

History of Judaism

Hellenistic Judaism and the Greek Period

Dr Joshua Esler



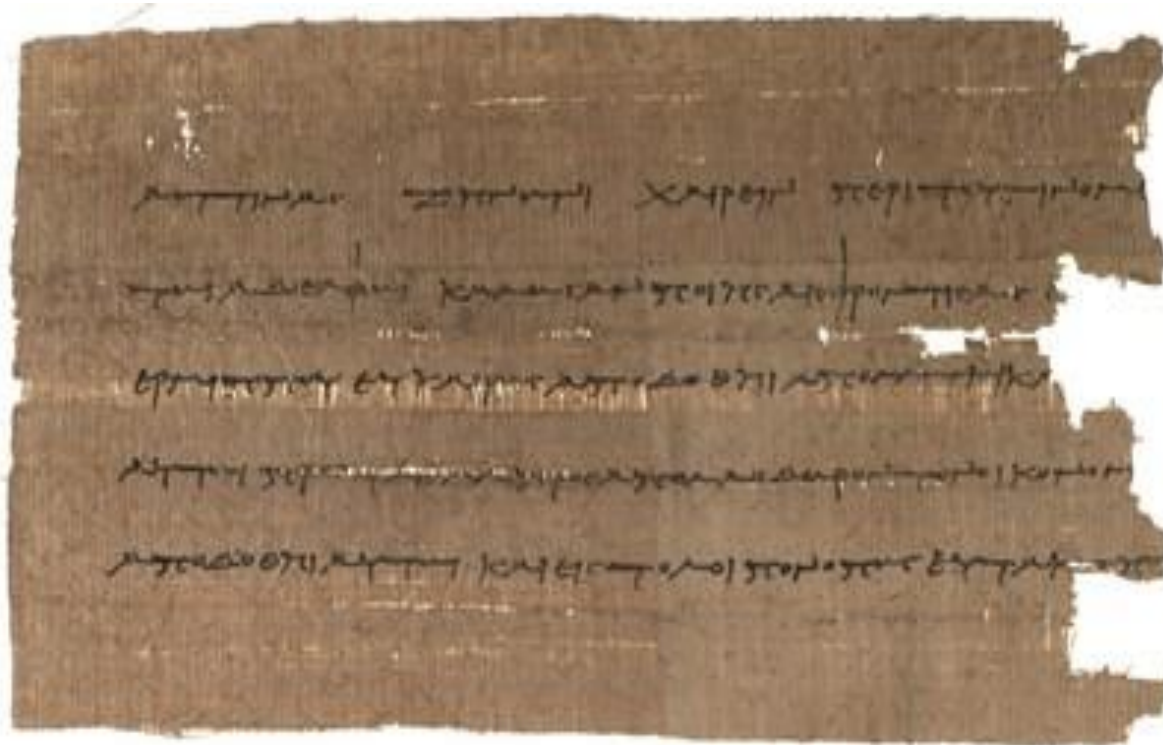
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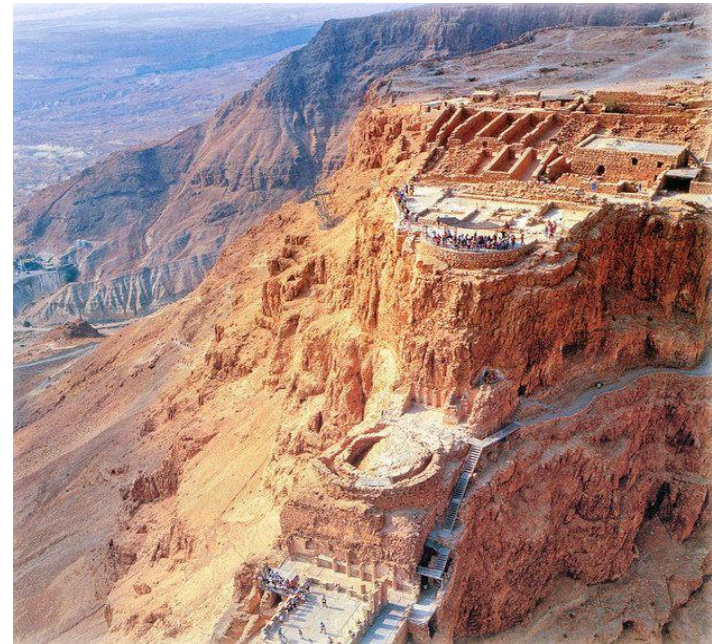
Hellenistic Judaism

- Greek period (332-63 BCE)
 - Palestine conquered by Alexander the Great (332 BCE) – incorporated into Ptolemaic Egypt; conquered by Syrian Seleucid dynasty in 198 BCE by King Antiochus III (r. 223-187 BCE)
 - Under both Alexander and Antiochus, Jews treated liberally, with their own governance and constitution (the Torah)
 - 29 Greek cities in Palestine – strong Hellenistic influence
 - Early 2nd century BCE – Hellenizing Jews controlled priesthood; Jason established Jerusalem as Greek city – Menelaus, an even more thoroughly Hellenized Jew, ousted Jason; civil war erupted between the two factions – Antiochus intervened, siding with Menelaus and banning practice of Judaism; resulted in revolt led by Mattathias in 167 BCE and 5 sons (the Maccabees - Hasmoneans)
 - Hellenizers supported by wealthy urbanites; Maccabees by peasants and urban masses – yet the struggle seems to have been political more than cultural

Zenon Papyri, correspondence from Ptolemaic official concerning the wealthy Jew Tobiah



King Herod I of Judaea (r. 37-4 BCE) - palace at Masada



Jewish Society under Hellenization

- **Priests**
 - Wealthiest and strongest political group in Jerusalem, especially Oniad family – oversaw wealth of Temple and individual deposits at Temple
- **Pharisees**
 - ‘Separatists’ – Evolved from the scribes (*soferim*) (especially the Hasidim) who opposed monopoly of priests – supported by the lower classes; not ‘normative Judaism’ as once claimed
- **Sadducees**
 - Thoroughly Hellenized – rejected oral interpretation of the Torah and prophetic books of Bible, and Pharisaic beliefs in angels, divine intervention in human affairs, and the afterlife; focused on the Temple – disappear from Jewish narrative around 60 CE due to Pharisaical opposition
- **amme ha-aretz (the rural masses)**
 - Much antagonism between amme ha-aretz and Pharisees; former did not observe strict tithing, laws of purity, or prayer – antagonism revealed in Babylonian Talmud (interpretation of Oral Law in 5th century CE) and New Testament Gospels
- **Proselytes**
 - Converts to Judaism – from 700,000 to 5,000,000 in Palestine and from 2,000,000 to 5,000,000 in Diaspora; estimates of 1/10 of Mediterranean Jewish; also Jewish sympathizers (*sebomenoi* – ‘fearers of the Lord’)

Hellenistic Cultural Influences

- Religious influences
 - Talmud
 - 2,500 to 3,000 Greek words – terms related to fields of law, government, science, religion, technology, daily life
 - Sermons preached by rabbis translated into Greek
 - Ossuary inscriptions and Greek papyri in Dead Sea caves
 - Greek names for rabbis
 - Greek school for ‘Greek Wisdom’ – 2nd century CE
 - Synagogues stylized on Hellenistic Roman temples
 - Stories concerning rabbis parallel Socratic and Cynic narratives
 - Dialogue between rabbis and Greek and Roman philosophers
 - Despite these influences, Judaism retained distinctiveness: very few embraced Gnosticism; Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle never mentioned by rabbis or strongly Hellenized Jews; Greek philosophical terms not used – the resilience of core Judaic religion perhaps due to stronghold of Judaea

Hellenistic Judaism in Palestine

- The Temple and priesthood
 - Temple rebuilt by Herod after Roman general Pompey's (106-48 BCE) desecration; but appointed high priests for political and financial gain
 - Class warfare erupted 59 CE between high priests and regular priests and leaders of population in Jerusalem
 - Synagogues increasingly common in addition to centrality of Temple – foundations in 6th century BCE Babylonian Exile
- Legislative and Judicial spheres
 - The Great Sanhedrin (council court) – included Sadducees
 - Members of Sanhedrin initially governed with king during early Hasmonean dynasty but with Herod's reign restricted to religious authority only; a separate Sanhedrin established by high priest for political council and jury

2ND Temple under Herod



Synagogues - e.g. Capernaum



Hellenistic Judaism in the Diaspora

- Key centres – Syria, Asia Minor, Babylonia, Egypt
 - Antioch
 - Attracted many Jewish converts; apocryphal book of Tobit probably composed here in 2nd century BCE
 - Asia Minor
 - Jews did not join Jewish revolt against Nero (r. 54-68 CE), Trajan (r. 98-117 CE), and Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE) – appear well assimilated
 - Babylonia
 - 1st century CE – Jewish brothers Asinaueus and Anilaeus established minor independent state; royal house in Adiabene, northern Mesopotamia converted to Judaism
 - Egypt
 - Largest diasporic settlement; Jewish military colony at Elephantine in Upper Egypt from as early as 6th century BCE
 - Alexandria – most populous and influential Hellenistic Jewish community in diaspora – established under Alexander the Great
 - Large number of papyri in Greek after 3rd century BCE attest to many details concerning Jewish community in Egypt

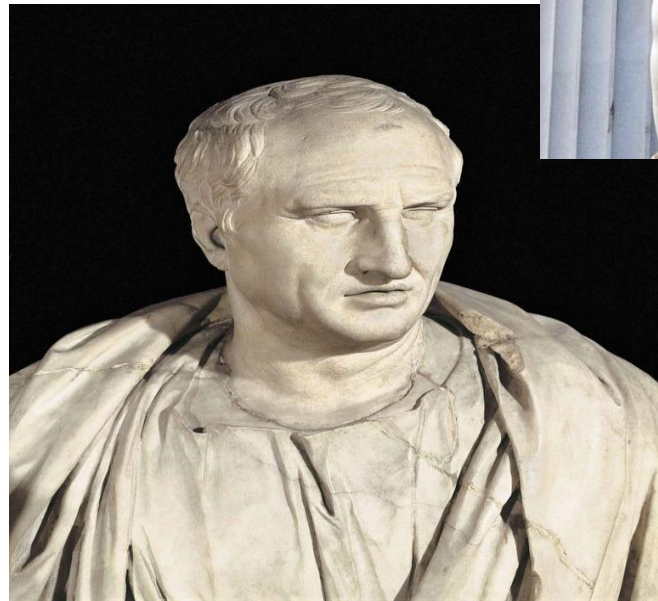
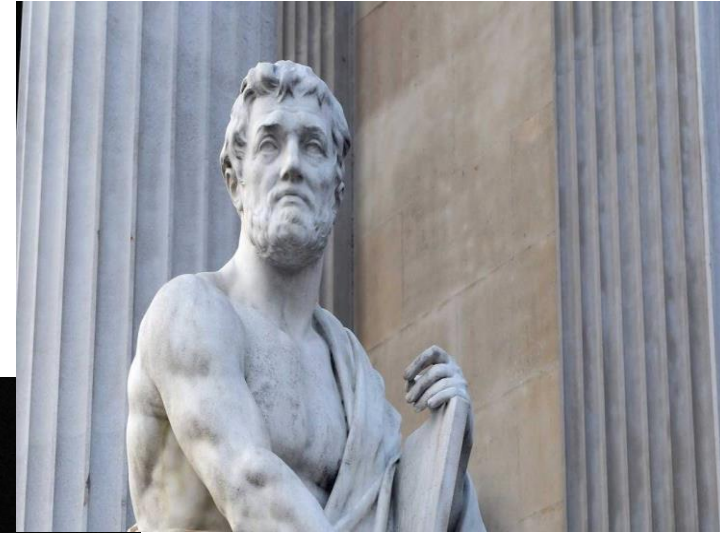
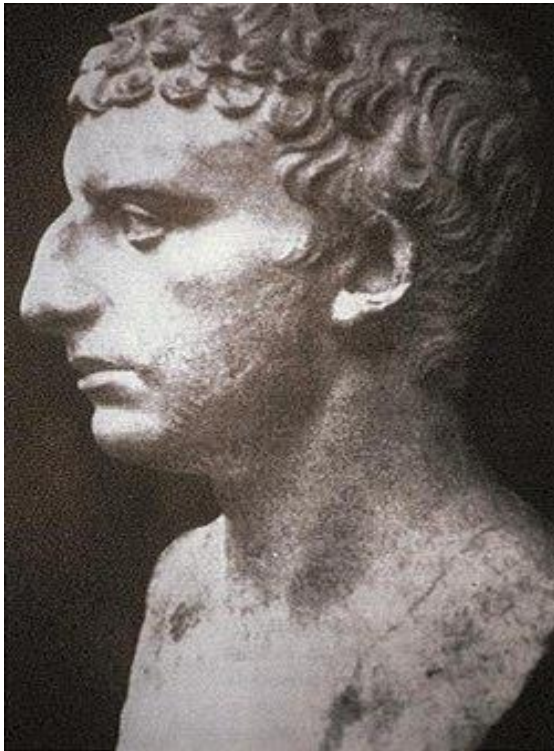
Jewish Diaspora during Greek period



The Septuagint - Greek translation of Hebrew Scriptures



Josephus, Cicero, Tacitus



Literature of the Diaspora

- Egypt – written to instill pride in Jewish culture and history
 - ‘Syncretic’ literature
 - *On the Kings in Judaea* – around 3rd century BCE, by Demetrius; *On the Jews* – 2nd century BCE, by Hecataeus; *On the Kings in Judaea* – c. 150 BCE, by Eupolemus – claimed Phoenicians and Greeks owed written culture to Jews; *On the Jews* – c. 100 BCE, by Artapanus – romanticized Moses as Musaeus, the Greek poet and Thoth, Egyptian god of literature and culture
 - Anti-Hellenizing literature
 - 2 Maccabees – c. 100 BCE, by Jason of Cyrene – glorified Temple and attacked Jewish Hellenizers
 - 3 Maccabees – 1st century BCE – propaganda against Jews seeking citizenship in Alexandria
 - Letter of Aristeas – c. 100 BCE – probably composed by Alexandrian Jew to defend Judaism against detractors
 - Wisdom literature and philosophy
 - Wisdom literature and philosophy – attempts at harmonizing Greek philosophy and the Torah – Aristobulus of Paneas, 2nd century BCE; Philo – recognized as first Jewish theologian – the *Logos* (Word, or Divine Reason) as intermediary between God and the world laid foundations of Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and ideas of early Church Fathers

Egyptian Jewish Papyri



Literature in Palestine

- Literature in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek
 - Works originally in Hebrew only existed in Greek in later Hellenistic period: Ecclesiasticus, 1 Maccabees, Judith, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Baruch, Psalms of Solomon
 - Apocryphal works imitating biblical books
 - Aramaic works – biblical or Bible-like legends or Midrashic additions
 - Greek works – histories of Jewish war against Rome and Jewish kings by Justus of Tiberias; *History of the Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* by Josephus
 - Hebrew – wisdom literature

Key Post-Exilic and Hellenistic Figures

- Ezra (4th century BCE)
 - Led Jews back from Babylon and rebuilt Jewish community on basis of the Torah – considered the ‘father of Judaism’
- Philo Judaeus
 - Most representative philosopher of Hellenistic Judaism – first to attempt synthesis of revealed faith and philosophic reason
- Hilel (1st century BCE-1st century CE)
 - Studies in both Babylonia and Palestine in Scripture and Oral Law under Pharisees – first distinct personality of Talmudic Judaism
- Akiba Ben Joseph (40-135 CE)
 - Key rabbinical figure – introduced *halakha* (new method for interpretation of Jewish oral law), laying foundation for later Mishna (post-biblical written code of Jewish law)
- Johanan Ben Zakkai (1st century CE)
 - Leading representative of Pharisees against Sadducees – critical of elitist Temple tradition; ‘Temple’ should be alive among all Jews outside the temple; key in ensuring the continuation of basic Jewish traditions after the destruction of the Temple with the establishment of Jabneh, a major academy and authoritative rabbinic body

