

Chapter 6 - The Setting and the Story

1. Introduction

i. The Aim

First-century Judaism - not an atomistic 'religion' to practice, "but a total worldview, embracing all aspects of reality...recognition that the present state of affairs had not yet (to put it mildly) seen the full realization of the purposes of the covenant god for his people" (149).

ii. The Sources

Josephus (AD 37 - c. 100) - the most important

Major works - *War of the Jews*, c.75; *Antiquities*, c.94

Supplemental - *Against Apion*, c.97; *Life*, c.99

I and II Maccabees (and III and IV, too - same story, different perspectives)

Rabbinic literature - gives useful information, but written at a much later time, thus addresses different cultural needs than those experienced in the 1st century.

Apocrypha/pseudepigrapha and Dead Sea Scrolls - witness to Jewish attitudes, but not known or accepted by all. The Bible and Targums (Aramaic 'translations' and interpretations of the Bible).

2. The Greco-Roman World as the Context of Early Judaism

Israel was thoroughly steeped in Hellenistic culture – “the average town or city was full of reminders of the pagan way of life” (155). “We should not be surprised that the Jews were regarded as atheists...[Roman General Pompey] was, we may assume, disappointed; he had presumably gone in [to the Holy of Holies, in 63 BC]...to confront the Jews’ god with the fact that the goddess Roma had just worsted him or her in a straight fight” (156).

3. The Story of Israel, 587 BC - AD 70

i. From Babylon to Rome (587 - 63 BC)

After the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple in 587 BC, the Jews “had been faced with the mounting tension between the faith they professed and the facts they perceived” (157).

167 BC – Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian ruler, took over the Temple

164 BC – Maccabean revolt (Judas Maccabaeus and company cleansed and reconsecrated the Temple); origin of Hanukkah. “It powerfully reinforced the basic Jewish worldview...YHWH had vindicated his name, his place, his land, his law – and his people” (159).

ii. Jews under Roman Rule (63 BC - AD 70)

The Romans took on the same stigma that had been attached to the old oppressors – the Jews persisted in believing that “sooner or later the covenant god would act once more to vindicate his name, to restore the symbols (particularly the Temple) which expressed his covenant with Israel, and of course to liberate Israel herself” (161).

This led to the revolt that began in AD 66 – although, since “different factions, each believing that they were the

true chosen warriors, fought against each other with as much or more violence as against the Romans...the Romans were bound to be the eventual winners" (161).

The covenant god did nothing – the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, Masada in 74 (the last Jewish holdout).

iii. Judaism Reconstructed (AD 70 - 135)

"It was a very different Judaism that the reconstructed itself, with grief and pain and a sense not only of crushing disaster but of belief overturned and hope dashed" (161).

Responses to the destruction of the temple were varied: anguish, pragmatism, or smoldering rebellion. (The young Christian church could also be included as another take on the fall of Jerusalem.

There is little evidence for anti-Christian bigotry on a systematic level from the Jews at this time. Christians were still welcome in the synagogue.

"This period of transition came to an abrupt and bloody end with the rebellion against the emperor Hadrian in AD 132-5...[he] passed a law forbidding circumcision, ...he had also founded a pagan city, Aelia Capitolina, on the site of ruined Jerusalem, with an altar to Zeus on the site of the Temple itself. These provocations...called forth rebellion" (165-166).

Simon ben Kosiba (hailed as Messiah by rabbi Akiba, and given the title Bar-Kochba) began a revolt, but the Jews were completely decimated. A ban on Jewish customs became strictly enforced.

iv. Conclusion

This chapter answers *what* happened, the next few chapters (7-10) begin to ask *why*.