but then throughout the Greek-speaking world: Cyrenaica, Syria, Anatolia, Cyprus and the islands of the Aegean, and finally in three or four cities of Greece itself (in Judaea, where the Jerusalem temple remained dominant, synagogues may have played a less important role but were nevertheless numerous). What little information we have about the spread of Judaism in Greek-speaking cities suggests a fairly spontaneous growth: unlike the New Covenant Christians in the early centuries CE, Judaeans in the Hellenistic period felt no obligation to convert Gentiles. With rare exceptions, ancient Judaism was not a missionary religion. In the typical Greek city, therefore, Judaism must have begun with the transplanting of Judaeans from elsewhere. Judaeans who moved to a small city in which there was no Jewish community are likely to have done so for personal or practical reasons: perhaps most often professional military service, but also pursuit of a craft or trade, and occasionally just the desire to live in one of the new and attractive cities that the Diadochs had built all over the Levant, in Egypt, and in western and southern Anatolia. In some cities the number of Judaeans immigrants may have been so minuscule that their Jewish identity was soon lost, and so Judaism did not take root.

In many cities, however, Judaeans arrived in numbers sufficient to form a small and cohesive community of their own within the larger Greek context. Initially some of these communities would have been too small to purchase and maintain a building in which to worship. When Paul came to Philippi in Macedon he found that the small group of Judaeans in the city was wont to gather at the river every Sabbath, and there worship the Lord (Acts 16:13). Among the worshipers was a woman newly arrived from the city of Thyatira in Lydia, two hundred miles to the southeast. She and her family had apparently come to Philippi for business reasons (she was engaged in the buying and selling of purple). One can imagine that the Judaeans of Philippi rejoiced at the arrival of every Judaeans newcomer, whether a family or a single individual, and that they may have encouraged friends and family members to come and join them at Philippi, a good city in which to live. Once a critical mass was reached - let us say a *minyan* of ten adult men - the little group could purchase a house, reshape it to create a small assembly hall, and acquire at least a few scrolls of the Law and the Prophets. At that point, Judaism would be launched in the city and begin to grow. The Sabbath worship would soon have attracted curious Gentiles, a few of whom would eventually take the momentous step of joining the synagogue. Over the generations, these small but steady additions added up to the

enormous increase of Hellenistic Judaism that our sources reveal.

## **1. Hellenistic Judaeans' desire to coexist with Hellenes**

The most important reason for the growth of the Hellenistic Diaspora is negative: the Judaeans immigrants into Greek-speaking cities had no quarrel with Hellenes and saw no reason why Judaism should be incompatible with Hellenism. On the social level, Hellenistic Judaeans made little effort to keep themselves separate from Gentiles. This is hardly surprising because Hellenistic Judaism resulted from the voluntary - and even, one suspects, eager - emigration of Judaeans from Judaea to lands ruled by the Ptolemies and Seleukids, often to serve in the professional armies of the Hellenistic kings. Separation was an indispensable feature of rabbinic Judaism, but in the wider Mediterranean world Judaism did not begin to follow rabbinic rules until the fifth century CE, by which time urban society was steadily becoming Christian.

In the third century BC almost all Judaeans were monolatrists and some were monotheists. Judaeans who took up residence in one of the Greek cities, however, did not consider it their duty to condemn polytheism, the worship of images, or other features of Greek life and tradition. One of the great attractions of Judaism was its aniconic monolatry, and undoubtedly many Hellenistic Judaeans must have expressed to their Gentile acquaintances some skepticism that the big statues in the temples were actually gods (educated Hellenes were likely to have agreed with them). And occasionally a Judaeans must have declared to outsiders his or her belief that Adonai was the only god. But we find very little "in your face" condemnation of the Greek gods by Judaeans writers in the Hellenistic Diaspora. Such attitudes and actions - so characteristic of New Covenant Christians - would have antagonized the Hellenes, and would have made life uncomfortable if not intolerable for the little Judaeans communities. These communities had been established for practical reasons: professional military service, economic advantages, or just the opportunity to enjoy the amenities of one of the new cities. Judaeans did not participate in the cults of the Hellenes, but on religious matters the typical Judaeans in a Greek city was evidently content to live and let live. Perhaps it is not fortuitous that in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 22:28 (27) the Lord commands that his followers "not revile the gods," using the plural rather than the expected singular.<sup>52</sup>

## **2. Worship in the synagogues**

We may suppose that the very nature of worship in the Hellenistic Diaspora, as in the Mesopotamian, appealed to many Gentiles. With benefit of retrospect, we know that the image cults of the old gods were eventually to be replaced by the aniconic worship of God: first as expressed in Judaism, and then in Christianity and Islam. In place of blood sacrifices before an image, worship in the synagogue consisted of prayer, praise and thanksgiving to an unseen deity, and to these activities the publication of the Septuagint added readings from the "books of Moses and the Prophets" and a commentary thereon. To Hellenes who were critical of their image-gods and of animal sacrifices the Judaeans way must have been very attractive. Even better, the synagogues' monolatry and incipient monotheism must for these Hellenes have seemed more plausible than the conventional polytheism of either Greek or Egyptian tradition. Many a visitor to a synagogue would have welcomed the admonition to worship no god other

than the Lord, especially in a land where so many gods and such a confusion of cults clamored for one's attention. A Gentile who was not ready to set the many gods aside entirely could be assured that the Lord worshiped in the synagogues was the highest god of all.

### **3. The miraculous story of Israel**

Hellenes who were not especially skeptical found even more to like in the synagogues. Unlike God as the Greek philosophers imagined him, Adonai (or Kyrios) was not a colorless abstraction but a vivid character who had shown his power in dozens of miracles, all recorded in detail by "Moses and the Prophets." Not everyone in the synagogue took Moses' account literally, as Philo shows, but Philo leaves no doubt that most Judaeans did. The miracles convinced many a Gentile visitor to become a part of the great story of Adonai and Israel, or to enter into the Covenant that the Lord had with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When eventually visual evidence becomes available, in the catacomb art at Rome or the wall paintings in the synagogue at Dura-Europos, we can see that the miracle stories were by far the most popular chapters of the Septuagint. Many of these stories came from Genesis and Exodus: the creation of Adam and Eve, Noah's Flood, the miraculous production of a ram to prevent Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the rescue of Baby Moses from the Nile river, the Ten Plagues that Adonai sent upon pharaoh, Moses' parting of the Red Sea, and so forth. The stories of Elijah and Elisha (in I and II Kings) were also impressive: the fire that Elijah called down from Heaven, or his ascent into Heaven on a chariot of fire. Other favorites were Adonai's bringing the dry bones back to life for the benefit of Ezekiel,<sup>53</sup> and the entire Book of Jonah. In the latter Adonai sends a whale to swallow the protagonist, who has been thrown overboard into the Mediterranean, and three days later the whale regurgitates Jonah, none the worse for his ordeal, safely on to dry land.

In no other literature was there anything like these stories from the Septuagint. Greek myths were obviously not to be taken seriously, and the great deeds of Egyptian and Mesopotamian gods were at the cosmic level, without the human participants who could make the story seem like history. The Septuagint stories, on the other hand, appeared to be prosaic accounts of wondrous things that had actually happened in the past, acts of God that were assigned to a particular place and time, and translated from Hebrew texts that were supposed to be very old and therefore venerable and creditable. Best of all, the Judaeans worshiping in the synagogue were themselves the beneficiaries of the miracles. All of the wonderful things that the Lord had done, that is, he did because of his constant love for Israel, and he surely would perform similar or even greater miracles in the future. Most Gentiles who heard the miraculous history of Israel would have been deeply impressed, because they were no better equipped than were Judaeans to make a critical assessment of the Septuagint stories. A few wealthy Judaeans who had studied philosophy could recast the stories as allegories, but no attempt at a critical history of ancient Israel was made until late in the seventeenth century.

### **4. Concerns about the Afterlife**

Although our evidence on the eschatology of Hellenistic Judaism is slim, it seems that the success of the synagogues was at least in part a result of the assurance they gave that Judaeans

would fare much better in the Afterlife than would the worshipers of idols. On this score Judaism was in competition with the cults of Isis, Demeter, Dionysos and - from the first century CE onward - with Christianity and Mithraism, all of which also promised a blessed Afterlife. The romance *Joseph and Asenath* stresses the immortality that Asenath's conversion to Judaism confers on her.<sup>54</sup> The romance was written in Greek by a Hellenistic Judaeon, perhaps in Alexandria in the first century BC.

It may have been in Mesopotamia that Judaeans first learned of the blessed place into which, at the Day of Judgement, the righteous would enter. The Old Persian word *pairidaêza* was Hellenized as *paradeisos*,<sup>55</sup> and the concept of Paradise may have originated in Persian Mesopotamia. But doctrines about the Afterlife are hardly to be found in the Avesta,<sup>56</sup> and the promise of Paradise may have been elaborated by Judaeans in the Greek-speaking Diaspora. Judaeon monotheists, identifying Adonai as God, were of course convinced that his worshipers would receive the blessings of Paradise while people who worshiped the gods of the Gentiles would not. It also seems that in Hellenistic Judaism the threat of eternal punishment was as important as the promise of eternal bliss. Judaeans in the Greek-speaking world, that is, seem to have adopted Plato's myths about the fiery torments that awaited the souls of the damned, and some synagogues may have insinuated that those torments would be the lot of all who did not worship Adonai.

Some light on the eschatology of Hellenistic Judaism (which may have been quite different from the eschatology of Pharisaic and then rabbinic Judaism) comes from the "Book of the Watchers," which was incorporated in I Enoch.<sup>57</sup> The "Book of the Watchers" was probably composed early in the second century BC, but whether the original was in Greek or in Aramaic is uncertain. Neither the Aramaic nor the Greek version is extant, but in Ethiopic Christianity the text was attached to other Enoch literature in the book known as I Enoch. The Ethiopic translation, which does survive, was made from the Greek. In any case, both Greek and Aramaic versions of the "Book of the Watchers" and other Enoch literature were for a time very popular. This was certainly so when the Qumran scrolls were hidden away for safekeeping: fragments written in at least eleven hands indicate the presence of at least eleven Aramaic copies in the Qumran caves.

At the beginning of the "Book of the Watchers" Enoch reveals what will happen at the End of Time:

6 And the high mountains shall be shaken,  
And the high hills shall be made low,  
And shall melt like wax before the flame

7 And the earth shall be wholly rent in sunder,  
And all that is upon the earth shall perish,  
And there shall be a judgement upon all (men).

8 But with the righteous He will make peace.  
And will protect the elect,

And mercy shall be upon them.  
And they shall all belong to God,  
And they shall be prospered,  
And they shall all be blessed.

And He will help them all,  
And light shall appear unto them,  
And He will make peace with them'.

9 And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones  
To execute judgement upon all,  
And to destroy all the ungodly:

And to convict all flesh  
Of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed  
(I Enoch 1:6-9)<sup>58</sup>

Although the authors of I Enoch imagined a Judgement Day when the world would come to an end, they apparently did not imagine - as did the Pharisees - that the dead would on that day be resurrected. They seem instead to have supposed, perhaps following Plato here, that at death a person's *psyche* went directly to Heaven or to Hell, and that Judgement Day would affect only those people still alive when the End of Time began. In Chapters 17-25 of I Enoch the protagonist tells how Raphael, Uriel and other angels gave him a tour of the Underworld and showed him its rivers of fire.<sup>59</sup> In these burning rivers lay writhing the two hundred angels who, some time after Noah's Flood, had lusted after the beautiful "daughters of men" and begot by them the race of Giants. By the second century BC notions of a vast fiery pit in the underworld, in which flames burned eternally, appealed to many people who saw criminals and scoundrels go unpunished in this life. In Greek the fires were located in Hades, and in Aramaic in Gehenna, which was originally the name of a burying ground outside Jerusalem but now denoted the most dreadful precinct of *sheol*.

## **5. The community, local and ecumenical**

As in Mesopotamia, a very important attraction of Judaism in the Hellenistic world was the community it offered. A local community so close and cohesive as that of a synagogue was difficult to find in the new Greek cities. Most synagogues were small enough that members quickly came to know each other, to enjoy each other's company, and to stand by each other in life's joys and sorrows. The large civic community of the old city-states in Greece and the Aegean coast of Anatolia was not characteristic of the cities founded by the Ptolemies and Seleukids. Eating and drinking clubs helped to provide camaraderie, but most of the clubs met only once or twice a month. In contrast, many Judaeans men and boys visited the synagogue daily for prayers and the entire congregation met at least weekly.

Neither the social clubs nor the various mystery cults of a Hellenistic city brought entire families together. In contrast, both men and women, and both adults and children participated in

the synagogue activities. Although some scholars believe that women and girls at a synagogue were restricted either to a balcony in a two-story building or to a separate room in a one-story building, the evidence is ambiguous and it may be that the sexes were not segregated during worship.<sup>60</sup> Children routinely accompanied their parents to the synagogue.

The synagogue was a place for worship and prayer, but also for merriment. In Late Antiquity the rabbis forbade the eating of meals at a synagogue, but the Hellenistic synagogue seems to have normally had a dining room or even a dining hall. Lee Levine's exhaustive study of the ancient synagogue concludes that "meals were a familiar feature of ancient synagogue life."<sup>61</sup> The closeness of the synagogue community resembled that of a greatly extended family. When a Gentile converted to Judaism, he or she became a member of this huge family.

The synagogues were especially festive on three great holidays: Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles (*pesach*, *shavuot*, and *sukkot*), the first two in spring and the third in early autumn. In Judaea itself these were pilgrim-feasts, celebrated at the Jerusalem temple. In the Diaspora, the celebration took place at the synagogue, but often spilled out into the streets. Eating, drinking, singing and dancing (circle dancing, or square dancing) made the festivals the high point of the religious calendar. In medieval times the Christian majority suppressed the public celebration of the Jewish holidays, and they perforce became more private. The rabbis also tried to make the holidays more somber, with much prayer and contemplation of the Exodus. But in Hellenistic Judaism the three holidays still retained much of their origins as harvest festivals, and often were raucous affairs.

The wider community to which Judaeans had access was also a strong attraction for those Gentiles who learned about it. The synagogues were not organized in provinces or dioceses, but an informal network kept them in touch, and when they came to a strange town Judaeans routinely sought out the local Judaeans. Some exceptionally hospitable synagogues provided not only meals but also beds for visitors from distant cities. Most important was the human network. Travelers would often carry a letter of introduction, written by someone back home who was a friend or acquaintance of one or more of the Judaeans in the town toward which the carrier was traveling. The Judaeans "family", if we may use that metaphor, was closest at the local level, but it extended through much of the civilized world, and was characterized by familial affection and cooperation.

### **"God-fearers" and proselytes**

Gentiles who were regular worshipers at a synagogue were called "God-fearers" (*theosebeis*) by the Judaeans. In any given synagogue full-fledged Judaeans must have greatly outnumbered the "God-fearers," but the latter were sufficiently numerous that they merited inclusion in narratives and inscriptions. Those God-fearers who found the synagogue's assets attractive enough to outweigh its liabilities took the serious step of actually becoming Judaeans. For males, this required circumcision, a painful surgery that must have discouraged many a man. Gentile women who joined a synagogue were required only to undergo a ritual bath, and therefore converted to Judaism in much greater numbers than did men.

The importance of women proselytes in the growth of Hellenistic Judaism is obvious. Josephus says that in 66 CE most of the women of Damascus were Judaeans, but their husbands were not.<sup>62</sup> Although the evidence is mostly anecdotal, we may assume that in such “mixed” families most children would grow up to be favorably disposed toward Judaism. Paul’s companion Timothy (*Timotheos* meant, literally, “Honor of God”), for example, seems to have found his way to the synagogue because his mother was Judaeans, evidently having proselytized while her husband remained a Hellene.

Both men and women paid social and cultural penalties when they became Judaeans, but these were not so severe as has sometimes been thought. Proselytes were encouraged to give up some of the activities that as Gentiles they had hitherto enjoyed. Specifically, once one had formally joined a synagogue one was supposed to sever attachments to the other mystery cults, and to cease attending the rituals and ceremonies of the civic cults. In comparison with rabbinic Judaism, however, Hellenistic Judaism was relatively lax on this score. The evidence of papyri, tomb inscriptions, and inscribed charms and apotropaic amulets indicates that a fair number of Judaeans in Hellenistic and early Roman Egypt were not exclusively monolatrist.<sup>63</sup> In a polytheistic world you could “hedge your bets” by joining as many cults as you liked and could afford, and although Diaspora Judaeans were generally averse to such promiscuity they seem to have tolerated it to an extent that would have been unthinkable in Christian or rabbinic Judaeans circles.

Proselytes to rabbinic Judaism or to Christianity were required to withdraw from most of a city’s amusements and cultural events. In Hellenistic Judaism, on the other hand, it seems that many and perhaps most Diaspora Judaeans attended dramatic and musical performances. Your attendance at Greek dramatic performances would have been frowned upon by those Judaeans who regarded the dramas as celebration of gods other than Adonai, but your tastes in entertainment were not likely to cost you your synagogue membership. Likewise, watching and even participating in an athletic event was much more common for Judaeans in the Hellenistic Diaspora than it was in Judaea itself. Diaspora Judaeans could avoid the overtly religious aspects of these events and enjoy the excitement of the athletic competition. In the principate of Claudius the Hellenes of Alexandria were irate at Judaeans who crowded into the games, taking up seats and space that the Hellenes thought should have been reserved for Hellenes.

The most serious social consequence of becoming a Judaeans was - for a man - the loss of polis citizenship. Enrollment in the civic organization - belonging to one of the *phylai* - of a Greek city required a man to participate in the religious rituals and festivals of his *phylē*, and Judaeans could not do that. As a result, proselytes to Judaism were customarily dropped from the citizen rolls of the Hellenistic cities. Politically ambitious Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism seem to have preferred to remain at the God-fearer status. In a city in which Judaeans formed a sizeable minority of the population they were permitted to form their own *politeuma*, a quasi-polity that was governed by a Judaeans ethnarch or archon. There is slight but credible evidence that the Judaeans of Alexandria had their own *politeuma*.<sup>64</sup> In their *politeuma* here and at Antioch in Syria Judaeans followed “the laws of Moses” insofar as those laws did not conflict with the city’s laws.

## **Size of the Hellenistic Judaeian Diaspora**

Because there were some liabilities that attended conversion to Judaism it is astounding to find how many converts there were. The scanty information we have indicates that by the first century CE several million people in the Roman empire were Judaeian. Our evidence is best for Egypt. Philo of Alexandria described his city as divided into five regions, identified by the letters alpha through epsilon. Of these five, one was entirely Judaeian, one was largely Judaeian, and each of the other three were home to a small number of Judaeians. The population of Alexandria at the time that Philo was writing (40s CE) was probably about half a million, and so it appears that the Judaeians of Alexandria numbered close to 200,000. Philo also claimed (on what basis we do not know) that in all of Egypt a million people were Judaeian.<sup>65</sup>

The number of people throughout the Roman empire who identified themselves as Judaeian is estimated to have been, by the end of the Augustan Age (31 BC-14 CE), between four and seven million, which is to say between seven and thirteen per cent of the empire's total population. The actual numbers are likely to have been closer to the lower than to the higher estimates,<sup>66</sup> but much depends on guesswork. The great majority of Judaeians were to be found in the Greek-speaking eastern provinces, led by Egypt and by Judaea itself. Judaism was also conspicuous in Cyrenaica. As we have seen, Judaism seems to have come to Cyrene in the form of a garrison of Judaeian soldiers, sent by Ptolemy Soter.<sup>67</sup> Three hundred years later well over a hundred thousand people in Cyrenaica must have been Judaeian and the population was divided into four classes: citizens, farmers, metics, and Judaeians.<sup>68</sup> Cyrenaica was Greek-speaking, and Judaeians were far fewer in the Latin-speaking provinces of North Africa and Europe (there was no Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible until the second century CE, when Christians made two of them). Nevertheless, communities of Greek-speaking Judaeians were found in the larger cities of the western provinces and possibly all the way to Spain. Except in the city of Rome, however, Judaeian communities in the Latin west were evidently very small. In Rome Judaeians may have been numbered in the low five figures, although some studies would put the figure as high as 50,000.

The expansion of Judaism throughout the lands of the eastern Mediterranean from the fourth century BC to the first century CE should be amazing. We are dealing here with at least a ten-fold and possibly a twenty-fold increase: when Alexander conquered these lands they could have included no more than 300,000 Judaeians, almost all of them living in Judaea itself.<sup>69</sup> The growth of the Judaeian Diaspora in Greek-speaking lands was just as dramatic as the earlier expansion in Mesopotamia (as was said in Chapter 4, it is likely that in Mesopotamia and the rest of the Parthian empire at least several hundred thousand and perhaps a million people were Judaeian by the end of the Hellenistic period). Had the rate of Judaism's expansion in the Roman empire during the three centuries prior to Augustus' death continued for the next three centuries, everyone in the empire would have been a Judaeian by the time that Constantine came to power.

Most educated people, far from being amazed at the dramatic expansion of Hellenistic Judaism, have not even heard of it. Those who are aware of it have usually been satisfied with the explanation that "the Jews" were a prolific nation, and that whatever increase in numbers they may have experienced was the result of their tendency to have large families. In this view,

a constant stream of emigrants poured out from Judaea during the Hellenistic period and headed for Gentile cities, with the result that by the time of Augustus the surplus population of Judaea had created a large Diaspora throughout the Mediterranean. This assumes that from the fourth century BC through the first century CE Judaeans for one reason or another produced far more children than did any other ancient population (whether in Judaea or anywhere else), that the survival rate of Jewish offspring was for some reason extraordinarily high during these four hundred years, and that in subsequent centuries either the birthrate or the survival rate plummeted so sharply that after the first century CE the number of Judaeans barely grew at all.

Such an explanation for the rise and fall of the Judaeans in the Greek-speaking world is, for all sorts of reasons, impossible. Historical studies of population growth are agreed that in the ancient world populations were relatively stable, with long-term growth rates in most places usually about 0.1% a year, rarely as high as 0.3%, and never reaching the 1% growth rate commonly experienced in the modern world since the rise of medical science.<sup>70</sup> It is unlikely that the total population of the eastern Mediterranean world grew noticeably between the late fourth century BC and the Augustan Age. Yet in that period the number of Judaeans had increased by ten or twenty times. The Judaeans - men, women and children - who came to western Anatolia in the third century BC probably numbered no more than eight or ten thousand. By the first century BC the number for a single province in western Anatolia had grown to approximately 300,000.<sup>71</sup>

Judaeans in the Hellenistic period were in theory a nation or even a family, but in fact were a religious community.<sup>72</sup> And the reason that Judaism expanded so dramatically in the Hellenistic period is that during those three centuries a small but steady stream of “God-fearing” Gentiles became Judaeans. We are not dealing here with the kind of mass conversions sometimes accomplished by Judaism and often by Christianity in Late Antiquity: in the Hellenistic period we do not hear about entire communities becoming Judaeans. But many individual Gentiles, and sometimes entire families, did join the synagogues, and in almost every city stood at least one synagogue. Let us imagine a small synagogue in a Greek city ca. 250 BC, its membership including thirty adults, all of whom were immigrants from Judaea. Then let us imagine that reproduction rates for this original group were those typical for an ancient population, but that every year the group was increased by just one proselytizing “God-fearer.” After twenty-seven years the number of Judaeans would have doubled, and by the Augustan Age would have been ten times its original size. The synagogues of, let us say, Cyprus must certainly have been established by Judaeans who came from elsewhere to settle in Cyprus. Far the most likely explanation is that Ptolemy I and his successors stationed Judaeans in various strongholds in Cyprus. But these soldiers and their families are not likely to have numbered more than a few thousand, and by the early second century CE the number of Judaeans in Cyprus seems to have been close to 200,000, perhaps as much as a third of the island’s population. How many of these Judaeans had Cypriote proselytes in their ancestry? My guess is that almost all of them did, and that the original Judaeans had contributed only a small fraction to the “gene pool” of this huge Judaeans population in Cyprus.

An inscription from the city of Berenike, in the North African province of Cyrenaica, tells us something about the membership of Judaeans synagogues in the first century CE. In 25 CE

an assembly of the Judaeans of Berenike (modern Benghazi, in Libya) expressed their gratitude for services rendered to the city's Judaeans by Marcus Tittius, the Roman governor of the province of Crete and Cyrenaica. The assembly stipulated that the archons (leaders) of the city's Judaeans were to see to it that a resolution of thanks to Tittius be inscribed on a stele of Parian marble and be set up "in the most conspicuous place of the amphitheater" at Berenike. All of the nineteen Judaeans archons (leaders) named in the inscription bear Greek names: Cleander son of Stratonicus, Euphranius son of Ariston, Sosigenes son of Sosippus, Andromachus son of Andromachus, and so on.<sup>73</sup> That these men were entirely descended from an immigrant stock that centuries earlier had come from Judaea is a theoretical possibility. But it is far more likely that the "Judaeans genealogies" of many of Berenike's nineteen Judaeans archons began when a Gentile proselyte - two, three, or ten generations back - became a Judaeans.

### **Traditional Jewish perspectives on the growth of the Diaspora**

Through most of the nineteenth century, so far as scholars recognized the growth of the Hellenistic Diaspora they supposed it was due to a high fertility of Jewish women and a low mortality of Jewish infants. Detailed studies of Judaism in the Hellenistic period changed that perception, and critical historians began to explain the expansion of Hellenistic Judaism as the result of conversion.<sup>74</sup> This explanation has recently been set forth with additional evidence and in great detail by Louis Feldman.<sup>75</sup> The earlier view, however, still has supporters. Notably, Martin Goodman's *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* emphasizes the fact that rabbinic and other Jewish sources in antiquity rarely mention proselytes or proselytizing. Goodman says very little about the numerical increase of the Diaspora, and he concludes that proselytes contributed very little to the Judaeans population in the Roman empire:

Nor should any conclusions about proselytizing be made from the general growth of the Jewish population in this period, which can be fully explained in other ways. Ancient writers explained the Jewish diaspora by the overpopulation of the home country (cf. Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 2.232) and Jewish fertility by the Jews' strange ideological opposition to abortion, infanticide, and contraception (cf. Tac. *Hist.*, 5.5). To this one could add the Jewish concept of charity, unique in the ancient world until Christianity, which made it a religious duty to prevent the children of the poor from dying in infancy, so that the main natural inhibition on population growth was at least partially stifled.<sup>76</sup>

The main problem of course is why these factors - high female fertility and low infant mortality - operated to such spectacular effect during the four centuries after Alexander, and began to weaken just as New Covenant Christianity began to grow.

On the general question of the growth of the Diaspora scholarship has been hampered by the Jewish and Christian belief - rooted in Biblical myth and nurtured for two thousand years - that "the Jews" have always been a national as well as a religious community, and that Gentile proselytes to Judaism could therefore never have been of much significance. The very term *Diaspora* ("scattering"), eagerly adopted and embraced by Judaeans in the Hellenistic period, implied that the Judaeans of the Diaspora either were themselves expatriates or were descended

from expatriates who - for one reason or another - had somehow been separated or “scattered” from their Judaeian homeland. This was indeed the belief of most Judaeians, both in the Diaspora and in Judaea itself, and had two important roots.

The lesser of these roots was the importance, until 70 CE, of Jerusalem and its temple in the Judaeian Diaspora. Ideally, adult Judaeian males - no matter how far from Judaea they lived - were to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year, for the festivals of Passover (*pesach*), Weeks (*shavuot*) and Tabernacles (*sukkot*). This was obviously impractical for Judaeians of the Diaspora, and they routinely fulfilled their obligation by paying a “temple tax” of two drachmas a year. Nevertheless, at least once in his lifetime a Diaspora Judaeian did make the pilgrimage, and so established his personal connection with the Jerusalem temple, the center of Judaism. Philo of Alexandria, early in the first century CE, spoke frequently of Jerusalem as the “mother-city” of Judaeians everywhere, and described Diaspora Judaeians as “colonists” from Jerusalem. A recent monograph on Philo contends that he essentially invented the myth of Judaeian origins in Jerusalem.<sup>77</sup>

The other and much more important root of the doctrine that Judaea was the homeland of Diaspora Judaeians was the ethnic ideology that from the beginning had been associated with the worship of Adonai. According to the myth, Adonai did not “cut a covenant” with his worshipers whoever they might be, but with a specific family: Jacob (Israel) and his sons and their descendants. In order to be included in the covenant you therefore had to imagine yourself as descended from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and one of Jacob’s sons, and so to be part of a huge kin-group. In the Hebrew Bible this kin-group was called either “the sons of Israel” or “the people of Israel.”<sup>78</sup> Because Adonai was the god of Israel his worshipers enjoyed his blessing and protection only by virtue of their belonging to the genealogical entity of Israel: by their descent, that is, from the patriarchs with whom Adonai had sworn his covenant. Whether they lived in Judaea itself or in the Diaspora, Judaeians were required to consider themselves as belonging to “the people of Israel” and more specifically to a single tribe or stock of that people (usually the tribe of Judah).<sup>79</sup> Gentiles, or non-Judaeians, were in the Septuagint and in everyday Judaeian parlance described as “belonging to a different stock” (*allophyloi*).

The spread of Judaism among the Gentiles in the Hellenistic period was not allowed to undermine this insistence on Judaeian tribalism and on the ethnic solidarity of “the people” of Adonai. Although Philo welcomed proselytes to Judaism, he spoke of Judaeians “as constituting an *ethnos* (‘nation’), composed of the twelve tribes; they are kinsmen and indeed brothers.”<sup>80</sup> Gentile proselytes were eager to embrace the myth of common descent, even though the proselytes themselves knew full well that their ancestors were not descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If you attended a synagogue but had not formally joined the Judaeian tribe and “the people of Israel” none of the mercy and of the miraculous power of Adonai was likely to do you much good. Thus the covenant ideology provided the incentive to graduate from the ranks of the God-fearers, and by circumcision or a ritual bath to *become* a Judaeian and to join “the people of Israel.” How insistent most Diaspora Judaeians were on their Judaeian kinship, and on the insignificance of proselytism, is strikingly illustrated by Tertullian, writing ca. 200 CE. Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos*, which the author says was inspired by a street-corner argument that he and other passersby heard between a Judaeian proselyte and a Christian, berates the

synagogues for priding themselves on the notion that they were descended from Israel (Jacob) and that the Gentile proselytes among them were nothing but “a little drop in a bucket” or “the dust on a threshing floor.”<sup>81</sup> The very sense of family that made the Judaeans community so satisfying for insiders, and that attracted a small but steady stream of outsiders, strongly discouraged the insiders from acknowledging how artificial the family actually was.

The Judaeans of Judaea were well aware that the number of Judaeans in Gentile lands was vast, and they explained this fact as the result of the “scattering” of Judaeans from their homeland. The occasion on which this “scattering” had occurred was identified sometimes with the Assyrians’ deportation of the Ten Tribes, sometimes with the specter of Nebuchadnezzar’s expedition against Jerusalem (587 BC), and sometimes with the end of the Babylonian Captivity. Long after Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and Hadrian’s expulsion of Judaeans from Jerusalem in 135 CE, these events were cited - especially by Christians - as explanations for the Diaspora. The ethnic (whether tribal, national or racial) perception of Judaism was sharpened and magnified by the Pharisees, who emerged as a hyper-religious sect in Judaea toward the end of the second century BC but may have had considerably earlier antecedents in Mesopotamia. Like other Judaeans, the Pharisees understood that Adonai had made a covenant with Israel, communicating the terms through Moses on Mt. Sinai. But the covenant that the Pharisees constructed went far beyond what ordinary Judaeans supposed. For the Pharisees, the covenant required scrupulous obedience to the *torah*, oral as well as written. “The Judaeans” (almost always with the definite article, denoting a corporate entity) were to be a holy people, avoiding any pollution by contact with worshipers of gods other than Adonai. Gentiles were by definition unclean and so to be kept at a distance. The term “Pharisees” is a transliteration, via the Greek, from the Hebrew word *perushim*, which meant “the separated ones.” It is possible that the name came from the sectarians’ resolution to remain ritually pure by physically separating themselves from Gentiles and Gentile society. The Pharisees were in any case adamantly opposed to having or permitting the kind of contact with Gentiles that was a prerequisite for proselytizing. Socializing or even conversing with Gentiles was for the Pharisee a risky business.

This separation from the Gentile world seems to have been in sharp contrast to the relatively easy mixing that had been going on in Mesopotamia since the sixth century BC and in Egypt and elsewhere in Greek-speaking cities since the fourth. Although the Pharisees were a minor sect until the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, they became the rabbis of the post-temple period and eventually the rabbis dominated Judaism in the Aramaic-speaking world. The Mishnah and Talmud contained detailed and elaborate instructions about avoiding contact with Gentiles, lest the Judaeans compromise the purity of their worship of Adonai. That God-fearing Gentiles typically worshiped side-by-side Judaeans in Hellenistic synagogues was a scandal for the rabbis and their students in the Tannaitic academies. Thus Pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism from the beginning exhorted the Judaeans to be a tribe or “a people” separate from the Gentile world. From within that perspective it has been and still is difficult to recognize the remarkable growth of the Judaeans Diaspora as resulting from the proselytizing of Gentiles to Judaism.

Many agnostic or secular Jewish scholars have also been reluctant to see the importance of Gentile proselytizing during the Hellenistic period. Scholars who are proud to identify themselves as Jewish, but are not eager to define that identity in terms of religious practice or

belief, have been comfortable with the idea that “being Jewish” is essentially a matter of genetics. The ideology of the modern nation-state of Israel has also promoted the view that the Jewish Diaspora was a “scattering” from ancient Israel and Judah, that founding the State of Israel was tantamount to the ingathering of exiles, and that modern Israel is and must remain “the Jewish homeland.” If most people who today identify themselves as Jewish are descended from proselytizing Gentiles, then it is difficult to argue that they or their parents have “returned” to Israel.

### **Revisionist scholarship on “the Jewish people”**

In recent decades assumptions about “the Jewish people” have begun to be eroded by revisionist scholarship of various kinds. Writing in the *American Historical Review* in 1999, Martin Cohen summarized this important development:

The idea, nurtured in the last century in the language of modern nationalism, of the Jewish people as a coherent, self-identifying ethnos of unbroken continuity has been the object of scholarly challenge on many fronts, with extraordinary revelations that yield a more complex and far more colorful picture of the development of Jewish identity.<sup>82</sup>

David Kessler, who has championed the cause of the Falashas, the “black Jews” who in the 1980s were brought to Israel from Ethiopia, frequently challenged the widespread idea that Judaism’s dependence on genetics rather than conversion was just as pronounced in antiquity as it has been in modern times. “The notion of a Jewish racial group,” he observed, “has long been regarded by anthropologists as a myth, though the idea that Judaism can be spread only by a movement of people and not by dissemination and conversion dies hard.”<sup>83</sup>

Another important contributor to the scholarly challenge to which Martin Cohen refers has been Paul Wexler, Professor of Linguistics at Tel Aviv University and perhaps the leading expert on the origins of the Yiddish language. In separate books in the 1990s Wexler argued that most people who in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries identified themselves as either Sephardic or Ashkenazic Jews were descended from Gentile proselytes to Judaism.<sup>84</sup> Most recently, the title of a book by Shlomo Sand - a historian of modern Europe who also teaches at Tel Aviv University - asks *When and How was the Jewish People Invented?*<sup>85</sup> The answer that Sand’s book offers to that question is that “the Jewish people” is in large part an invention of nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals in Europe (and especially in Germany), whose horizons were increasingly shaped by the nationalist ideologies around them. Sand’s analysis may underestimate the degree to which the ideology of “the Jewish people” is rooted in the Talmud and in the Hebrew Bible itself, but it is a salutary corrective to that ancient perspective.

### **Traditional Christian perspectives on the growth of the Diaspora**

For entirely different reasons, Christian scholars have been even more reluctant than Jewish scholars to acknowledge that the rapid growth of the Hellenistic Diaspora was a consequence of Gentile proselytes becoming Judaeans. Paul, who was schooled as a Pharisee and who formulated the New Covenant gospel, of course saw the Judaeans of his day as “a

people” and understood the Judaeans of the Diaspora to have been scattered from the homeland. Like Paul, subsequent preachers of the New Covenant declared that the Old Covenant had been restricted to “the Judaeans people” or - later - “the Jews” and had been virtually inaccessible for Gentiles. On this view, only by canceling the Old Covenant and establishing the New Covenant could God extend his grace to Gentiles as well as Judaeans. According to God’s plan, so Paul revealed (Romans 11:25-36), the Judaeans are temporarily to reject the New Covenant. But once all the Gentiles have accepted the New Covenant, so also will all of Israel.

Belief that the Old Covenant had been restricted to “the Jewish people” was therefore a prerequisite for belief in the New Covenant. To admit that prior to Jesus’ crucifixion millions of Gentiles had already converted to Judaism, and that had the trend continued virtually the entire Roman empire would have become Judaeans, would be to admit that the Old Covenant was working well enough and that the New Covenant was unnecessary. Not surprisingly, Christians have been reluctant to recognize the rapid growth of the Diaspora as the result of proselytizing.

The Judaeans’ own insistence that their vast numbers in the Parthian and Roman empires were the result of a “scattering” (for the Greek word *diaspora* the Latin counterpart was *dispersio*) of what had once been a compact tribal community eventually became an important piece of Christian propaganda against Judaism. It is instructive to see how Christians in Late Antiquity explained the presence of Judaeans throughout the Mediterranean world. Although no longer quite so vibrant as it had been in the Augustan Age, Judaism still numbered several million people, and synagogues were thriving in most cities of the Roman empire. The members of these congregations, so Christian writers of Late Antiquity declared, were descendants of those Judaeans who had been scattered from Jerusalem when (in 70 CE) the temple was burned and the city was sacked, these events being God’s punishment of Judaea for having rejected Jesus. Writing in the year 401, the chronicler Sulpicius Severus detailed the punishments that the Romans inflicted on Judaea in 70:

So, at God’s bidding, with everyone (i.e. in Titus’ council) fired up, the temple was destroyed, 331 years ago. And this final destruction of the temple and this last captivity of the Judaeans, because of which these exiles from their fatherland are seen dispersed over all the world, are a daily reminder to the world that they have been punished for no reason other than their raising their impious hands against Christ.<sup>86</sup>

This “last captivity of the Judaeans,” a figment of the imagination, was an article of faith already at the beginning of the fourth century, when Lactantius informed his readers that after the burning of the Jerusalem temple the Judaeans were “banished for ever from their own lands.”<sup>87</sup> Josephus, in his detailed account of the Judaeans-Roman war of 66-70, says that Titus enslaved 97,000 Judaeans and sold them, but says nothing about an expulsion of Judaeans from Jerusalem or Judaea.<sup>88</sup> Sixty-five years later, when the Bar Kochba war ended in 135, Hadrian did prohibit Judaeans from living in Jerusalem or its immediate environs. But this edict resulted primarily in the displaced Judaeans’ resettlement in towns and villages of western Judaea (severely depopulated by the Bar Kochba war) and especially of Galilee and the Golan heights.<sup>89</sup> Once again, no contemporary source mentions a general expulsion of Judaeans to the Diaspora. That the Judaeans Diaspora throughout the Mediterranean was a result of the Roman emperors’

expulsion of the Judaeans from Judaea is an aetiology that Christians put forward as an explanation for the great spread of Judaism in the Roman empire. They found the aetiology so attractive that it became “common knowledge” and eventually was believed even by Judaeans themselves. This “final captivity” in 70 or 135 CE was described by Christians as destined to last forever.<sup>90</sup>

Thus the amazing spread and growth of Judaism, far from being seen as evidence of the great appeal of Judaism to the Gentile world, was explained by Christians as the penalty that God imposed on “the Jewish people” for their failure to accept the New Covenant and for their killing of Jesus the Christ. Those who propagated this myth had no idea that the Diaspora was numbered in the millions even before Jesus was born. Bad theology requires bad history.

### **The beginnings of a Judaeans literary culture in the Hellenistic Diaspora**

The Judaeans literary tradition began in the Hellenistic period. It was from the Hellenes, that is, that Judaeans acquired a taste for reading and writing books. The Septuagint was one of the first-fruits of the interaction between Hellenes and Judaeans. The third century BC also saw the establishment of Judaeans elementary and secondary schools and the first truly literary activity among Judaeans.<sup>91</sup> Only after the publication of the Septuagint did a few Judaeans begin to write for publication and to attach their names to what they wrote. Because it did not become part of the canon of either rabbinic Judaism or Christianity most of this literature, which was written in Greek, has since been lost.<sup>92</sup> Its character was what can be called “apologetic” in the original meaning of that word. These books, that is, were “defenses” of Judaism, or advertisements of it. Addressing themselves to the culturally dominant Hellenes, the Judaeans authors tried to put their own religious and historical tradition in the best possible light. Late in the third century BC a Judaeans named Demetrios wrote a *History of the Kings in Judaea*. In the next century Eupolemos wrote another prose work with the same title and Philo the Elder (note the Greek names of these authors) wrote the history of the Judaeans in the form of an epic poem, in dactylic hexameters. Another author, Ezekiel (or Ezekelios as he Hellenized himself), wrote a tragedy in the tradition of Sophokles and Euripides, but instead of elaborating a Greek myth Ezekelios chose for his subject the Hebrew myth of the Exodus (his tragedy was titled *Exagoge*). The *Letter of Aristeas to Philokrates* - written by the author whom we designate as Pseudo-Aristeas - was also a celebration of Judaism, the Septuagint, and the Jerusalem temple. The culmination of the apologetic tradition in Hellenistic Judaism came with the voluminous writings of Philo of Alexandria.

The purpose of most of these compositions was to convince the Hellenes that the Judaeans, far from being barbarians, had wisdom that surpassed that of the Hellenes. In this early stage of contact with Hellenes, the Judaeans of the Diaspora and of Jerusalem (though not the rural populace in Judaea) took long steps toward Hellenizing themselves superficially, without giving up their Judaeans identity and religion. Most importantly, and in contrast to the later insularity of rabbinic and Aramaic-speaking Judaism, the Judaeans apologists of the Hellenistic Diaspora were eager to converse with the Greeks, in Greek. It must be remarked how narrow was the range of interest shown by the Judaeans compositions. So dominant was the cult of Adonai, so strong the compulsion to maintain the characteristically Judaeans traditions (the

Sabbath, circumcision, abstention from “unclean” foods), and so regular the tendency to dichotomize all of humankind into Judaeans and Gentiles, that virtually the only topics about which Judaeans wrote were those that affirmed either Judaeans identity or the Judaeans religion. The writers tirelessly celebrated something or other about the Judaeans heritage, or argued that Moses or Solomon was wiser than Homer or Plato.

In the Hellenistic period other books, usually anonymous or pseudonymous, were written specifically for Judaeans, and many of these have been preserved because they made their way into the canon of sacred texts. For centuries they were read in Greek-speaking synagogues, and so also in the early Christian churches. Although eventually jettisoned by rabbinic Judaism, they survived in the Christian tradition, in many branches of which the books are still honored as sacred - although apocryphal - texts. Some of these books, such as First Esdras or Second Maccabees, were in Greek from the beginning. Others, such as First Maccabees, Judith and Tobit - were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic but were preserved in Greek translation. A high proportion of the books written for Judaeans were pseudepigraphic: they pretend, that is, to have been written by the great figures of the Judaeans past. Favorite pseudo-authors were Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Ezra, and Baruch, all of whom were well known from the Septuagint. The actual authors of the pseudepigrapha hoped that their books would be accepted as ancient and sacred writings, and would be read to the congregation in the synagogues, and often the ruse succeeded. These pseudepigrapha, of course, had to be written in Hebrew or at least in Aramaic in order to have any chance of being accepted as genuine ancient texts, but translations into Greek were quickly made from the Semitic originals.

## Summary

In the Hellenistic Diaspora relations between Hellenes and Judaeans were, for the most part and for a very long time, congenial and mutually beneficial. The Hellenes admired the Judaeans’ worship of a single aniconic god, and hundreds of thousands of Hellenes became “God-fearers” and then became Judaeans. On the other side, Judaeans adopted the Greek language (and usually Greek names), studied Greek philosophy (and learned about the philosophers’ God), and began a literary tradition that continues to the present day. In the Hellenistic period Diaspora Judaism was not hostile to the dominant Greek culture. A strong opposition to Hellenism, as we shall see, took root in Judaea itself in the second century BC, and flourished. In contrast, Diaspora Judaism in Greek-speaking lands was beginning to compete with Hellenism, but the two were not yet in conflict.

---

1. See Hengel 1981, pp. 28-29 for details on the taxes collected from Judaea by the ruling power, from the Persians to the Romans.

2. Pliny, *Natural History* 5.16.74 lists ten cities of the Decapolis but notes that various writers supply various lists.

3. In the Roman period Aramaic inscriptions were set up occasionally. Grant 1984, p. 317, n.

---

13, reports that at Beth-Shearim 175 Greek inscriptions dating to the Roman period have been found, along with 32 in a Semitic language (most of them in Aramaic, a few in Hebrew).

4. Hengel 1981, p. 59.

5. Hengel 1981, pp. 63-4.

6. Josephus *AJ* 12.225 and *BJ* 1.515. On the whole matter see Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (1959), pp. 84-87.

7. Feldman 1993, p. 87, notes that “the papyri now show conclusively that Jews did serve in the armies of the Ptolemies and that there is no basis for the skepticism of those who had wondered how Jews could have served as soldiers when they were not allowed by the Torah to work on the Sabbath.” Especially helpful on the subject of Judaeans as professional troops in Hellenistic armies is Hengel 1981, pp. 12-18, with accompanying notes.

8. For details see Porten 1968. For a recent summary of the military settlement and especially of its “temple” see Rosenberg 2004.

9. In Letter B 13 in Porten *et al.* 1996, Hananiah instructs other Yahweh worshipers about the proper observance of Passover. But even in this “Passover letter” Hananiah’s salutation includes the hope that “the gods” will be solicitous for the welfare of his brethren.

10. A summary of Hekataios’ story appears at Josephus *Contra Apionem* 1.192.

11. See Hengel 1981, p. 16: “Thus the Aramaic Cowley Papyrus 81, c. 310 BC, newly edited by J. Harmatta, mentions ten places between Migdāl on the north-eastern border of Egypt and Syene in the south where Jews were settled; even two priests are mentioned.”

12. For the figure of 30,000 see Pseudo-Aristeas, 13. In his note to that paragraph, Moses Hadas cites four papyri that mention Jewish garrisons in Ptolemaic Egypt. The papyri date from 259, 226, 210, and 111 BC. Josephus *Contra Apionem* 1.186 cites Hecataeus of Abdera’s statement that after the Battle of Gaza in 312 BC many Syrians, including Judaeans, were eager to accompany Ptolemy I and to associate themselves with his rule. See also Gruen 2002, p. 68.

13. For Ptolemy Soter’s dispatch of a Jewish garrison to Cyrene see Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.44.

14. In addition to the *Letter of Aristeas* see Josephus, *AJ* 12.11-118 for a lengthy account of Philadelphos’ generosity in securing the translation of the sacred texts. For the growth of legends about the Septuagint see *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), a book begun by Abraham Wasserstein and completed by his son, David Wasserstein. As the Wassersteins show, the legends (mostly asserting the holy character, or divine inspiration, of the Greek translation) arose in Hellenistic Judaism and were then elaborated and propagated by Greek-speaking Christians. By Late Antiquity most Hellenistic Judaeans had set aside the Septuagint in favor of other Greek

---

translations, but for Greek-speaking Christians the Septuagint remained their sacred text of the Old Testament for another twelve hundred years.

15. For a comprehensive survey see Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

16. J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Egypt and the Rise of the Synagogue," *Journal of Theol. Stud.* 38 (1987), pp. 1-15.

17. Even Jeremiah, whose father was a priest of Yahweh, had apparently never read or even heard Exodus 22:29. In his denunciation of infant sacrifice Jeremiah erroneously presents Yahweh as saying (7:31) that infant sacrifice "was no command of mine; indeed it never entered my mind" (OSB).

18. Although the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah had been composed by ca. 300 BC, the Septuagint of the third century BC did not, it seems, include them. Nor did it include the so-called "Writings" (Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes) or the Book of Daniel. All of these, with the exception of Esther, seem to have been added to "the Law and the Prophets" in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC by the Maccabees, who drew up for themselves a canon of texts that they hoped would be regularly read. Ben Sirach, who wrote ca. 180 BC, did not include Ezra and Nehemiah among his gallery of "great men." Even in Paul's time the Book of Esther was virtually unknown to synagogues outside of Mesopotamia, and in Judaea (Palestine) itself was not regularly read in the synagogues before the third century CE.

19. On Yom Kippur the name Yahweh was evidently pronounced no fewer than ten times by the high priest; see Tractate *Yoma* 39b. In the time of Ben Sirach the name *Yahweh* was also apparently still being pronounced in the Priestly Blessing given daily at the Jerusalem temple. But even on these occasions of high ceremony the name was eventually replaced by the title *Adonai*. See F. Ó Fearghail, "Sir 50, 5-21: Yom Kippur or the Daily Whole-Offering?" *Biblica* 59 (1978), pp. 306-07 with note 12. Because the name YHWH does not appear in either the Song of Solomon or Ecclesiastes, whether these two books "defiled the hands" was debated in rabbinic circles late in the first century CE. After much debate the decision was made that the two books did indeed "defile the hands" (the decision perhaps rested on the rabbis' assumption that the books were written by Solomon).

20. Hengel 1981, p. 26.

21. Hengel 1981, p. 28.

22. II Macc 3:22-28.

23. Josephus *Antiquities* 12.5 (148-53). For a detailed discussion of the letter and its implications see Abraham Schalit, "The Letter of Antiochus III to Zeuxis Regarding the Establishment of Jewish Military Colonies in Phrygia and Lydia," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 50 (1960), pp. 289-318. On the letter's authenticity see, most recently, Trebilco 2004, pp. 37-38. Unlike modern scholars, Josephus himself was not aware that the letter illuminates the

---

beginnings of Judaism in western Anatolia. Josephus cites the letter merely as one more example of the honors and privileges that Hellenistic kings showered upon his countrymen.

24. Translation by Ralph Marcus, in the Loeb Classical Library.

25. Marcus translated εἰς τὰς χρείας ὑπηρετοῦσιν as “to those engaged in public service.” This was challenged by Schalit. On the basis of various parallels in Hellenistic Greek, Schalit translated the phrase as “to those engaged in religious duties.” Schalit 1960, pp. 310-15.

26. On the larger question of the Judaeon Diaspora in Anatolia see Trebilco 1991.

27. Rutgers 1998, pp. 103-04.

28. The inscription is no. 70 in the *CIRB* (= *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani*, ed. V. V. Struve, Moscow 1965). I thank Professor Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen for alerting me to this publication.

29. The Talmudic rabbis believed that before the destruction of 70 CE Jerusalem had hundreds of synagogues, and as many courts of law. The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate *Kethuboth*, Folio 105a) reports an opinion that the Jerusalem synagogues numbered 394. The Palestinian Talmud (Tractate *Kethuboth*, Folio 35c and Folio 73d) variously reports the number as either 460 or 480 synagogues. The rabbis must therefore have imagined that these Jerusalem synagogues were small structures.

30. See Levine 2000, p. 97 (on Ostia) and pp. 100-01 (Delos).

31. BT, Tractate *Sukkah*, Folio 51b. Although the rabbinic evidence apparently transfers to the congregation at the Alexandria synagogue much that originally applied to the crowds at the Jerusalem temple, evidence from Philo indicates that in the first century CE Alexandria’s “great synagogue” (the city had many other synagogues, most of which must have been quite small) was indeed impressive. See Levine 2000, pp. 81-89.

32. The inscription is *CIJ* 2.1404.

33. The Judaeon belief in the eternity of the Torah, and in its inscription in Hebrew on Heavenly Tablets, is exactly paralleled by the Muslim belief in the eternity of the Quran, and its inscription in Arabic on Heavenly Tablets. For references to the Heavenly Tablets in *Jubilees* see 3:10-11; 4:5; 4:32; 6:19; 15:25-26; 16:29; 28:6; 32:10-11; 32:15; 32:28; 33:10; 49:7-8; 50:13.

34. At 3:31-32 the author of *Jubilees* decries the public nakedness of the Gentiles. In the 170s BC the opening of a Greek gymnasium in Jerusalem caused considerable controversy. See Hengel 1981, vol. I, pp. 70-71.

35. Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

36. The Septuagint translators did not transliterate the divine name, Yahweh. In place of it

---

they used either the term κύριος (“lord”) by itself, with no definite article, or the term κύριος ὁ θεός (“lord, the god”).

37. *Letter of Ps.-Aristeas*, 25-27 (R. H. Charles translation).

38. For an excellent introduction to Philo Judaeus see Sandmel 1979. On pp. xi-xii Sandmel provides a list of the conventional Latin titles for Philo’s treatises. For a specialized study of Philo’s attitude toward native Judaeans and proselytes see Birnbaum 1996.

39. For an example of Philo citing earlier “philosophers” for his allegorizing of the Tanakh see *De Abrahamo* 99, where he says he has heard some very persuasive allegorizing of the Genesis story about Pharaoh’s affair with Abraham’s wife, Sarah.

40. Peters 1970, p. 300.

41. Josephus, *AJ* 18.159-160, and 20.100. Josephus informs his readers that Alexander Lysimachus was the *alabarch* of the Alexandrian Judaeans, an office with which his readers must have been familiar. Juvenal *Satire* 1.130 refers to an Egyptian *arabarch*.

42. Sandmel 1979, pp. 11-12.

43. Our word *encyclopedia* comes from the Greek term. Philo often alludes to such an education and refers to it explicitly at *De agricultura* 9 and at *De fuga et inventione* 183.

44. See, for example, *De confusione linguarum* 4, where Philo aptly quotes *Odyssey* 11:315-316 as he compares the Tower of Babel story with the Aloadae trying to pile up mountains in order to reach the sky (Ossa on Olympos, and then Pelion on Ossa). And here he calls Homer the greatest and most glorious of poets.

45. *Legum allegoriarum* I, 2-16.

46. *Legum allegoriarum* III, 65-199.

47. Sandmel 1979, p. 107.

48. Birnbaum 1996, pp. 23 ff. and 30 ff. At p. 25 Birnbaum notes that “seeing God” had by the first century become important in Greek, and especially in Platonic, philosophy, and she suggests that Philo’s “etymology linking ‘Israel’ with seeing God derives in all likelihood from earlier Jewish exegetes.”

49. On the early Christians’ interest in Philo see Runia 1993.

50. According to Sandmel 1979, p. 174, note 24, in the rabbinic tradition the first reference to Philo was made by Azariah de Rossi, a rabbi in Venice. Possibly de Rossi (1511-1578) took note of Philo because of the editio princeps that appeared in 1552.

51. Carl Gustav Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria als Ausleger des Alten Testaments* (Jena: Dufft,

---

1875), was a pioneering work on Philo's methods, allegories, and etymologies. Philo is now one of a very few ancient writers to whom a scholarly journal is devoted. *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* is an "annual journal," if we may use that oxymoron, published since 1989 by the Society for Biblical Literature.

52. The Hebrew commands the Israelites not to revile *elohim*. The conventional translation of the Hebrew text of Exodus 22:28 would be something on the order of the OSB's "You must not revile God."

53. Rutgers 1998, p. 108, observes that in the wall paintings of the Dura synagogue the miracle of Ezekiel and the dry bones (Ezekiel 37) "takes up no less than seven and a half meters of wall space."

54. Cf. Perkins 1984, p. 52: "Conversion to Judaism and the promise of immortality are linked in *Joseph and Asenath*. The proselyte is given a meal that consists of the bread of life or immortality (15:3-4). Resurrection or being gathered up into Paradise is symbolized by the food given (16:6-8). Joseph refuses to kiss Asenath because lips that have blessed the living God, eaten the blessed bread of life, and drunk the cup of immortality, should not touch a strange woman who blesses idols and eats from their table (8:5). *Joseph and Asenath* has thoroughly assimilated the vocabulary of immortality and incorruptibility. It forms part of the appeal for conversion to Judaism."

55. On *pairidaêza* see James Charlesworth, p. 306, in H. Shanks, ed., *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992).

56. For the Avesta's single reference to *pairidaêza* see Choksy 2003, pp. 36-37, with note 66.

57. See Bernstein 1993, pp. 179-196 for a detailed look at the picture(s) of Hell in *I Enoch*.

58. From R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

59. I am indebted to Richard Green's, *The Origins of Hell*, an unpublished M.A. paper in Classics at Vanderbilt University (2003), for bringing out the parallels between the descriptions of Hell in Plato's *Phaedo* and in *I Enoch*.

60. Levine, *Synagogue*, pp. 471 ff.

61. Levine 2000, pp. 393-94.

62. Josephus, *BJ* 2.559-561.

63. Feldman 1993, pp. 67-8.

64. Gruen 2002, pp. 74-75.

---

65. *In Flaccum* 55 and 43.

66. The fundamental work on population in all of the ancient world is still Julius Beloch, *Die Bevölkerung der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Leipzig: 1886). At p. 507 Beloch estimated that there were 54,000,000 people in the Roman empire at Augustus' death. Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904-05), vol. I, pp. 1-8, estimated that in the first century CE Judaeans numbered about 4,000,000. That is now considered a low estimate, but is perhaps closer to reality than the much higher estimates made in the last thirty-five years. A detailed study of the ancient Judaeans population was made by Salo Baron, "Population," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13 (1971), pp. 866-903. Baron concluded that by the first century CE the Judaeans, who in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC had numbered only about 150,000, had increased to about 8,000,000. Of these, Baron thought, 7,000,000 lived in the Roman empire and 1,000,000 in the Parthian empire. Unfortunately, Baron's estimate for the Roman empire was based in large part on an erroneous statement by Bar-Hebraeus, a Syrian Christian writing in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to Bar-Hebraeus, the emperor Claudius "ordered the Jews in his domain to be counted, and their number was 6,944,000 men." McGing 2002, pp. 92-94, points out that Bar-Hebraeus' very precise figure (for *men*, suggesting that Bar-Hebraeus imagined the total number of Judaeans to be three or four times that high) came from an erroneous reading of Jerome's Latin version of Eusebius' *Chronicle*. Jerome there says nothing about Judaeans but instead reports that Claudius counted the Roman citizens - *cives Romani* - and found that there were 6,944,000 of them. Baron's estimate is implicitly accepted by Feldman 1993, p. 293, and by Grant 1984, p. 60: "The number of Jews in the world in Julius Caesar's time is impossible to determine: perhaps there were about eight million, as against fourteen million today. Out of these, it may be estimated that about a million lived outside the Roman empire - mainly in the Parthian kingdom, and most of all in Babylonia.... It is estimated that in the eastern provinces as a whole the Jews comprised nearly twenty per cent of the total population." Smallwood 1981, pp. 120-22, discusses the high population of the Diaspora but does not estimate its overall size. For another estimate see Meeks 1983, p. 34: "In the first century some five to six million Jews were living in Diaspora, that is, more or less permanently settled outside Palestine.... There was a substantial Jewish population in virtually every town of any size in the lands bordering the Mediterranean. Estimates run from 10 to 15 percent of the total population of a city - in the case of Alexandria, perhaps even higher."

67. Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.44.

68. Josephus, *JA* 14.115-118, quoting the geographer Strabo.

69. For a population estimate based on a survey of archaeologically attested habitation sites see Magen Broshi and Israel Finkelstein, "The Population of Palestine in Iron II," *BASOR* 287 (1992), pp. 47-60. Broshi and Finkelstein conclude that in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC the population of all of Palestine (from upper Galilee in the north to Beersheva in the south, including all of the "Philistine" coastal plain) was no more than approximately 400,000, of whom some 60,000 lived in the coastal plain and were presumably neither Israelites nor Judahites. For the Byzantine period, Broshi and Finkelstein (p. 56) estimate the population of all of Palestine at about a

---

million. The population of Judah after Ezra's reform in the fifth century BC was probably between 200,000 and 300,000. The census given at Ezra 2:1-67 (or Nehemiah 7:6-73) counted 42,360, the figure probably referring to heads of families. Although the text presents it as a list of those who returned to Judah from Babylon in the time of Cyrus the list seems to have no connection with a return from exile. Miller and Hayes 1986, p. 447, suggest that "it may be some census count, a tax document, or a population count from a later period which has been incorporated into the text and treated as a list of returnees." For scholarship on the Ezra and Nehemiah lists see Grabbe 1992, pp. 38-40.

70. On the general topic see Massimo Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007). In the lands included in the Roman empire the population in the third century seems to have been only slightly larger than it had been in the third century BC. Donald Engels, "The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World," *Classical Philology* 75 (1980), p. 116, concluded that "the highest average population growth rate in antiquity was probably little more than 1 per 1,000 per year for any long period and for any large population." Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century the "doubling time" for most population groups seems to have been a little more than 1000 years.

71. The province of Asia (some thirty thousand square miles in western Anatolia) probably included about 300,000 Judaeans in the middle of the first century BC. At Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 66-69 we learn that Flaccus, the governor of the province, was charged with having confiscated over 120 lbs of gold that had been gathered as their annual temple-tax by the province's Judaeans. Smallwood 1981, p. 126, n. 21, notes that "a pound of gold was at this time worth approximately 1,000 silver denarii or drachmae." The 120 lbs of gold were thus the equivalent of 120,000 drachmas. Because the temple-tax for an adult Judaeon male was two drachmas a year (see Feldman 1993, p. 48), we can estimate that in Flaccus' province there were at least 60,000 Judaeon men between the ages of 20 and 50, and a total Judaeon population of about 300,000.

72. Note the generalization of Dio Cassius, in the third century CE. At 37.15-17 Dio explained that the name *Ioudaioi* is not really an ethnonym: the name applies to all people, no matter what their ancestry, who have adopted the Judaeon religion and customs.

73. *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*, Vol. 1, no 1024. Translation in Reinhold 1983, p. 92.

74. That proselytes and descendants of proselytes accounted for most Judaeans in late Hellenistic and Roman times was concluded long ago by two specialists on ancient Judaism: Emil Schürer and Jean Juster. The first edition of Emil Schürer's *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* appeared in two volumes, published in 1886 and 1890. Schürer continued to study the topic and by the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of his great work (published in Leipzig, by Hinrichs, in 1909) it had grown to three volumes. A revised edition, translated into English and revised by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black and Martin Goodman, appeared in three volumes between 1973 and 1987. Schürer's much younger contemporary, Jean Juster, published his slightly less ambitious *Les Juifs dans l'empire romain* in two volumes (Paris: Geuthner, 1914).

---

The conclusions of Schürer and Juster on the extent of proselytizing to ancient Judaism were generally accepted.

75. Louis Feldman's *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) makes use of the epigraphical and papyrological evidence published since the time of Schürer and Juster. Feldman's final six chapters are devoted to showing the consequences of proselytism to Judaism, especially in the period from Alexander's time to the Bar Kochba revolt, but also in the third and fourth centuries CE.

76. Goodman 1994, p. 84. Although he alludes to it in this paragraph on p. 84, Goodman does not discuss the remarkable increase in size of the Judaeon Diaspora during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Many of Goodman's arguments were answered in advance by Feldman 1993, pp. 290-93.

77. Niehoff 2001. For a less radical view see Pearce 2004, p. 36: "Philo may have been the first to articulate the concept of Jerusalem as mother-city, but in doing so he drew on traditions with strong roots in Jewish Scripture."

78. The term "nation" (*goy* in Hebrew) had negative connotations in the Hebrew Bible. The translators of the Septuagint used the term *ethnos* as its Greek equivalent. "The nations" (*goyim*, or *ethnē*) have in English translations most often been rendered as "the Gentiles" or "the heathen" rather than "the nations." For their own group (the "us" in the "us-them" dichotomy into which they divided the world) the writers of the HB regularly used the term *'am*. In Greek this Hebrew word was translated as *λαός*, and is usually rendered in English as "people."

79. The word for "tribe" in Hebrew was ordinarily *shēvet*, although the terms *matteh* and occasionally *mishpacha* were also used. In the Septuagint the normal Greek translation of *shēvet* was *φυλή*. For an excellent analysis of the Hebrew terms see Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979), pp. 245-270.

80. Sandmel 1979, p. 106.

81. Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 1.2 (trans. S. Thelwall). Goodman 1994 seems to assume that had proselytes joined the synagogues in substantial numbers, ancient Jewish writers would surely have boasted about this development.

82. Martin Cohen, *AHR* 104 (1999), pp. 284-85, in reviewing Wexler 1996.

83. Kessler 1996, p. xxv.

84. First came Wexler's, *The Ashkenazic Jews: A Slavo-Turkic People in Search of a Jewish Identity* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Press, 1993). This was followed by his *The Non-Jewish Origin of the Sephardic Jews* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

85. The Hebrew title of Sand's book (published in 2008 by Resling, in Jerusalem) is "Matai ve'ech humtza ha'am hayehudi?"

---

86. Servius Sulpicius *Chron.* 2.30.8: ita Dei nutu accensis omnium animis templum dirutum, abhinc annos trecentos triginta et unum. atque haec ultima templi eversio et postrema Iudaeorum captivitas, qua extorres patria per orbem terrarum dispersi cernuntur, cotidie mundo testimonio sunt, non ob aliud eos quam ob illatas Christo impias manus fuisse punitos. The Gentile and Christian understanding that the Judaeans of the Diaspora were *extorres patria* may have been encouraged by the edict of Hadrian, in 135 CE, that banned Judaeans from the city of Jerusalem and its immediate environs. But the natives (hardly more than 100,000) who were forced to emigrate from Jerusalem and its surrounding villages at the end of the Bar Kochba war would have been a tiny fraction (perhaps no more than 2%) of the empire's Judaeans.

87. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.21.

88. *BJ* 6.420-21. See also Smallwood 1981, p. 327.

89. Millar 1993, pp. 449-50. Dio Cassius' report (69.14) that 580,000 Judaeans were killed in the Bar Kochba war and that many others died of disease and starvation is probably an exaggeration. It is nevertheless quite likely that those Judaeans who survived, and whom Hadrian displaced from Jerusalem and eastern Judaea after the war, did not need to go far to find a place in which to resettle.

90. Sulpicius, *Chron.* 2.30.8, contrasted the permanence of the "last captivity" with the relatively short duration of the earlier captivities that God had inflicted on the Judaeans for their sins: nam saepe alias, cum propter peccata captivitatibus traderentur, numquam tamen ultra LXX annos servitutis poenam pependerunt. The *postrema captivitas* or "last captivity" to which Sulpicius refers was a favorite theme of John Chrysostom, in his eight *Homilies against the Judaeans*. John too stressed that although the first three captivities (Bondage in Egypt, Babylonian Captivity, and the Seleukid usurpation of the Jerusalem temple) were temporary, the "last captivity," which commenced with the destruction of the temple and resulted from the Judaeans' killing of the Christ, would never end. See, for example, *Homily against the Judaeans* 5.1.7: "You Jews did crucify him. But after he died on the cross, he then destroyed your city; it was then that he dispersed your people; it was then that he scattered your nation over the face of the earth."

91. On the first schools see Cohen 1987, pp. 120-21.

92. For what remains see Carl Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983 [four volumes]).