

ONE GOD OR MANY?

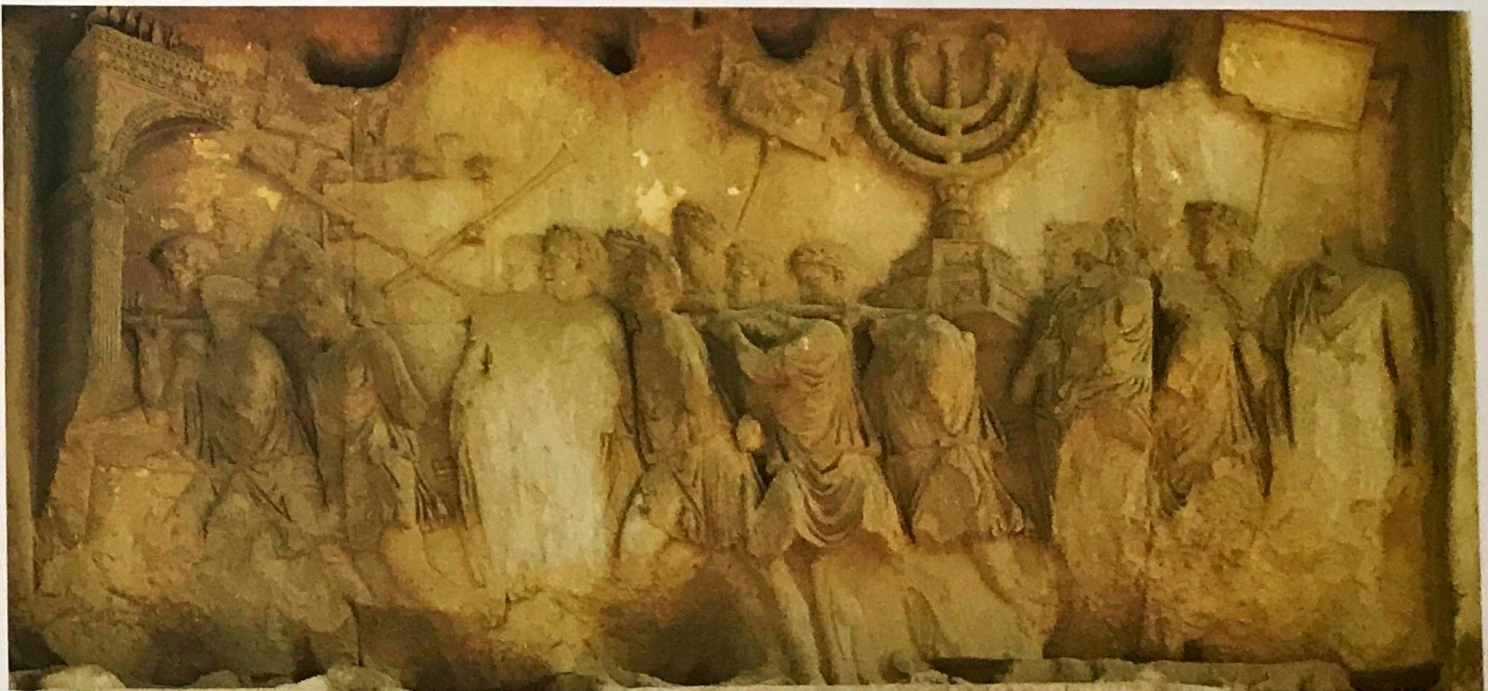
THE JEWS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

66 THE BOOKS OF GENESIS AND EXODUS, THE FIRST BOOK OF MACCABEES, AND THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The emperor Vespasian's son Titus stormed Jerusalem with a Roman army in 70 CE. A Jewish army defended the city. The slaughter on both sides was terrible, but Titus finally defeated the Jews. The Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple, leaving only a retaining wall standing. Many of the Jews who survived were sold into slavery. The defeat was a crushing blow to Jews throughout the Roman world. Those living away from Jerusalem were no longer allowed to send money to Jerusalem for sacrifices at the Temple. Instead they were forced to send this money to the temple of Jupiter in Rome.

Even though the Jews had been badly defeated in Jerusalem, some rebels escaped to Masada, a steep rock fortress 1,700 feet above the Dead Sea. There, the Jews were almost unreachable, but the Romans didn't give up. They built a huge ramp out of

Roman soldiers carry treasures stolen from the Jewish Temple. In this detail from the triumphal Arch of Titus, the sacred menorah is taken from Jerusalem.





A sad Jewish slave sits on the ground beneath a palm tree. Is he thinking of his homeland? The face of Vespasian, the emperor who conquered Jerusalem, appears on the other side of the coin.

dirt—it took them six months to complete it. But when the Romans finally reached the fortress, the rebels set fire to their own buildings. And all but two women and five children took their own lives.

How had the Romans and the Jews come to such violent conflict? The battle against the Romans was not the first time that the Jews had suffered for their faith, their laws, and their ancient traditions.

According to Jewish scripture, God created light, earth, oceans and rivers, fish, birds, animals, and human beings: both women and men. God's work of creation took six days. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. . . . On the seventh day, God finished the work that he had done, and he rested. . . ." Following God's pattern of work and rest, the Jewish people set aside the seventh day of each week as a holy day. They called this day the Sabbath.

Ever since the Israelite King Solomon's time, the people of Jerusalem knew that when they heard three sharp blasts on a ram's horn, the Sabbath was beginning. The sound came at sunset on Friday from the top of the temple that Solomon had built around 950 BCE. For 24 hours from that moment, the Jews would do no work. They didn't cook—food had to be prepared the day before. They were not allowed even to peel a piece of fruit. A girl would not braid her hair. A boy would not light a fire, even on a cold day. The fire had to be started the day before. People couldn't write anything down on that day, and they were allowed to walk only short distances. A mile was too far. And they couldn't carry anything, not even a handkerchief. Many Jews still follow these strict rules today.

Jewish law, found in the Hebrew Bible, set out strict rules for daily life. For example, Jews were not allowed to

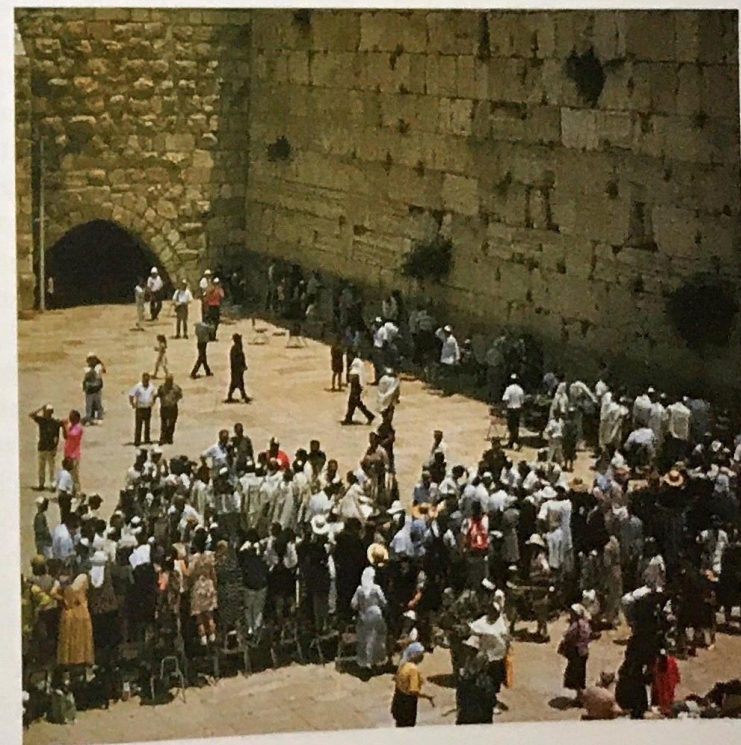
eat pork, horse, rabbit, or any shellfish such as shrimp. Even acceptable food, such as beef, had to be slaughtered in a certain way to keep the animal from suffering more than necessary. Dairy foods could not be mixed with meat. Such a combination would not be kosher. Even today, a kosher cook uses separate pots, pans, plates, knives, spoons, and forks for different food groups. An observant Jew would much rather go hungry than eat non-kosher food.

The Jews' practices and beliefs made them different from other ancient peoples, most of whom were polytheists—believers in many gods. The Jewish people were monotheists. They believed in one God. They made their sacrifices only to him. For them, it would be a sin to worship the many state gods of Rome—Jupiter, Juno, Venus, or Mars. They also refused to bow down to a Roman emperor and call him a god. How could they? Worship of any other god would break one of the most important of God's commandments: "You shall have no other gods except me." According

“Kosher” is a Hebrew word meaning “fit for use” and is usually applied to Jewish laws about food.

to the Hebrew Bible, Moses—an early Jewish leader—received a set of laws directly from God, who wrote them on two stone tablets. These Ten Commandments were important to the Jewish people when they established the state of Israel about 1000 BCE, when King David united the Jewish tribes under his rule. And when his son Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, it became the center of Jewish religion for more than a thousand years.

Jewish pilgrims still flock to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the only part of the temple that was left after it was destroyed in 70 CE.



Exodus, Hebrew Bible

Genesis, Hebrew Bible

THE JEWISH
JOURNEY**1200 BCE**Moses leads the Jews
out of Egypt**1000 BCE**King David creates
Jewish state of Israel**950 BCE**King Solomon builds
the temple**587 BCE**Babylonians destroy
temple and exile Jews**538 BCE**Returning Jews build
second temple**164 BCE**Judas Maccabeus
defeats Antiochus;
establishes Hanukkah**40–4 BCE**

Reign of King Herod

70 CERomans destroy the
second temple**135 CE**Final Jewish revolt;
Diaspora of Jews

But in the sixth century BCE, the king of Babylon destroyed the temple and drove many Jews into exile. Later King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and helped to rebuild their Temple. The most devoted Jews moved back to Judea, settling in or near Jerusalem. Their lives revolved around the temple, its rituals, worship, and rules. Gradually, there came to be two very different kinds of Jews: temple Jews and the Jews of the diaspora. The Diaspora Jews were those Jews who scattered and settled all over the eastern Mediterranean world. They were much less strict than temple Jews and often adopted local customs.

Over the centuries, people sometimes despised and persecuted the Jews because they were different. But others admired them for their high moral standards and strong beliefs. It all depended upon who was in power.

When Antiochus IV became King of Syria in 175 BCE, the Jews once again lost their primary place of worship. Antiochus treated the Jews as his enemies. For him, “different” meant suspicious—dangerous. Antiochus wanted the Jews to be more like Greeks, so he tried to keep them from practicing their religion. He looted the Temple in Jerusalem, stealing the golden altar, candlesticks, and other precious treasures. He even built an altar to Zeus in the ancient temple and sacrificed swine (pigs and hogs) there. The Jewish people were shocked and horrified to have God’s temple fouled by the worship of a pagan god. And the sacrifice of swine made it even worse. According to Jewish laws, pork was unclean.

Antiochus tried to force the Jews to sacrifice swine every day, not only in Jerusalem but in small towns and villages as well. If people refused, the king ordered them to be beaten, tortured, and sometimes crucified.

In 164 BCE, a wealthy landowner named Judas Maccabeus took a stand against Antiochus. He and his four brothers overthrew the idol altar and escaped into the desert. Then they gathered an army of faithful Jews who rose up against the king and defeated him. They cleansed the city, making Jerusalem Jewish again, not Greek. They tore down the pagan altar and built a new one. They rebuilt the inside of

the Temple and “brought the candle holders, the altar of incense, and the table into the Temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the Temple. . . . So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days.”

Every year, the Jewish people celebrate the rededication of the temple to God during the eight days of Hanukkah, the Festival of Light. The candles in their nine-branched holders, called menorahs, are lit again. The worshipers rejoice and give thanks with songs and the music of harps, cymbals, and lutes.

After his victory, Judas Maccabeus sent ambassadors to Rome. “They . . . entered the senate chamber and said: ‘Judas, who is also called Maccabeus, and his brothers, and the Jewish people have sent us to you to establish alliance and peace with you, so that we may be listed as your allies and friends.’”

Rome recognized the new Jewish state as an ally. But friendship between the two lasted for only 100 years. Pompey conquered the land of Judea in 63 BCE and took control of Jerusalem. Armed and accompanied by soldiers, Pompey marched into the temple and even entered its most secret and sacred space, the Holy of Holies. Only the Jewish High Priest was allowed to enter this room, and even he could go there only once a year. But Pompey went in anyway. He didn’t know—or perhaps he didn’t care—that he had dishonored the Jews and all that was sacred to them.

Later, when Mark Antony ruled the eastern Mediterranean, he made Judea a client kingdom and gave the throne to Herod. This same King Herod appears as a character in the New Testament story about the birth of Jesus.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.”

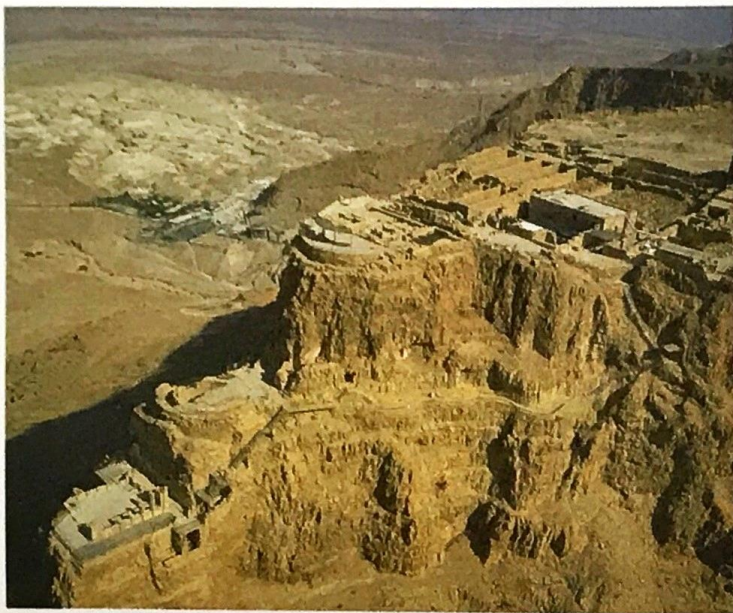
The Jewish people feared and hated Herod throughout his 33-year rule—from 37 BCE until 4 BCE. This cruel king,

66 First Book of Maccabees

66 First Book of Maccabees

“Client” comes from the Latin *clinare*, which means “to lean.” A client leans on another person or government for protection. Client kings were often native rulers, subject to Rome.

66 Matthew, New Testament



The towering fortress at Masada, built on steep rocks, was almost unreachable. Its rocky site allowed a small group of determined Jews to hold out against their powerful Roman attackers.

who was only half Jewish, did very little to make himself liked or accepted by his subjects. He did convert to Judaism and followed some of its rules—for example, he didn't eat pork. But he didn't really sympathize with the beliefs of the Jews. He tried to force Greek and Roman culture on them. He had Greek lettering stamped on their coins. He put on gladiatorial games, which sickened Jews, and built temples to celebrate the worship of Rome's emperor-gods.

After Herod's death, Judea became a Roman province, and the resentment that had been bubbling during Herod's reign

boiled over. The Zealots, a group of Jewish extremists, stirred up the people's passion for freedom. After decades of unrest, a full-scale rebellion finally erupted during Nero's reign. He sent four Roman legions to crush the uprising. Vespasian led the Roman forces, but the Jews were not easily defeated.

After years of war and the destruction at Masada in 73 CE, Israel was in ruins. With the temple gone, priests no longer led the Jewish people, and the traditional sacrifices were no longer allowed. But under the leadership of Yohanan Ben Zaccai, the Jews continued to study their ancient texts and practice their rituals. Rabbis (teachers) became the new community leaders, and the tradition of Rabbinic Judaism began. The Jews still practice this form of Judaism today.

The Jews made only one more attempt to rebel against Roman power. Simon Bar-Kochba organized a Jewish army against Hadrian, but he was defeated in 135 CE. The Jews who survived scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Jewish communities in Alexandria and Rome now centered around synagogues. Wherever Jewish people lived, they cherished their traditional ideas, books, beliefs, and music. But there was never again a Jewish state until the establishment of modern Israel in 1948.