

# Chapter 18

## Inheritances

(37 BCE onwards)

*If the world was created for our sake,  
why don't we possess our world as an inheritance?<sup>1</sup>*

### Judea under Herod (37 BCE to 23 BCE)

Even before the expansion of his territorial responsibilities in 30 BCE, Herod had to rule over a mixed population that included many Greeks, Samaritans, Syrians and Arabs. In addition to these formal responsibilities, he saw himself as the representative of all Jews in the diaspora, even though the more religious Jews in Judea questioned his Jewishness – he did, after all, come from an Idumaean family who had been forcibly converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus around 125 BCE. In order to strengthen his position in Judea, Herod chose to marry Mariamme, who was the grand-daughter of both John Hyrcanus and Judas Aristobulus – giving any child of their marriage an excellent Maccabean pedigree. According to Josephus, their relationship was a passionate one. Mariamme was Herod's second wife: he had exiled his first wife, Doris, and their child.

The Jewish community in Alexandria was numerically considerable – possibly larger than the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Early in his reign, Herod controversially appointed 'Hanameel the Egyptian', as High Priest<sup>2</sup>. This turned out to be an unpopular move, a fact that enabled Hanameel to be replaced by the 17-year-old brother of Mariamme in BCE 35. Shortly afterwards, the brother 'accidentally' drowned at a party, possibly with help from the staff. Hanameel was re-appointed as High Priest.

In 36 BCE Mark Antony had married Cleopatra, the latest of the Ptolemy queens, despite the fact that he was already married to Octavian's sister Octavia. Back in Rome Octavian was incensed by the humiliation and implied repudiation of his sister. It is probable that, even without this provocation, Octavian's ambition would have led him to break the power-sharing agreement that the two men had forged earlier, but this humiliation made that break inevitable, and also provided Octavian with the opportunity to persuade the senate that Mark Antony was a danger to Rome – especially when he was able to show the extent of Mark Antony's commitment to Cleopatra as revealed in his will.

The Judean community in Alexandria may have taken the side of Octavian in this dispute - a decision that would have put them in conflict with Cleopatra. Josephus states that during a famine that occurred at this time, Cleopatra (in her "barbarity and perfidiousness") did not permit a distribution of grain to the Jews<sup>3</sup>, although it is possible that the Jews were not singled out for rationing and native Egyptians also suffered a similar deprivation. The Alexandrian Jews certainly had their opponents; Josephus lists Manetho, Cheremon, Lysymachus and Apion, as being amongst the Egyptians and Greeks who, between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, penned various attacks on the Jews<sup>4</sup>. For a number of years in the late first century BCE, it appeared that the Alexandrian community had few friends. Herod may have initially supported his boss Mark Antony despite the animosity that he had felt towards Cleopatra ever since she had secured Judea's coastal cities.

In 31 BCE, Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra in a sea battle outside Actium – a strategic harbour on the West coast of Greece. Subsequently they both committed suicide. Antony's troops fought on for a few weeks unable to believe in the loss of their leader, but eventually they too surrendered. Cleopatra's eventful reign had lasted 20 years.

Herod hastened to reassure Octavian that, whatever his relationship with Mark Antony had been, he regretted anything that may have been perceived as less than wholehearted support for the new ruler of Egypt and indeed the whole Roman Empire. Such expeditious action resulted in Octavian confirming Herod as the ruler of the Judea and secured for him all Cleopatra's former holdings in Judea, Transjordan

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Esdras 6:59

<sup>2</sup> Hanameel was an Egyptian according to the Mishnah, although Josephus has him as a Babylonian.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus. Against Apion: 2.5 (60)

<sup>4</sup> Josephus. Against Apion: 1.34 (304)

and Samaria. When Octavian became Emperor and took the title Augustus, Herod showed his appreciation by extending the ancient capital of Samaria and renaming it Sebaste – the Greek form of Augustus.

Egypt now came under direct Roman rule. It would be developed strategically under Augustus as the grain supplier to the Empire. Under the Ptolemies, the Judean communities in Egypt had enjoyed considerable influence – with their members occasionally rising to high office. But with the establishment of direct Roman rule the Judeans were classified as Egyptians along with the indigenous population. The new hierarchy had Roman Citizens at the top, especially the ones living in Alexandria, followed by the Greeks and below them were the ‘Egyptians’. This had an impact on how the Egyptian Jews were taxed and what punishments might be inflicted on them. The change in status would have been resented – especially as there was a mutual antipathy between the Jews and the true native Egyptians. The Alexandrian Jews remained influential in Jerusalem, however, for when Hanameel’s tenure of the office of High Priest ended in 30 BCE, Herod appointed an Alexandrian as his successor an Alexandrian.

Herod’s paranoid jealousy led him to suspect his beloved Mariamme of adultery. She was put on trial for her life. This appears to have been something of a show trial with coerced witnesses. Even her mother Alexandria, perhaps fearing for her own life, witnessed against Marianne. After the trial and execution, Marianne’s mother spoke out against Herod saying he was too unstable to rule. She attempted to take over the Kingdom but was herself caught and executed; this time without any pretence of a trial.

Herod was a tax-and-spend ruler. As well as the renovations and developments in Sebaste, he built the port of Caesarea, a palace at Jericho, the fortifications at Massada, and the infrastructure needed to open up several areas for agricultural production. He undertook extensive developments to give the Temple a more Hellenistic style. He taxed his people heavily in order to support his lifestyle; to sponsor Hellenist institutions such as the Games that took place every four years in Caesarea; to execute his extensive building program; to provide lavish gifts to those he wished to influence and to pay his share of the Empire’s expenses. He often spent 50% of the national output. But many of his projects boosted the economy - and trade with the empire flourished. Dissension burst out into periodic insurrections, usually easily put down. Dispossessed peasants formed bandit groups that were culled from time to time.

In 25 BCE, Herod imported massive quantities for grain from Egypt in order to mitigate the local consequences of a failed harvest. He waived a third of the taxes and yet, at the same time, started work on Caesaria Maritima. A couple of years later he built a new palace in Jerusalem and the fortress at Herodium. He also married his third wife, another Mariamme, and appointed her father, Simon Boethus, as High Priest – relieving Jesus ben Fabus of the role. Like ben Fabus, Simon came from Alexandria.

Judea was now being ruled by a non-Judean of unstable mind and Egypt by a Roman elite unconcerned by needs of its Jewish population. It is possible that, at this troubled time, a book was compiled on the subject of ‘Wisdom’ and was addressed to the rulers.

### **Wisdom of Solomon**

This book was written by a Greek speaking Jew living in Egypt. When the author quoted from Isaiah it was the Septuagint’s translation that he used. Some 35 words and phrases used in this text are also to be found in Greek texts of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE but not, so far, in earlier texts, which suggests that if it was written before the Current Era, then it was in the very last years. The text has been quoted by early Christian authors. Some scholars, reading the letters of St Paul, who wrote around 50 CE, detect an influence on the Paul’s style and ideas<sup>5</sup> Could it have become so influential if it was written in as late as the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE?<sup>6</sup> The content talks of rulers of distant lands, and rulers who made themselves gods<sup>7</sup>. The Emperor Augustus, who ruled Egypt from Rome between 27 BCE and 14 CE, seems a good fit for the distant ruler, whilst later emperors and earlier Seleucids and Ptolemies also sought to be worshipped as gods.<sup>8</sup> The author uses the unusual Greek term ‘*Sebasma*’ to mean ‘idols’ – a possible allusion to ‘*Sebaste*’, the Greek name for Augustus.

---

<sup>5</sup> Introduction to The Wisdom of Solomon; New Jerusalem Bible (study edition); p 1042-4.

<sup>6</sup> William Horbury; Oxford Bible Commentary; Introduction to Wisdom of Solomon.

<sup>7</sup> Wisdom 6:1 & 14:16

<sup>8</sup> Anchor Bible Dictionary; Article on Wisdom of Solomon; David Winston. The author prefers Augustus as his divinity arose more gradually – in the manner described in the text.

The sense of resentment that some see in this book may stem from the diminished status and power of Jewish community in Egypt. The disgust the author shows for the Egyptians reflected what may have been a fairly common attitude of Alexandrian Judeans to the native Egyptians. Josephus, writing in the first century CE clearly despised their religion as being the vain and foolish worship of brute beasts<sup>9</sup> whose adherents rejoiced when they were seized by a crocodile or bitten by an asp<sup>10</sup>.

The book has three parts: -

- Reflections on Wisdom and Human Destiny (Wisdom 1 - 5)
- An Address to Kings on the Value of Wisdom (Wisdom 6 - 9)
- The Working of Wisdom in History (Wisdom 10 - 19)

Unlike most other Biblical books, there are no strong reasons for believing that more than one author was involved in the writing this book; all three are written in the same elegant Greek style. It began:

*Love righteousness, you who rule the earth*

This opening line was used by Dante in his work ‘Paradiso’. He imagined the letters of the Latin text, ‘*diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*’ to be displayed in paradise by heavenly spirits.<sup>11</sup> Although the opening of ‘Wisdom’ seems to address the rulers of the world, the first section was largely directed more generally at the author’s fellow believers. He went on to say:

*Wisdom is kindly to humanity,  
but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words;*

...

*Because the spirit of the Lord has filled the world,  
That-which-holds-all thing-together<sup>12</sup> knows what is said,*

The godless were allowed to speak for themselves – or rather the author imagined their arguments in order to defeat them. The godless would say, he suggested: -

*Our life is short and nasty  
There is no remedy at the end –  
No-one comes back from Hades.  
We came into being by chance  
And afterwards it shall be as though we had never been*

...

*Come then let us enjoy the good things of today ...,  
Who cares what our revelry leaves behind,  
For this is our life, our lot.*

*Let’s exploit the honest poor,  
Let’s not worry about the widow,  
nor reverence the aged,  
For might is right  
And what is weak is useless.<sup>13</sup>*

---

<sup>9</sup> Josephus. Against Apion 1.25 (224-5)

<sup>10</sup> Josephus. Against Apion 2.7 (85)

<sup>11</sup> Paradiso; Canto 18; 58-99 ‘*diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram.*’

<sup>12</sup> ‘That which holds all things together’ is a translation of a word from the vocabulary of the Stoics; there is no biblical comparison.

<sup>13</sup> Wisdom 2:1-11

So the wicked might reason, the author argued, but they were misled. They did not see of the reward of the holy life, the blameless soul, for “*God created humans for incorruption*”, and to be in his image<sup>14</sup>. The use of ‘*incorruption*’ used here and later by St Paul in Romans 2:7 (and elsewhere) hints at immortality, which some translators substitute directly. Death came into the world only through the action of the devil – a transliteration in English texts of the Greek *diabolos*, whose meaning to a Greek would have been ‘slanderer’ – perhaps a development of the ‘accuser’ (Hebrew ‘*satan*’) from the book of Job.

The destiny of the righteous was in the hands of God; therefore no torment can touch them. They may appear to die, and their death may be regarded as a disaster, but they would be at peace. If they seemed to suffer punishment, God was just putting them to the test. At the time of their ‘visitation’ they would shine forth, rule nations, understand truth, and live with God in love.

*For grace and mercy await his holy ones,  
And he watches over his chosen.*<sup>15</sup>

But the destiny of the godless was to be without hope.

*Their labour will be unprofitable,  
Their work useless  
Their wives reckless  
Their children depraved  
And their descendants accursed*<sup>16</sup>

The author argued that it was better to be virtuous and sterile than to have godless children, for virtue in remembrance was immortality. The premature death of the righteous was not to be mourned for they would have peace even though people may not understand this. But when the godless are called to judgement they will be confronted by those they oppressed, and will be terrified.

The righteous would live forever, for the Most High would take care of them. The author, inspired by Isaiah 59, described the armour of God, an image that St Paul will also use in Ephesians 6 and 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5. But the whole cosmos will join in the destruction of the godless - the seas will rage against them, rivers engulf them.

In the second essay, the author more clearly took on the persona of Solomon despite never naming him (although biblical editors often do). Here he addressed rulers of remote lands and, having assured them that “*Your authority is given you by the Lord, and Power by the Most High*”, he warned them that god himself ‘*will probe your acts and examine your plans*’. On the highly placed a ruthless judgement will fall, whereas the lowly may be pardoned. Wisdom, the author argued, can be readily found for: -

*Her beginning is a sincere desire for instruction  
Concern for instruction means loving her,  
Loving her means keeping her laws,  
Keeping her laws is an assurance of incorruptibility  
And incorruptibility brings us near to God  
Thus the desire for wisdom leads to kingship.*<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Wisdom 2:22-23

<sup>15</sup> Wisdom 3:9. The passage Wisdom 1-9 is used for the liturgy on All Saints Day and potentially at the passing of anyone whose departure is regarded as a disaster.

<sup>16</sup> Wisdom 3:11-1?

<sup>17</sup> Wisdom 6:17-20 This passage uses a chain-syllogism – a form found in Greek Philosophical writings – and also used by St Paul (Romans 5:3-5; II Peter 1:5-7).

In counselling his fellow rulers, the 'author' modestly allowed that he was 'a mortal, like everyone else' and that 'crying was the first sound I made'. He confessed that, aware of this common beginning, he prayed for wisdom— 'and the spirit of wisdom came to me'. He followed this with an extended introduction to an expansion of Solomon's prayer for wisdom – the prayer now found in Kings and Chronicles. The introduction included a listing of the properties of wisdom, culled from Greek Philosophical ideas. In three sets of seven characteristics, Wisdom was held to be: -

*Intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, incisive,  
Unsullied, lucid, invulnerable, benevolent, keen, irresistible, beneficent,  
Humane, steadfast, dependable, unperturbed, all-powerful, all-seeing, and penetrating*<sup>18</sup>

The extended version of Solomon's prayer included a passage which has been used as a model for the private prayer for rulers from the time of Elizabeth I onwards: -

*God of our ancestors, Lord of mercy,  
who by your word made the universe,  
and in your wisdom formed human beings  
to rule the creatures you had made,  
to govern the world in holiness and justice  
and to dispense fair judgement in honesty of soul,  
grant me Wisdom, consort of your throne,  
and do not reject me from amongst your children.*

...

*You have chosen me to be a king over your people -  
to be judge of your sons and daughter.*

...

*Send Wisdom forth from your throne of glory  
That she may labour at my side  
And teach me what is pleasing to you.*

...

*Then all I do will be acceptable,  
I shall govern your people justly  
and be worthy of my father's throne*<sup>19</sup>

In the third essay, the author, building on the ideas found in Proverbs 8, personified Wisdom as feminine and as God's great co-worker in creation and history:

*It was Wisdom who protected the first man to be made, the father of the world, who had been created all alone, for it was she who rescued him from his fall and gave him strength to rule all things. But when a wicked man deserted her in his anger, he perished in fratricidal fury. And when because of him the earth was drowned, it was Wisdom who saved it, piloting the upright man on valueless timber.*

The author traced Wisdom's involvement in history as far as the Exodus, but then used the plagues and the Exodus journey as the background for a series of comparisons between God's support of his own people and his punishment of their Egyptian oppressors. In the first of seven comparisons, he used the miracle of the water in the desert.<sup>20</sup> Here he contrasted the thirst quenching water given to the Israelites with the river fouled by mud and blood given to the Egyptians in the first plague.<sup>21</sup> He was

---

<sup>18</sup> Wisdom 7:22-23

<sup>19</sup> Wisdom 9:1-12

<sup>20</sup> Exodus 17:1-7 & Numbers 20:2-13

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 7:17-21

.

particularly disgusted by the Egyptian's worship of man-made idols, of 'mindless reptiles', such as snakes and crocodiles, and of 'contemptible beetles' such as the scarab.<sup>22</sup>

*And this is why those living foolish and wicked lives,  
were tormented by you with their own false gods<sup>23</sup>.  
For they went far astray on the paths of error,  
accepting as gods those animals that even other animals despised.*

*They were deceived like silly children.  
Therefore, as to children with no sense,  
you gave them a sentence to mock them,  
but those who would not heed the warning of a mocking rebuke  
would experience a sentence worthy of God.*

*The creatures that made them suffer and against which they became incensed were those  
creatures that they had thought to be gods.  
And being punished by means of them, they recognized as the true God the one whom they had  
refused to know before.<sup>24</sup>*

This was followed by an elegant excursus on the subject of the cult of idols, its origin and its consequences. Most contemptible, he concluded, were those who played the tyrant with the people of God, for

*No man can model a god to resemble himself,  
Subject to death, his wicked hands can produce only something dead.  
He himself is worthier than the thing he worships for he at least has life, but they never will.<sup>25</sup>*

The second comparison followed on from this, contrasting the punishment of the Egyptians by plagues of frogs and flies with the gift to the Israelites of flocks of quails.

*Therefore the Egyptians were deservedly punished through such creatures,  
and were tormented by swarms of vermin.  
Whereas in contrast to this punishment you showed your people kindness,  
preparing quails – a luscious delicacy – for them to eat.  
Thus the Egyptians, though they longed for food,  
lost their appetite at the sight of the disgusting creatures sent to them,  
whilst your own people, after being hungry for a little while,  
partook of rare delicacies.*

The remaining comparisons contrasted the death-giving plague of locusts with the life-giving bronze serpent, the plague of hailstones with the gift of manna, an impenetrable darkness with the pillar of fire, the night of bereavement with the night of deliverance, and the drowning in the sea with the creation of a way across the sea. The author freely interprets scripture to fit his teaching.

Finally the Egyptians were condemned once more for they had not only failed to welcome the strangers – the proto-Israelites – who came amongst them, but they had enslaved their 'guests' and 'benefactors'. But God always looked after the Israelites: -

*For in every way, Lord, you have made your people great and glorious,  
and never failed to help them in any time or place.<sup>26</sup>*

---

<sup>22</sup> Wisdom 11:15

<sup>23</sup> Literally 'abominations' – the usual biblical term for false gods and idols.

<sup>24</sup> Wisdom 12:2-27

<sup>25</sup> Wisdom 15:16b-17a

<sup>26</sup> Wisdom 19:22

## **Herod; Temples, taxes and wars (23-4 BCE)**

In 22 BCE, Augustus, apparently satisfied with Herod's stewardship, extended Herod's kingdom to the North East – probably against the wishes of the people in his new territories. But at home Herod was generally sensitive to the religious beliefs of his people. His coinage never depicted human images; he did not erect statues in public places. He sought to earn the support of the diaspora through financing local subsidiary temples and through the recognition of the priestly families in Alexandria – to the fury of the Sadducees. In 20 BCE he started work on remodelling the Jerusalem Temple. The employment offered probably secured Herod a measure of public approval, but, whilst he may have hoped for priestly approval by reserving important parts of the temple for the priesthood, his decision to remodel it in the Greek style put him in conflict with the Pharisees, many of whose design suggestions were rejected.

In 14 BCE, the Judean economy was buoyant and Herod waived 25% of the taxes whilst continuing to spend. The following year he made a will naming Antipater, the son of his first, and exiled, wife Doris as heir. Herod suspected that his two sons by his second wife were plotting against him, but Augustus intervened and effected a reconciliation – for a while.

Ongoing discontent in the north-eastern territories turned into open rebellion against Judean rule when a mistaken rumour of Herod's death circulated in 12 BCE. Herod was unable to put down this rebellion decisively since the rebels were able to establish safe bases in the Kingdom of Nabatea, with whose king Herod had fallen out over a failed marriage arrangement<sup>27</sup>. Herod put the matter to the Romans, who ruled that the rebels should be expelled, but when the Nabateans failed to comply, Herod took the initiative and invaded Nabatea in 10 BCE. In doing this, Rome felt that Herod had gone too far and relations were strained.

Back in Jerusalem, however, the remodelling of the temple had progressed far enough for it to be inaugurated for general use.

In 8 BCE, Herod again suspected Mariamme's sons to be seeking his downfall. This time Augustus agreed to Herod's request that they be tried. The trial took place before a Roman court in Beirut the following year. The sons were found guilty and executed. But Herod was still tormented by thoughts of familial disloyalty and in 5 BCE Herod had Antipater, his only son by his first wife Doris arrested, tried and placed under sentence of death pending Augustus' approval. This allegedly caused Augustus to quip, "I would rather be Herod's pig (*hys*) than his son (*huios*)". Nevertheless, approval was given.

Herod had a total of nine wives and despite executing the male offspring of the first two, he still had enough sons left over to inherit his fiefdom. Towards the end of his life Herod suffered an unpleasant skin disorder (possibly venereal disease) and tried to find a cure in the hot springs of Callirhoe near the East bank of the Dead Sea. When this failed he made arrangements to distribute his territory amongst his remaining sons. He died in 4 BCE.

A little time afterwards, the last major section of the book of Enoch was written

### **The Similitudes**

The Similitudes (1 Enoch 37-71) is the longest and probably the last section of the Book of Enoch. It is not present within the copies of Enoch found amongst the Dead Sea scrolls. It can be found only in the Ge'ez of the Ethiopian Scriptures, which is probably a translation from the Greek - itself a translation from an Aramaic original. There are possible references to the Parthian invasion of 40 BCE<sup>28</sup> and to Herod's failed attempt to cure himself in the waters of Callirhoe.

*Those waters shall serve the kings, the mighty, the exultant and those who dwell on earth for the healing of the body and the punishment of the spirit. Those whose spirit is full of lust will be punished in the body, for they have denied the Lord of Spirits and see their punishment daily and yet do not believe in his name. In proportion as the burning of their bodies becomes severe, so a corresponding change shall take place in their spirit.*<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Herod had insisted that as a condition of marriage, the Nabatean king should be circumcised. He refused.

<sup>28</sup> Compare Josephus: Antiquities. Book 17: 6.1 (146) and 6.5 (168-173) with Enoch 56 and the comments thereon in Olson (2003) p 921

<sup>29</sup> Enoch 67:8-9.

The three parables which form the bulk of the similitudes present visions of the triumph of the righteous over the powerful. The author perceived the world to be divided into the chosen and faithful on the one hand, and the sinners, who were the kings and the powerful, on the other. The chosen were depicted as oppressed by the evil of the world, an evil which was largely attributable to the fallen angels, their offspring the giants, and the rulers and leaders of this world. The ultimate victory of righteousness was thus not to be achieved other than through divine intervention. The first similitude<sup>30</sup> opened with a question: -

*When the congregation of the of the righteous shall appear,  
and sinners shall be judged for their sins  
and shall be driven from the face of the earth -  
When the Righteous One shall appear before the eyes of the righteous and elect  
whose deeds depend upon the Lord of Spirits  
and light shall appear to the righteous and the elect who dwell on the earth,  
Where then will be the dwelling of sinners?*

The author saw a parallel – a similitude - between heavenly matters and earthy matters. In this rhetorical question, the righteous and elect are humans but the Righteous One, who would also be called the Chosen One, was divine but distinct from the Lord of Spirits who is generally taken to be God. Whilst the question of where sinners will dwell was left unanswered, it was noted that when the Righteous One appears, then

*The kings and the mighty will perish  
And be given into the hands of the holy and righteous*<sup>31</sup>

Enoch was taken to see the place where righteous men and angels pray for the children of men. Here too he saw the Chosen One, a heavenly figure before whom righteousness will never fail, and before whom nothing ceases, but rather all stand continually before him saying

*“Blessed be you and blessed be the name of the Lord for ever and ever”.*

And he heard the voices of four ‘presences’. The first voice, Michael, was blessing the Lord of Spirits; the second, Raphael, was blessing the Chosen One and the elect who depend upon the Lord of Spirits; the third voice, Gabriel, was praying for those who dwell on the earth whilst the fourth, Phanuel was fending off the evil spirits, the ‘*satans*’, thereby preventing them from coming before the Lord of Spirits to falsely accuse mortals - in a reflection of the manner in which the ‘satan’ came before Yahweh to ‘accuse’ Job<sup>32</sup>.

In Genesis 32 there is a story in which Jacob wrestled all night with a mysterious being and prevailed. Afterwards Jacob named the place Peniel (meaning ‘the face of God’) because, he said, “I have seen El face to face and have survived” There is a Samaritan tradition that Phanuel was Jacob’s mysterious unnamed assailant. (Another early tradition named Sariel as the one who, in the same incident, renamed Jacob as ‘Israel’; Sariel was the name given to the fourth angel in the Book of Watchers.<sup>33</sup>)

The author examined the similitudes between Heaven and Earth – frequently employing astronomical parallels. Here he looked at the theme of division and separation: -

*I saw all the secrets of the heavens, and how the kingdom is divided and how the actions of men are weighed in the balance. And there I saw the mansions of the chosen and the mansions of the holy; and I saw all the sinners, those who deny the name of the Lord of Spirits, being dragged off, driven away by the punishment which came from the Lord of Spirits.*

Just as the kingdom was divided, so were the winds, for Enoch said: -

---

<sup>30</sup> Enoch 37-41 & 44. Chapters 42-43 contain a passage on Wisdom, which seems like a misplaced insertion. See later.

<sup>31</sup> Enoch 38:1-5

<sup>32</sup> Job 1:6-12

<sup>33</sup> Olson (2003) in Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, p. 917

*I saw the secrets of the lightning and the thunder and the secrets of the winds, how they are divided to blow over the earth...*

*I saw the chambers of the Sun and Moon and how they do not leave their orbit...but keep faith with one another in accordance with their oath...and they give thanks and praise.*

*The course of the moon is light to the righteous,  
but darkness to the sinners in the name of the Lord -  
He who made a separation between the light and darkness  
and divided the spirits of men.<sup>34</sup>*

Earlier, in the introduction, Enoch had claimed that the wisdom that had been given to him had never previously been revealed. Here he says that wisdom resides in heaven, having been rejected by men, for

*Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men,  
and found no dwelling-place:  
So Wisdom returned to her place  
and took her seat among the angels*

Whereas,

*Unrighteousness went forth ...  
and dwelt with them as rain in a desert  
or dew on a thirsty land."*

This contrasts with the common priestly view that wisdom had been given to the people of Israel in the form of the Law and the Temple.<sup>35</sup>

In the final episode of this vision, Enoch was shown the stars of heaven who obey the words of the Lord of spirits and are weighed in their righteousness in accordance with the brilliance of their light. He asked what this meant and was told that he was witnessing a parable of the holy that dwell on earth and believe in the name of the Lord of Spirits for ever.

Whilst the first similitude began with the question "Where will the sinners dwell?", the second began when Enoch learnt the answer: there will be no place for sinners.

*They shall not ascend to heaven,  
They shall not come to earth.  
Such shall be the lot of the sinners who have denied the name of the Lord of Spirits,  
who are thus preserved for the day of suffering and tribulation.*

Sinners were to be retained outside heaven and earth until they were judged. This contrasts with the elect who will have innumerable places in a transformed heaven and a transformed earth. Thus, the absence of a place for sinners in heaven will be mirrored on earth: and just as all heaven will be available for the righteous, so will all the earth be.

Then Enoch saw another heavenly being who had a 'head of days' – a head 'white like wool' – and with him was another whose 'countenance had the appearance of a man but was also full of graciousness like one of the Holy Angels'. Enoch asked the angel with him who this was and was told that this was 'the Son of Man', who dwelt in righteousness and who will reveal all the treasures that are hidden because the Lord of Spirits had chosen him. Most commentators assume that the *Head of Days*, also called the *Ancient of Days*, was another name for the Lord of Spirits and the *Son of Man* was the same as the Chosen One.

*And this Son of Man whom you have seen  
shall remove the kings and the mighty from their seats*

---

<sup>34</sup> Enoch 41:1-8

<sup>35</sup> See, for example Ecclesiasticus 19:20 'All wisdom is the fulfilling of the Law' and 24:11 "In the beloved city the Most high has given me rest, in Jerusalem I wield my authority"

...  
*And shall loosen the reins of the strong  
and break the teeth of sinners*

...  
*Before the sun and the signs were created,  
Before the stars of heaven were made,  
His name was declared before the Lord of Spirits*

*He shall be a staff to the righteous on which they support themselves and do not fall,  
the light of the gentiles,  
and the hope of those who are troubled at heart*<sup>36</sup>

This description of the 'Son of Man' may have been inspired by Third Isaiah where the Servant who was named by Yahweh 'before his birth' was destined to be 'a light to the gentiles' before whom kings would bow<sup>37</sup>

Whilst heaven did not foresee any prospect of redemption-through-repentance for the sinners of Israel, there was a narrow opportunity for the 'others', presumably gentiles, for on the day of affliction,

*The Lord of Spirits will cause the others to witness this  
That they may repent and forgo the works of their hands.*

*They shall have no honour through the name of the Lord of Spirits,  
yet through his name they will be saved.  
The Lord of Spirits will have compassion on them.*<sup>38</sup>

But there was to be no mercy for the Judean sinner, not even the repentant Judean sinner.

The day of judgement will bring great joy both in heaven and on earth for the holy and the elect of any age and time: -

*In those days, the earth will return that which had been entrusted to it,  
Sheol will return that which it had received,  
and hell shall return that which it owed.*

*For in those days the Chosen One shall arise,  
and he shall choose the righteous and holy.  
For the day has drawn near that they should be saved.*

*In those days, the Chosen One shall sit on my throne*<sup>39</sup>,  
*and his mouth shall pour forth all the secrets of wisdom and counsel.  
For the Lord of Spirits has given them to him and has glorified him.*

*In those days, the mountains shall leap like lambs –  
the hills shall skip like lambs satisfied with milk,  
and the faces of all the angels in heaven shall be lit up with joy.*

*The earth shall rejoice.  
The righteous shall dwell upon it  
and the elect shall walk there.*<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Enoch 46:4 & 48:3-4

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 49:1-7

<sup>38</sup> Enoch 50: 2b-3a

<sup>39</sup> 'My throne'. This is God's throne if the reader presumes the Lord of Spirits is speaking. Sometimes a translator makes this assumption for the reader and renders the text as 'God's throne' without comment. However, it is usually an angel that accompanies Enoch, and not the Lord of the Spirits

<sup>40</sup> Enoch 51:1-5

Here the author firmly asserts a belief in the afterlife, and the resurrection of the dead – a belief of the Pharisees.

Enoch was once more carried off in a whirlwind to the West where he saw more of the secrets of heaven. He saw seven mountains, six of which were made from different metals – iron, copper, silver, gold, soft metal and lead. These, he was told, will serve the purposes of the Anointed one – the Messiah<sup>41</sup>. The metals will melt like wax in his presence so no-one will escape by using silver or gold, nor will there be any iron for use in war, nor bronze for armour. (This passage may have been inspired by the metallic statue of Daniel whose parts (representing the empires of the earth) were blown away having been destroyed by the remaining mountain which, in Daniel's vision, 'filled the earth'.<sup>42</sup>)

Enoch was taken to see the places being prepared for the punishment of the sinners. In one, angels were preparing *all the instruments of Satan* for the kings and the mighty on earth. In another, great chains and rocks were being readied for Azazel and his host, to hold them in readiness for being thrown into burning furnace *so that the Lord of Spirits can take vengeance for their unrighteousness in becoming subject to Satan and leading astray all those who dwell upon the earth.*<sup>43</sup> Here the author recognised that there may have been an evil power behind Azazel to which Azazel became subject – another idea that reflected the influence of Persian theology.

There was a third place of punishment, but whilst taking Enoch to see this, the accompanying angel explained that *in those days* the Lord of Spirits will destroy all those who dwell on earth by means of a flood in which the waters of the heavens, the masculine waters, will be joined with the feminine waters beneath the earth. But later the 'Head of Days' saw that it was pointless to destroy all who dwelt on earth and repented of this action. A change of tense and name suggests that this reference to the flood might have been a later insertion.<sup>44</sup> But if it was not an insertion, then Enoch may have been describing a three-part punishment comprising judgement on earth, judgement by the flood and finally judgement in heaven.<sup>45</sup>

In the third place of punishment, the mighty kings will have to watch the Chosen One sit on the throne of glory to judge Azazel and his associates and all his hosts. The angels of punishment held scourges and chains of iron and bronze and used them to deal with the 'elect and beloved' of Azazel so that they could be cast into the abyss.

The second vision ended with the pillars of heaven being shaken by the noise of the wagons of all the dispersed people returning to the homeland.

The author had Enoch introduce the third similitude by saying it will be concerned with the righteous and elect, and the opening passage does indeed comprise a glorious hymn of praise to the righteous. But then Enoch reverts to his particular interest in lightning and thunder. This led into an incomplete fragment, which was probable originally a separate work involving Noah, but has been clumsily adapted to fit here by replacing Noah with his great grandfather Enoch<sup>46</sup>. In this fragment, Enoch/Noah was terrified by a great '*quaking in heaven*'. Michael sent an angel to comfort Enoch/Noah who asked why he was so frightened, for surely he knew that judgement would come - the Head of Days had been patient for long enough. Michael goes on to say: -

*In order that the punishment of the Lord shall 'rest' on them, and not be in vain, children will be slain with their mothers and sons with their fathers. But when the Lord of Spirits 'rests' from punishment, judgement shall take place according to his mercy and patience.*<sup>47</sup>

This verse skilfully plays on the word *noah*, which, as well as being the ark-builder's name, also means 'rest' in both its senses of 'lie down' and 'desist'.

This led, by means of a stream of consciousness, into an account of the separation of two great monsters – the female Leviathan who goes to sea and her partner, the male Behemoth, who goes to the

---

<sup>41</sup> This is the second of the two occasions where the Son of Man is identified as the Messiah. The term is not used elsewhere in the whole of Enoch.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel 2:31-45

<sup>43</sup> Enoch 53

<sup>44</sup> Enoch 54: 7-10. The insertion may be just the second part where the 'Head of Days' repents of his destruction and sets a sign in heaven as a pledge of good faith with mankind. See Genesis 9:8-17

<sup>45</sup> Olson (2003); p.920-921.

<sup>46</sup> Enoch 60:8 refers to 'my great-father, the seventh from Adam'. That would make 'me' Noah.

<sup>47</sup> Enoch 60:25

dry wilderness<sup>48</sup>. Whilst Enoch pondered on the power of these beasts, the angel eventually told him they were being prepared as food to be served in the great feast at the end of time.<sup>49</sup> In the meantime the author returned to his meteorology, and in particular speculated upon the spirits of various forms of precipitation - rain, hail, frost, hoarfrost, snow and dew.

Later he would return to another account of the Flood myth in which Enoch responded to an anguished plea from his grandson Noah who perceived the earth to be “*sunk down*”. Enoch explained that a command had gone out from the Lord to destroy those who dwelt on earth because they have learnt the secrets of the angels and because of the violence of the ‘*satans*’, but he assured Noah that he personally would be saved and his name included amongst the holy. Then the angels of punishment were instructed to hold back the waters of heaven for a while whilst a wooden construction was made to hold the seed of life from which the earth will be repopulated.

Angels who had shown unrighteousness would be imprisoned in a sulphurous volcanic valley. Hot springs from nearby would be used for a time by the mighty for the ‘*healing of the body, and the punishment of the spirit*’, a reference, some think, to the springs used unsuccessfully by Herod.<sup>50</sup>

Enoch notices angels going off with cords. He is told that these are both to measure off parts of heaven for the righteous and to enable the righteous to hang on to their righteousness.

In the midst of this the author had come to the much-prophesied day of Judgement. The trial of the mighty and exalted began with the command of the Lord: -

*“Open your eyes and lift up your horns if you are able to recognize the Chosen One”*

And when they see the Son of Man sitting on his throne of glory they are terrified and all the kings and the mighty ‘*bless, glorify and extol the one who rules over all, but who was hidden from them*’. From the beginning, the Son of Man was preserved in the power of the Most High and revealed only to the elect. The kings and the mighty fall down before him, *worship him, petition him and plead for mercy*, but the Lord of Spirits *so presses them that they hastily leave, their faces filled with shame* and are delivered to the angels of punishment *because they oppressed his children and his elect*.

*They shall be a spectacle for the righteous and elect  
who will rejoice  
Because the wrath of Lord rests on them  
and his sword is drunk with their blood*

The Romans from time to time put on ‘spectacles’ for their citizens in which the perceived enemies of the state were tortured or killed for entertainment. In this case, the kings and the mighty, who form the victims in this spectacle, implore the Lord for a little respite in a long prayer of worship, confession and supplication. But to no avail. The judgement was confirmed and it was terrible; so much so that Michael asked Raphael, “*Whose heart is not softened and whose is not troubled by this word of Judgement?*” but in the hearing of the Lord of Spirits he only says “*I will not take their part under the eye of the Lord ... for neither man nor angel shall bear it, but they alone that have received their judgement for ever and ever.*”

Two lists of the fallen angels are supplied; the first is copied from the book of watchers, but the second is original to this book and includes details of their specialities. Penemue taught men to write “*and many therefore sinned*” since man was not created for that purpose. Humans were not created differently from the angels in that they should also lead continually righteous lives. They should have been immortal, but ‘*thanks to this knowledge of theirs, they are perishing.*’<sup>51</sup>

The last of the angels, the keeper of the oath, tried to obtain the hidden name of God from Michael – in order that he could enunciate it in ‘*the oath*’. The oath was very powerful, for through this oath: -

*The heaven was suspended before the world was created  
and through it the earth was founded on the water...*

---

<sup>48</sup> See Job 40-41 for a description of these delicious monsters.

<sup>49</sup> Actually, the final part of this statement is missing, but can be inferred from references to this story in other writings of the time. See Olson (2003) p 921.

<sup>50</sup> Enoch 65-67. See the earlier discussion on the date of the similitudes for more details about the hot springs.

<sup>51</sup> Enoch 69:10-11

*and through that oath the depths are made fast...  
and through that oath the stars complete their course  
He calls them by their names  
and they answer him from eternity to eternity*<sup>52</sup>

And similarly the voice of thunder and the light of lightning are preserved in heaven. And the spirits of hail, frost and snow are there. All these confess and glorify the Lord of Spirits and

*Great was their Joy...  
because the name of Son of Man had been revealed to them...  
and has seated himself on his throne of glory.*

*All evil shall pass away before his face  
and the word of the Son of Man shall go forth  
and be strong before the face of all spirits.*

The author has Enoch declare

*Afterwards my spirit was translated.  
It ascended into the heavens,  
And I saw the holy sons of God...*

The Ancient of Days came with Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel and with myriads of angels without number. Then the angel came to Enoch and said,

*“You are the Son of Man!”*<sup>53</sup>

This astonishing revelation concluded the book of Enoch. The book introduced a number of theological ideas which would be picked up in Christian thought and writings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE.

### **Herod's successors**

After the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE, the Kingdom was divided up, in accordance with his last wishes, and given to the sons of his 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> wives, Malthrace and Cleopatra of Jerusalem respectively. Archelaus son of Malthrace, got the bulk of the territory – Idumea, Judea and Samaria. Phillip, son of Cleopatra, got the area northeast of Lake Galilee and Herod Antipas, Malthrace's second son received Galilee and Perea (a strip of land east of the southern Jordan). Whilst the sons were in Rome seeking confirmation of their positions, riots broke out in all three areas. In Galilee, a bandit leader captured the capital Sepphoris.

The uprisings were led by the oppressed lower classes. Varus, the Roman governor based in Syria sent in two legions, which, supported by an army of Nabateans put down the revolt. Sepphoris and Emmaus were burnt to the ground, 2000 Galileans were crucified and the rest of the population of Sepphoris enslaved. The village of Nazareth lies just three miles from Sepphoris, and Jesus of Nazareth may have been a young boy at the time.

Herod's eldest son Archelaus did not remain long in power. It may have been complaints from Judea and Samaria, or it may have been Roman concerns about the trade route from Syria to Egypt but, whatever the reason, Augustus banished Herod's main heir to Gaul after he had been in power for just two years and his territories were placed under direct Roman rule and incorporated into the province of Syria. The first Governor granted a degree of local autonomy and re-established the Sanhedrin (from the Greek word denoting an assembly) with the High Priest as its leader. The longest serving High Priest was Joseph Caiaphas (CE 18 – 36)

Josephus records a Roman census organised under Quirinius which he dates to CE 6 or 7.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Enoch 69 :16b-21

<sup>53</sup> Enoch 69:26-71:14a

<sup>54</sup> Quirinius gives the date as 37 years after the battle of Actium. Luke's gospel (2:1- 2) refers to this claiming it required Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary to travel to Bethlehem. Luke also states, correctly, that it was the first such census, but also incorrectly that it occurred when Herod the Great was

This stimulated a revolt led by Judas the Galilean, a revolt that continued to be sustained by members of his family until they were finally defeated at Massada nearly 70 years later. At roughly the same time as the census, a group of Samaritans entered the Temple during Passover and desecrated its sanctity by scattering human bones. This is one of several episodes that illustrated the enmity that had developed between Judeans and Samaritans.

Rome's appointed governors were mostly contemptuous of the local population. Pontius Pilate (CE 26-36) provoked the local population by bringing Roman standards, probably decorated with images of the Emperor, into Jerusalem. The resulting protest caused Pilate to send the standards back to Caesarea. His attempts to raid temple funds to construct an aqueduct led to another protest, which he suppressed by sending his troops into the unarmed crowd, massacring them.

In Galilee, Herod Antipas married Herodias, the divorced wife of one of his half-brothers. This not only incurred the condemnation of John the Baptist, but also the Nabatean king Aretas (9 BCE – 40 CE). According to Josephus, the Baptist was executed because his considerable popular support threatened Antipas' rule; according to the gospel authors he was executed at the instigation of Herodias for his criticism of her marriage. A border dispute with the Nabateans became toxic when Herod rejected his former wife, the daughter of the Nabatean King: this resulted in a war which eventually proved disastrous for the Galilean ruler. Herod Antipas, called 'that fox' by Jesus of Nazareth, fell out of favour with the imperial family following the death of Tiberius in CE 37, probably as a result of mismanaged machinations initiated by Herodias against her brother Agrippa 1, who also happened to be a close friend of the new and unstable emperor Caligula. Antipas and Herodias were banished by Caligula to the other end of the empire in CE 39; and Rome added the tetrarchy of Galilee to those already held by Agrippa 1.

Philip, the third brother, had inherited an area to the northeast of Lake Galilee whose population included very few believers in Judaism. He rebuilt the Hellenic city of Pnias and renamed it Caesarea (the Caesarea Philippi of the gospels). On Philip's death in CE 34, the area was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria.

The crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth occurred sometime between CE 30 and 36 during the reign of Tiberius (CE 14-37). Roman officials were reluctant to distinguish between Zealot leaders able to command significant public followings and spiritual teachers able to do the same – especially if they came from the hotbed of rebellious activity that was Galilee. When Jesus was crucified, Pilate was reported as insisting on naming him as if he were a rebel leader called the 'The King of the Judeans'. But the Jesus movement did not die with Jesus; on the contrary, it became a movement, known as 'The Way', in which people voluntarily adopted poverty and held all things in common; in these respects it was similar to the Essenes of Qumran, but it differed from them in that its adherents worshiped daily in the temple, whereas the Essenes considered the Temple corrupt.

Caligula (CE 37 - 41) considered himself to be a god: he accused the Judeans as being god-haters, since they did not make sacrifices to him.<sup>55</sup> He wanted his statue to be set up in the Jerusalem Temple, the mere threat of which caused a potentially serious uprising. Fortunately, by CE 39, Caligula had appointed his friend Agrippa 1 as ruler of the whole of the former Kingdom of Herod the Great. Agrippa presented himself as an observer of the Torah, and this combined with some skilful management and Caligula's death in 41 averted the worst of the disaster. But then in CE 44, Agrippa died and the emperor, Claudius (CE 41 – 54), annexed the whole territory as a Roman Province - finally removing anyone with an understanding of Judaism from the government of the lands of the Judah, Samaria and Galilee.

The governorship of Tiberius Julius Alexander (46 – 48) was impacted by a severe famine and a resurgence of the simmering rebellion led by the family of Judas the Galilean. The Governor had executed Judas, but his sons, James and Simon, renewed the struggle. The next governor was slow in dealing with an outbreak of violence between the peoples of Judea and Samaria. Revolutionary activity intensified under governor Antonius Felix (52 – 60), especially assassinations by the Sicarii who specialised in stabbing to death anyone they thought to be collaborating with the Roman authorities. During the 50's the Christian movement founded a number of churches outside Judea and Paul wrote letters to Christian communities in Thessalonica, Galatia, Corinth, Philippi and Rome. By CE 64, the Christians in Rome had become a large enough community to be blamed by Nero for the fire that destroyed much of the city. In Jerusalem, James, the brother Jesus of Nazareth, had assumed the leadership of the Jesus movement. Any idea that the new movement could remain within the structures of Judaism was killed off when the High Priest Annas II ordered his assassination in 62 - a time when the local authorities in occupied territories did not have the authority to carry out capital punishments.

---

in power, whereas in reality he had died two or three years earlier.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel N. Showalter in Oxford p 530

Annas was subsequently relieved of his post.

It was around this time that a book was written that attempted to blend the ideas of Judaism with those of Greek philosophy.

#### **4 Maccabees: On the Supremacy of Reason**

The book known as 4 Maccabees was a philosophical text written in Greek by a Judean living in the Syrian Diaspora. He employed an incident in the Maccabean history to illustrate his argument that reason is potentially more powerful than the emotions. The approximate date of the text is indicated by an anachronism; the author erroneously supposed that the High Priest Onias lived at a time when a single governor was in charge of Syria, Phoenicia and Cilicia. Whilst this arrangement was not in place during Onias' time, it was the administrative structure between 19 and 74 CE. It is likely that the error occurred because the author assumed that the structure in place in his time was also the structure in place at the time of which he was writing. There is no suggestion that the catastrophic events of CE 70, when the Roman army destroyed the Jerusalem temple, had taken place, so a time between 20 and 70 CE is plausible. The Greek is elegant and fluent. It is possible that the author, the apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews were all contemporaries. The place could have been Antioch, since that is the location of the stories he used to illustrate his arguments. The text urged Judeans to remain true to their ancestral faith despite the difficulties, sometimes extreme, of living in a Greco-Roman culture.

The book provided a well-argued philosophical case for the importance of the adherence to the Torah. The author argued first that *'rational judgement is sovereign over the emotions by virtue of the restraining power of self-control'*<sup>56</sup>. He referred to the commandment 'not to covet your neighbour's wife nor anything that is your neighbour's' and he illustrated this by reference to a number of stories in which self-control overcame emotions such as lust, power, arrogance, and even love. He further argued that *when God fashioned humankind, he planted in them emotions and inclinations, but at the same time he enthroned the mind among the senses as a sacred governor over them all. To the mind he gave the Torah, the law; and one who lives subject to this will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good, and courageous.*<sup>57</sup>

He took as evidence for his main argument incidents surrounding the attempt by Apollonius to seize the temple treasure (2 Maccabees 3:1-40). It will be recalled that Apollonius was met by mounted angels and was struck to the ground. Half dead, he prayed that the Hebrews would intercede for him. Moved by his words, the High Priest Onias did indeed pray for him with the result that Apollonius, saved beyond his expectations, returned to Antiochus and reported what had happened to him as divine intervention. The failure to obtain the temple treasure eventually led to Antiochus' persecution of the Judeans (2 Maccabees 5:11-6.11) which included the torture by the Tyrant Antiochus of Eleazar in order to induce him to eat pork. Eleazar was a man of priestly family, learned in the law, advanced in age and respected in the tyrant's court because of his philosophy. When Antiochus saw him he said,

*"Before I begin to torture you, old man, I would advise you to save yourself by eating pork, ... It does not seem to me that you are a philosopher when you observe the religion of the Jews. When nature has granted it to us, why should you abhor eating the most excellent meat of this animal? It is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful; and wrong to spurn the gifts of nature. It seems to me that you will do something even more senseless if, by holding a vain opinion concerning the truth, you continue to despise me to your own heart. Will you not awaken from your foolish philosophy, dispel your futile reasonings, adopt a mind appropriate to your years, philosophise according to the truth of what is beneficial, and have compassion on your old age by honouring my humane advice?"*

But Eleazar answered,

*"We who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law, think that there is no compulsion more powerful than our obedience to the law. ... Even if our law were not truly divine, even so it would not be right for us to invalidate our reputation for piety. Do not suppose that it would be a petty sin if we were to eat defiling food. To transgress the law in matters either small or great is of equal seriousness, for in either case the law is equally despised. You scoff at our philosophy as though living by it were irrational, but it teaches us*

---

<sup>56</sup> 4 Maccabees 1:30

<sup>57</sup> 4 Maccabees 2:21-22

*self-control, so that we master all pleasures and desires, and it also trains us in courage, so that we endure any suffering willingly; it instructs us in justice, so that in all our dealings we act impartially, and it teaches us piety, so that with proper reverence we worship the only living God.*

Eleazar explained that he believed that the Creator, in giving humankind the law, had “*permitted us to eat what will be most suitable for our lives, but had forbidden us to eat meats that would be contrary to this.*”<sup>58</sup>

So Eleazar refused to eat pork and was subjected to cruel tortures, his body scourged, his sides cut open, “*but he bore the pains, scorned the punishment and endured the tortures*” (4 Maccabees 6:9). Some scholars note the similarity between this and the Epistle to the Hebrews where the author wrote that the faithful should look to Jesus *who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

In a further twist to the tortures being inflicted on Eleazar, one of the guards asked him to save himself by at least pretending to eat pork, but Eleazar would not do so, saying it would be irrational if, having lived all his life, he should now change his course and become a model of impiety for the young. So they burned him with maliciously contrived instruments and poured stinking liquids into his nostrils. As he died he said; -

*"You know, O God, that though I might have saved myself, I am dying in burning torments for the sake of the law. Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs."*

Through the words of his hero, the author thus advanced the idea of substitutional atonement, an idea that Paul would develop in his letters (Romans 3:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:3 and elsewhere) and which would become a key doctrine of Christianity.

4 Maccabees continued with detailed accounts of the defiance and death under torture of seven elegant and able brothers. Finally, their mother threw herself into the flames so that no-one could touch her. The author concluded his argument by stating,

*These, then, who have been consecrated, are honoured, not only with this honour, but also by the fact that because of them our enemies failed to rule over our nation, the tyrant was punished, and the homeland purified – they having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of these devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been afflicted.*

4 Maccabees had a significant influence on the early Christian church. Gregory Nazianus, John Chrysostom, Origen, Ambrose and Augustine revered 4 Maccabees as if it were a Christian text. Gregory included a specific reference to ‘the book that philosophizes concerning reason being supreme over the passions’ in one of his sermons. Origen’s interpretation of martyrdom as an act of reciprocity for God’s many benefits to humankind may have found its inspiration in passages from 4 Maccabees. Erasmus made a Latin paraphrase of text in the year that Luther nailed his theses to the church door in Wittenberg.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Prayer of Manasseh**

The prayer survives in Greek and Syrian Manuscripts. Although modern scholarship regards it as of Jewish origin, it is preserved mainly in Christian tradition where it has been included in the Apocrypha of Protestant Bibles. There is a reference to this prayer (or some other prayer of a similar name) in 2 Baruch which would date it to the first century CE. It is thought by some to have been admirably suited for use on the day of Atonement when the High priest confesses his own sins and those of the nation. If its use on the day of Atonement is correct, then it must have been composed before the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

The title indicates that the author composed a prayer that he considered would have been appropriate for King Manasseh’s repentance as reported in 2 Chronicles 33. The prayer opened with a

---

<sup>58</sup> 4 Maccabees 5 contains the debate between Antiochus and Eleazar

<sup>59</sup> See David de Siva’s article on 4 Maccabees in Erdman’s Bible Commentary (2003) and Hugh Anderson’s article in The Anchor Bible Dictionary.

fearful appeal to the God of the patriarchs, *the wrath of whose threat ... is unendurable*; yet mindful that “*You, Lord, have promised repentance and forgiveness to those who have sinned against you*”, The penitent confessed his sins “*more in number than the sands of the sea*”, and finally pleaded for forgiveness:

*And now, see, I am bending the knee of my heart before you;  
and beseeching your kindness.  
I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned  
and yes, I certainly know my sins.  
I make supplication before you,  
Forgive me, Lord, forgive me!*<sup>60</sup>

### **The uprising**

A combination of high unemployment in Jerusalem, high taxes, avaricious, bribe-taking and incompetent governors, religious extremism, and intercommunal strife led many to believe that a change in governance was required and, further, that Rome would not supply it. Against this background something as little as a planning dispute could start a chain reaction that would end with disaster. The erection of a Greek building in CE 61 had blocked a synagogue. The resulting appeal went all the way to the emperor Nero, who eventually decided in favour of the Greeks. In CE 66, street fighting erupted between the Jewish and Greek communities. The authorities did little to restore order. To make matters worse, the governor raided the temple treasury once more, and broke up the resulting demonstration with armed force. Made fearful by the intensity and multiplicity of the protests, he retreated to Caesarea with most of his troops. With just a cohort left in Jerusalem, open rebellion broke out and spread quickly throughout Judea and into Galilee. Samaria followed a year later. The rebels had some early successes, seizing the fortress of Masada, the Antonia and the Temple Mount; they burnt a number of public buildings including the high priest's palace and the city archives.

Gallus, the governor of the neighbouring Roman Province of Syria, marched on Jerusalem with an augmented 12<sup>th</sup> legion intending to restore order with a show of force. Prevented from taking the Temple Mount, he decided to withdraw and await further reinforcements. The rebels tracked his retreat and caught the legion in a narrow pass near Bet Horon. Unable to form a defensive unit, the legion was massacred with 6,000 dead, the loss of their eagle and significant weaponry. The rebel victory encouraged many to join their cause; the Roman defeat ensured that the senate would dispatch sufficient force to restore their authority. The experienced general Vespasian was given the task. With his son Titus as second in command, he assembled a force of at least two legions and negotiated some assistance from Nabatea and from the son of Agrippa I. Ranged against them were Menahem ben Jehuda, who claimed to be a Messiah and was a leader of the Sicari and possibly the grandson of Judas the Galilean, Josephus who was later to change sides and become the author of several histories, Eleazar ben Simon and others. Rival leaderships and internal fighting amongst the various rebel factions was a hindrance to the rebel cause throughout the uprising; it would be effectively exploited by Vespasian,

Josephus claimed to be the leader of the Galilean forces with 100,000 men under his command and to have fortified a number of towns including Jotapata, Tiberius and Sephoris<sup>61</sup>, but when Vespasian landed, Josephus left his troops in Jotapata, which fell to the Romans 47 days later following which the population and Josephus' troops were either enslaved or killed. Meanwhile Josephus went to Tiberius and persuaded Vespasian to take him onto his staff as his Jewish expert, predicting rightly that Vespasian would one day be emperor. By the end of CE 67 Vespasian had taken all of Galilee. Noting the internal fighting amongst the rebel groups, he left them in Jerusalem to weaken themselves whilst he used his own troops to take the surrounding areas.

In June of 68, the emperor Nero committed suicide and civil war broke out in Rome. Vespasian needed now to be attentive to the disputes in Rome as well as those in Jerusalem. During the year of 68/69 three contestants for the Imperial throne successively rose and fell. Vespasian decided to allow a pause in his armies' activities in Palestine until the civil war in Rome had reached its conclusion. It may have been during this pause that Vespasian permitted the leader of the Pharisees to pass through his lines

---

<sup>60</sup> Prayer of Manasseh 11-13; from a translation provided by James H Charlesworth in his article on the prayer in ABD.

<sup>61</sup>Josephus; Wars of the Jews; Book 2: 20; 6 (572-576). Josephus was never fully trusted by his fellow rebel leaders; nor by modern historians. His claim to have 100,000 under arms is an obvious exaggeration.

to establish a school in Jamnia – a seemingly trivial decision that would have major long-term consequences for Judaism. In July 69, the struggles in Rome having petered indecisively out, the Roman armies in the east proclaimed Vespasian emperor and he set out for Rome to start his ten-year rule, leaving his son Titus in Palestine with a force of four legions. Titus moved on Jerusalem, which was vulnerable because internal rivalries had resulted in much of their stores of corn being burned. The outer walls fell quickly in early 70. Seven months later the temple was burned – either by the remaining Zealots or by Titus’ victorious legions.

The destruction of the Temple was a turning point for both the embryonic Jesus movement and for Judaism. Up until this event, the ‘Followers of the Way’, as the early Christians were known, had worshipped daily in the Temple, kept the Sabbath, observed the dietary laws, revered the Torah and generally behaved as orthodox followers of Judaism. But they also, like the Essenes, held all property communally, advocated poverty, came together for communal meals and looked for the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God. The idea of a Messiah that would herald the arrival of the Kingdom was entertained by a few in the second temple period, but became more widespread under the oppressions of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. The Jesus movement had made significant converts in some gentile cities in Asia Minor, and amongst the ‘God-fearers’ in Jerusalem, pagans who were attracted to the rituals of Judaism and who often frequented the outer court of the temple but were not circumcised. To these converts to The Way, the question of whether Jesus was the Messiah, a crucial problem for Jewish converts, was unimportant; for them the promise that following The Way would lead to eternal life was sufficient. For the Jewish converts, the traditional means of atonement – Temple and Torah – had already become less significant. For those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the destruction of the temple was neither unexpected nor disastrous. But the expected Kingdom of God did not materialize and those who had known Jesus personally had either died or were approaching old age. There was therefore a need to write down their understanding of the significance of the life and particularly the death of Jesus. All the presently Canonical Gospels were probably written within 50 years of the destruction of the temple with that known as Mark, written in the shadow of the event, being commonly regarded as the first.

For most Judean’s, however, the destruction of the temple was an unimaginable disaster, which they would struggle to understand in the centuries to come. But one group, the Pharisees, had already encouraged its members to live at home as if serving in the temple. The hearth became the altar; the householder the priest. Gathering together in Javneh, the Pharisees collected records of the traditional scriptures, rituals and practices so that when the temple could be rebuilt, the worship in it could be restored. They intensified the study of the Torah, but not in the old way: now they were seeking a new understanding of the texts, a *Midrash*, in which the surface meaning was to be distinguished from the true deeper meaning.

When Titus returned to Rome for his victory procession, pockets of resistance still remained. The temple’s Western Wall survived then and remains to this day a symbol of the Judean’s refusal to completely surrender. More practically, the fortresses of Herodium, Machaerus and Massada were still in the hands of the rebels. They were taken year by year, one at a time, so that it was in CE 73 that Masada fell. The story of mass suicide as reported by Josephus could have written to retain the honour of its defenders and to avoid the Romans being held guilty of a massacre; it is regarded with scepticism by some scholars. When the revolt was finally suppressed, Judea became a separate Roman Province; the 10<sup>th</sup> legion and its dependants were stationed there on a permanent basis; land was awarded to prominent officials; Vespasian built Neapolis – modern Nablus – near to Shechem; Judeans were expelled from several cities including Caesarea Maritima<sup>62</sup> and Jerusalem became a more cosmopolitan city; Vespasian issued a commemorative coin inscribed with the legend “Judea Capta” depicting a weeping woman seated beneath a palm tree and guarded by a Roman soldier; and the temple tax was replaced by the *Fiscus Judaicus* – to be paid by all Judean men over the age of 20 for the reconstruction of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.<sup>63</sup>

Titus ruled alongside his father for much of Vespasian’s time, but the year in which he became emperor in his own right (CE 79) was also the year in which Vesuvius erupted, burying the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Titus died two years later, generally recognised as a competent and compassionate ruler. His brother, Domitian was perceived very differently, at least by the Roman Senate whose powers he drastically curtailed. The common people, and particularly the army, whose pay he increased significantly, probably took a different view. He himself believed that government should be carried on by a divine monarch, such as himself, who should rule as a benevolent depot. His contemporary Suetonius regarded him as running an efficient imperial bureaucracy relatively free from

---

<sup>62</sup> Ami-Jill Levine; Oxford p 512.

<sup>63</sup> Rescinded by Nerva in CE 97

nepotism and corruption. But Suetonius also wrote of increasing persecutions towards the end of Domitian's reign. Domitian certainly revelled in the blood-shed of spectacular imperial shows, games and sacrifices. Pliny the Younger complained, "*Enormous 'herds' of victims were intercepted on their way to the Capitolinium and large parts of them were forcibly diverted from their path because, in order to honour the statue of that atrocious master, as much blood of victims had to flow as the amount of human blood he had shed*"<sup>64</sup> Following a failed revolt in 89, at least 20 senators were executed including members of his own family. He upheld and tolerated foreign religions provided they were compatible with traditional Roman religion, which the monotheism of Judaism and the Christian movement was not. Roman officials may not have been much concerned to distinguish between the two faiths. As a result, both religions suffered the severe persecutions that were recalled by Eusebius, writing two centuries later. Some scholars believe that the passage in Revelations 13 that describes the terrifying beasts from the sea and from the earth refers to Domitian and his local officials. These persecutions raised serious questions in the minds of those who believed in the Judaic doctrine that God had chosen them to be his special people.

#### 4 Ezra

4 Ezra is a Jewish text composed towards the end of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian – between 81 and 96 CE<sup>65</sup>. It is probably the work of a single author who nevertheless incorporated some earlier material, such as Ezra's prayer, into his work<sup>66</sup>. The author's purpose was to try to understand why the God of Israel did not reward the faith of his people but rather seemed to impose greater suffering on them than he did on their oppressors. Most scholars believe the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent oppression was the specific trigger for the writing of this work. The author developed his argument by means of a dialogue between Ezra and his God, mediated principally through the angel Uriel. The text had a significant impact on the early Christian church, such that a Christian writer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE prefaced the work by a two-chapter introduction and another, writing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, added an appendix bringing the text up to date by dealing with the disasters that had occurred in the intervening time. The combined text with its Christian introduction and appendix is known as the second book of Esdras. It may have been written in Hebrew and translated into Greek, but neither of these texts are extant; instead modern translators have to rely on Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, Georgian and Latin manuscripts. It was incorporated into the Greek orthodox bible and recognised as scripture by the Russian orthodox church, although that tradition held it to be of a lesser authority than the principle books of Hebrew Bible. It was included in the Apocrypha of the Vulgate by the western Christian churches.

The author has Ezra open his argument by reminding God of the history of his creation of the world until the exodus from Egypt. Then "*Your Glory passed through the four gates of fire, earthquake, wind and ice so that you would give the Law to Jacobs descendants... But you did not take away from them the inclination to do evil so that the Law might bear fruit in them*". Ezra appears to blame God for the weakness of his people. God raised up David and told him to build a city in God's name and bring offerings. Offerings were made for many years, but the people sinned as they had always done and so God handed over his people to their enemies. '*I saw how you destroyed your people*', complained Ezra, '*but preserved your enemies. And I have not been given any clue as to how to make sense of these ways.*'

Then Uriel, who had been sent to reply on behalf of God began, in the manner of God's response to Job, by demanding, '*Go, weigh for me the weight of fire; or measure for me a blast of wind, or call back for me the day that is past*'.<sup>67</sup> When Ezra, like Job, admitted he could not do these things, Uriel commented that since Ezra could not understand even these familiar things that he had grown up with, then how could he expect to understand the ways of the Most High. Ezra, despairing, replied, '*It would be better not to have been born, than to come here, live in the midst of wickedness, and suffer, and not understand why*'

<sup>64</sup> Pliny the Younger; Panegyricus 52:7. The criticism is that the victims were intended for sacrifice to the god Jupiter, but had been diverted for sacrifice to the 'Lord and God Domitian'.

<sup>65</sup> Evidence for the date comes from the 5<sup>th</sup> Vision: that of a three-headed eagle. Each head is believed to represent one of the three Flavian emperors of which the last was Domitian. Since the author does not know of Domitian's death, the text must have been composed during his reign. The author claims to be writing around thirty years after the destruction of 'our city'. If that city was Jerusalem, then a late Domitian date is probable.

<sup>66</sup> 2 Esdras: 8:20-36

<sup>67</sup> 2 Esdras 4:5

There followed an excursion into a discussion about the end of the world involving another angel, Jeremiel. Ezra was advised to look for the signs:

*The way of truth will be hidden; the land will be barren and devoid of faith; injustice will be multiplied.*

*The country you now see in power will have no-one left in it; people will see it desolate; but if the Most High grants that you live, you will see it thrown into confusion in the third period of the time.*

*The sun will suddenly start shining by night and the moon by day; blood will drip from wood and stones will speak out...Chasms will open up in many places and fire will shoot out. Wild beasts will roam beyond their territories; women will give birth to monsters<sup>68</sup>*

Similar Apocalyptic visions occur in the Gospels<sup>69</sup>. The idea that women may give birth to monsters may lie behind the cry of ‘Woe to those who are pregnant in those days’ in Luke and elsewhere. In Luke the apocalypse was to be followed by the coming of the ‘son of man’; in Ezra the end time foreshadowed the coming of an anointed one, but Ezra was not told this immediately – partly because Ezra was so shocked by what he heard that he was reluctant to continue.

Ezra remained in shock for seven days, but then began again to speak to the Most High. In this second dialogue he was particularly concerned about the apparent disparity in treatment between those who will be alive at the end of time and those who have already lived. He asked God why everyone could not have been created all at once. He was told to ask a woman who has ten children why she did not have them all at once, and why the children of her later years were weaker than those of her prime. In the same way, God’s planned creation has to take place over God’s time and cannot be hurried. This has the consequence that the people of the later time will be weaker – more inclined to evil – than those who lived earlier. God spoke directly through the angel, saying: -

*“In the beginning of the earthly world,  
before the world’s exits were made,  
before the gathered winds blew,  
before the voices of the thunders sounded,*

*...*

*before the present years were reckoned,  
before the imaginations of those who now sin were alienated,  
before those who stored up faith as a treasure were sealed –*

*then I planned these things. As they were done by me and not another, so also the end will come by me and not another.”<sup>70</sup>*

There were two times, the present imperfect time and the one which was to come. Ezra asked what separated the times. At this point God intervened with a message so important that Ezra was required to stand on his feet to hear it.

*Look! The days are coming when I will visit those who live on earth, and will examine those who unjustly inflicted harm in their cruelty. When the humiliation of Zion is complete, when the seal is put upon the age that is to pass away, then I will perform these signs: ... Infants a year old will speak with their voices...a trumpet will sound with a blast, and all who hear it will be terrified ... friends will make war on friends, the earth and all who live on it will be terrified ... and the sources of rivers will stand still for three hours. Everyone who is left after these things ...will be saved. They will see my deliverance and the end of my age. ...The hearts of those who live will be changed; evil will be erased and grief extinguished, faith will flourish and corruption will be overcome.<sup>71</sup>*

After another period of fasting, Ezra resumed his questioning. He began by recalling the seven days of creation with short reflections on each. He remarked that on the fifth day God had commanded

---

<sup>68</sup> 2 Esdras 5:1b-5. the full list of signs continues for seven verses.

<sup>69</sup> See Luke 21: 25-28 and parallels.

<sup>70</sup> 2 Esdras 6:1-6

<sup>71</sup> 2 Esdras 6:18-28

the waters, which altogether occupied just one seventh part of all the world, to produce animals, birds, and fish, but that god had kept two living creatures in reserve; the Behemoth, and the Leviathan. And on the sixth day god had created Adam to be the leader over all creation, and to be in particular the father of god's chosen, compared to whom Adam's other descendants were as nothing: -

*But look now Lord. These nations that are valued as nothing rule over us and devour us while we, your people whom you have called your oldest offspring, your one and only child, those who are zealous for you, your dearest ones are handed over to them. If the world was created for our sake, why don't we possess our world as an inheritance?<sup>72</sup>*

Ezra was encouraged to cease being obsessed with the present age but to focus on the world which was to come. He was urged to imagine a broad peaceful sea the entrance to which is narrow, or a glorious city which can only be entered by way of a precipitous path with water on one side and fire on the other. In the same way, the future world of God's creation, in which only the just and faithful will live, can only be entered through the present tribulations, and

*My Son, the anointed one, will arise and will accompany the survivors into the new world and will reign for 400 years.*

He would live and die with the inhabitants of the new world. His reign would last for 400 years – a time similar to the period of bondage of the Israelites in Egypt. The reference to a living and dying Son of God here is so surprising that some commentators believe it to be a retrospective Christian insertion or a mis-translation of the Greek.<sup>73</sup>

Ezra asked how many will be saved, since all men have sinned. He was told they are like a drop compared to a wave. Many will be created, but few will be saved – though Ezra was reassured that he would be amongst them.

*It was not by your will that you came into this world and it will not be by your will that you depart from it; you are given but a little time to live.<sup>74</sup>*

Ezra was offered a parable to help him understand the low proportion of creation that will survive; just as a farmer sows many seeds on the land, but not all the seeds will survive, so also not all of those who are sown in the world will be saved<sup>75</sup>

He is told that when he sees that some of the signs that were predicted have occurred, then he will understand that the time has come in which the Most High will visit humankind. He is to look for a tumult of peoples, the plotting of nations, inconstancy of leaders, and confusion of princes.<sup>76</sup> The righteous will be saved either through their works or through their faith<sup>77</sup> He was told that the world was created for the righteous; but those who were born without a purpose will perish.<sup>78</sup>

The text concluded with three visions. The first was of a woman in mourning, wearing torn clothing and with ashes on her head. She says she was infertile for 30 years and then God gave her a son; she found a wife for him, but on his wedding night he died. She was inconsolable. Ezra chided her for her selfish grief; "*Zion, the mother of us all, is destroyed. Grieve with us because we all grieve,*" he said, "*but do not mourn for just one son.*" Suddenly her face shone brightly and Ezra became afraid of her. Without warning she let out a great voice full of fear, so that the earth itself shook. As he watched she no longer appeared as a woman, but as a city built with great foundations. He was afraid, and shouted for Uriel who reassured him and explained the vision. The woman was Zion; the infertile period was the period when no sacrifices were made. The birth of the son was the building of the temple. The life of the son was the period when sacrifices were made. The death of the son was the destruction of the city.

The second vision was of an eagle with 12 wings and three heads and with a voice that did not come from the heads but from the middle of the body. The beast is taken to be an allegory of the rulers

---

<sup>72</sup> 2 Esdras 6:57-59

<sup>73</sup> John J. Schmitt: "2 Esdras" in Erdman's 'Commentary on the Bible' p 881.

<sup>74</sup> 2 Esdras 8.5

<sup>75</sup> 2 Esdras 8:40

<sup>76</sup> 2 Esdras 9.3

<sup>77</sup> 2 Esdras 9.7

<sup>78</sup> 2 Esdras 9:13 & 22

.

of the lands. Some of the symbolism may relate to that used in Daniel 7, but successive layers of editing may have obscured the interpretation. The three heads have been taken to be the Flavian emperors:

*I saw how it (the middle head) formed a partnership with the other two ...This head gained power over the whole earth and dominated those who lived in it, inflicting great distress. After this...the middle head disappeared. There were two heads left which ruled over the earth...I looked and watched as the head on the right devoured the one on the left.*

There is no report of the end of the third head until it was later made to vanish, so it may be presumed that the ruler represented by the third head was still in power at the time the author was writing. Then, out of a forest, Ezra saw something like a lion who spoke in a human voice to the eagle saying “*The Most high says to you, ‘Are you not the last of the four beasts (the four empires?) that I made to rule in my world so that I might bring about the end of time through them?... You have conquered all the beasts that came before you*<sup>79</sup>, ...*Therefore, Eagle, you must utterly vanish ruling over the world with much terror and harsh oppression...The Most High has reviewed his times. They are finished.*

The third vision began beside a stormy sea: -

*As I watched, the wind made something like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea. That man was flying among the clouds of heaven. Wherever he turned to look, everything that fell under his gaze trembled. Whenever an utterance came from his mouth, all who heard his voice melted like wax when it feels the fire.*<sup>80</sup>

This was the one whom the Most High had been keeping for many ages. Ezra was told that he would liberate God’s creation. Those who came to fight against him would be destroyed by a blast of fire from his mouth. When he had destroyed his opponents, he would call together a peaceful crowd – some rejoicing, some sad, some bound and some bringing other people as an offering. This man was the Son of God and he would come to prosecute the nations for their wicked deeds; he would destroy them by the Law. The peaceful crowd was the exiled ten tribes of the northern kingdom; the author tells us that they had gone on beyond their exile in Assyria to an uninhabited land where they had been able to practice their customs. Now they were returning, crossing the Euphrates dry shod as God had suspended its flow. They would join with Ezra’s people.

Three days after receiving this vision, Ezra was told that he himself would be taken from human beings and live, together with those like him, with God’s son until *all the times are finished*. When Ezra had asked when that would be, he was told that present age had 12 parts of which nine and a half were completed. Ezra was commanded to recruit 5 scribes and to compile a book that God would dictate. Some would be made generally public, the 24 books of the Hebrew bible, but the rest would be transmitted secretly to the wise.

4 Ezra had a significant impact on the early Christian community: Clement of Alexandria and Ambrose of Milan were amongst those that referred to it. Christopher Columbus quoted its assertion that the world was sixth sevenths land in his appeal for funds make a voyage that would discover and exploit the unknown. In the second century CE, a Christian introduction would add the text now found in 2 Esdras 1-2; text that claimed that it was the Christian, not the Jewish, community that was the true successor of ancient Israel. The judgement against the wicked that the book contained was perceived in this introduction to be a judgement against those who had not accepted the Son of God.

### **Forming the Canon**

Domitian died in CE 96, murdered by his servants and friends. The senate rushed to pass a motion of *Damnatio memoriae*, an order reserved for traitors and those that brought discredit on the state requiring that their memory be erased from history. After a brief caretaker rule, the empire passed to the Spaniard Trajan (CE 98 – 117).

The Jewish communities continued to be oppressed, mainly because they refused to participate in the Roman religion, and in so refusing were seen as undermining the stability of the empire. Violence erupted in Alexandria in CE 115, probably initially as an expression of the long-standing conflicts between the Greek and Jewish communities there. Trajan sent one of his best generals to suppress the

<sup>79</sup> 2 Esdras 11:38-44. This vision is explicitly linked to the visions of Daniel.

<sup>80</sup> 2 Esdras 13:2-4

revolt, but it still lasted two and a half years. In Cyrenaica, an eastern coastal region of Libya, there is a suggestion that a messianic figure called Lucuas led an uprising which resulted in widespread destruction of property and temples with thousands of dead on both sides. In Cyprus, a similar uprising had equally serious results. In Mesopotamia, the Jewish population participated in an uprising that began and had to be suppressed by another of Trajan's leading generals.<sup>81</sup>

These uprisings and the manner of their suppression may have been a factor in the lead up to the third Jewish Rebellion, this time centred on Judah during the rule of Trajan's son Hadrian in 132/135. The trigger was Hadrian's announcement that he intended to plough Jerusalem into the ground and replace it with a modern Graeco-Roman city; that circumcision was banned: and that the training of rabbis and the teaching of the Torah were forbidden by law. The leader of the revolt was known as Bar Kokba, "son of a star", by Christians and those Jews who, like Rabbi Akiba, regarded him as the Messiah. Bar Kokba succeeded in driving out the 10<sup>th</sup> legion from Rome, an achievement that seriously alarmed Hadrian and the Senate. The rebellion was eventually brutally crushed, thousands of Jews died, Jerusalem was rebuilt as Hadrian planned and renamed Aelia, the academy at Javneh was closed and Jews were forbidden to reside in historical Judah.

The anti-Jewish legislation was only relaxed in the time of Emperor Antonius Prius (158 – 161). The rabbis were then able to form a new Academy at Usha in Galilee where they revealed a wariness of messianic ideas. Most withdrew from politics altogether, preferring a life of study. It was at Usha that they fixed the canon of the Hebrew bible by making a final selection of the *Kethuvim* - the Writings. The selection comprised the historical works of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, the wisdom books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job together with the story of Esther (because of its use at Purim and despite the absence of any mention of God), and the Song of Songs (because it could be interpreted allegorically).<sup>82</sup>

The final list of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible comprised the five books of the Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy), the four Former Prophets (Judges to Kings), four books of the later prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the minor prophets in a single book), together with eleven books of Writings comprising three poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs and Job), five books for special occasions and Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The five books linked to the liturgical calendar were the Song of Songs for Passover or Pesach (in celebrate the liberation from slavery), Ruth for Shavuot (when Jews celebrate the wheat harvest and remember the gift of the Law on mount Sinai), Lamentations for Tisha B'Av (in remembrance of the destruction of the temples on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av), Ecclesiastes for Sukkot (harvest and the Exodus), and Esther for Purim (in celebration of surviving the wicked plans of Haman).

The early Christians were not reading their sacred texts in Hebrew, but rather in the Greek version employed by the ex-patriate community in Alexandria. Their body of texts thus included Greek works such as the Wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Esdras and Baruch, and of course their own, specifically Christian texts. For the early Christians there was no list of agreed recommended texts because there was no standard set of beliefs. Some doubted whether the Jewish Bible was of any relevance to their new faith. The early Christian theologians included Gnostics, Marcions, followers of Montanus, and Arians – all with different views and beliefs. The Gnostics held that the body was a prison from which the soul longs to escape; that a distinction must be made between the one true god and the Demiurge, a creator identified as the god of the Hebrews; that all humans have within them a spark of the divine nature; and the saving knowledge, the "Gnosis", by which deliverance was to be achieved and the Gnostic awakened to his or her true nature and divine origin.<sup>83</sup> Marcion (ca. 100 – 165) held that the God of the Jews was an evil and inferior god. He wrote a gospel based on the letters of Paul and extracts from Luke. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140 – 200) compiled a list of approved texts which was an embryonic version of the today's new testament but included a revelation entitled the "Shepherd of Hermas". Montanus and two women (Priscilla and Maximilla) prophesied that Jesus would return imminently to two Phrygian villages. In their scatological expectations, ecstatic prophesying and claim to be instruments of the Holy spirit, they challenged the growing authoritarianism of the church's bishops. Despite the failure of the prophecy, the sect persisted for two centuries until Emperor Theodosius had their books burnt and those found in possession of them put to death. Origen (CE 185 – 254) held that the Hebrew scriptures were an allegorical version of the New Testament, since the surface meaning of

---

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Geller in Oxford p 562-3.

<sup>82</sup> Karen Armstrong (2008)

<sup>83</sup> The Oxford Companion to the Bible, New York, 1993; p.256. In 1945 a number of early Christian texts were uncovered amongst which were included those of the Gnostics, which up till then had largely been known through the writings of those who opposed their ideas.

scripture was often unacceptable or irrelevant to the Christian conscience<sup>84</sup>. Arius (CE 250 -336), a Christian priest of Alexandria, argued that Jesus was a created, finite being. He produced extensive scriptural arguments to support his idea that Jesus was not God, noting in particular that Jesus prayed to God as a separate person. The council of Nicea (CE 325) attempted to resolve the matter by creating a new word, 'consubstantial', to define the relationship between God and Jesus. But even this did not resolve the matter. The divinity of Jesus continued to be debated for the next two hundred years, Nevertheless the council did produce the Nicæan Creed which they hoped would be a definitive statement of belief and declared all others to be heretical.

Jerome (CE 324 -420) was a gifted and widely travelled linguist. He translated the books of the Hebrew Bible into Latin and wanted initially to leave it at that, but was persuaded by his friend Augustine to include the non-hebrew writings that had been retained by the Christian church – texts that most protestant churches now relegate to the Apocrypha. Unlike the *Vetus Latina*, which it replaced, it was a translation from Hebrew texts rather than a translation from the Greek. It was widely used from the start; hence it became known as the Vulgate, the 'common' version, but it was not officially adopted by the Catholic Church until the Council of Trent over 1100 years later. The reformation initiated a struggle to make the bible available in the language of the people, an ambition for which many people gave their lives. In England, this culminated in the Authorized Version published in 1611. The discovery in Qumran in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Hebrew texts originating a millennium earlier than the earliest previously known manuscripts, together with a desire to offer the Bible in a more accessible modern English vernacular, has led to the variety of English translations available today.

There is no single selection of books which is universally agreed by all Christian denominations to comprise the Biblical Canon. Certainly, all have the material in the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible as the core of their Old Testaments, but there are differences both as to the underlying texts of this core of books, to the number of additional books that are included and to the authority to be attributed to these books. The western churches vary in their treatment of Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, the Greek additions to Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Susanna and the other additions to Daniel: Luther placed them in an appendix; the other protestant churches place them in an Apocrypha whilst the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches treat them as Deuterocanonical. The Eastern and Oriental orthodox churches generally include 3 Maccabees whilst the western churches do not. The Ethiopian Orthodox church has the broadest definition of the Canon including both Jubilees and Enoch.

### **Reading and Understanding**

Almost as important as the content of the scriptures is the way they have been read and understood. Karen Armstrong argues that a literal, fundamentalist, interpretation of the Bible is a relatively recent phenomenon. In earlier times, people have felt free to interpret scripture to suit their own needs. They sometimes went as far as adjusting the text. They were not especially interested in what the intentions of the original authors might have been. Interpretation was all.<sup>85</sup>

Rabbi Hillel stated the essence of all scripture was the Golden Rule, "do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you", adding "all the rest is commentary". Jesus of Nazareth is recorded as summarising all the law and the prophets as "love God and your neighbour as yourself". But there was much in the scriptures that did not seem to accord with this doctrine. In Rome, slaves who had joined 'The Way' would have been horrified to learn that the Torah stated that they could be savagely beaten by their masters provided that did not die within two days (Exodus 21:20); non-Judeans living in Judah would have been alarmed to know that the bible advocated their extermination (Deuteronomy 20:16-17). Therefore, those passages had to be rejected or interpreted in such a way as make them compatible with the golden rule. St Paul had argued that his converts to 'The Way' need not obey the strict dietary requirements of Leviticus 11 and did not need to be circumcised even though this was a requirement of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14).

The freedom offered to interpreters by treating the text as allegories was very attractive. Already by the second century BCE, the community at Qumran had been writing 'Pesharim' in which hidden meanings were discovered in ancient texts. In the second century CE, this technique was used by the Jewish scholars gathered at Javneh, and later at Usha. It was also used by Christians struggling to make sense of the Hebrew texts within the context of the Christian revelation. For some readers the freedom of interpretation allowed ideas to be extracted from the texts that departed far from the plain meaning.

---

<sup>84</sup> Karen Armstrong (2008); p.108

<sup>85</sup> Armstrong (2008); the introduction.

This was a difficulty perceived from the start: Rabbi Akiba was accused of saying to a text “Be silent until I interpret”. His interpretive approach prevailed because it was come to be accepted that there was no limit to the meanings that a piece of scripture could contain. Iranaeus, an early father of the Christian church argued that Christ was hidden in the Hebrew scripture in a way which could never have been understood before the physical coming of Jesus into world.<sup>86</sup> For Origen too, Jesus was the revelation hidden in the allegories of Hebrew Scriptures. An allegorical interpretation could be checked for validity, and heresy prevented, by applying the test that Jesus was to be discovered even in the detail of text. Origen argued that a biblical text should be studied in three ways; there was the literal meaning of the text which could be perceived from its plain surface sense; the moral meaning of the text which could be derived by studying the text to find how it taught the reader how to behave; and the spiritual or allegorical sense of the text. The relative importance of these three understandings would vary from text to text. Thus proverbs could be understood satisfactorily as a literal text, but Ecclesiastes should be studied for its moral meaning, whilst the Song of Songs should be seen as an allegory of the love of the Bride for the Celestial Kingdom – that is of the perfect soul for the Word of God. This approach to Biblical study was introduced to the Western Churches by the John Cassian (360 – 435 CE), who added a fourth dimension; the student was also to seek out the mystical sense – the sense that would speak to the question of the ‘end time’ as described explicitly in the book of Revelations and in other eschatological writings. Cassian’s ideas were later incorporated into the Rule of St Benedict and thus into scholarly monastic practices throughout Europe. Ordinary Monks were exposed to the Bible for two or more hours each day either directly, when they heard it read aloud at meal-times and in the chanting of psalms, or indirectly through the interpretations found in the writings of the church fathers. It was a process by which the bible was absorbed and experienced rather than studied critically. The four-fold interpretation would continue in scholastic circles until the reformation.

Spain was ruled by Moors from North Africa between 711 and 1490: they called it ‘El Andalus’. They brought with them a knowledge of mathematics, medicine, classical Greek science and Aristotelian philosophy – knowledge that had largely been lost in the West during the so-called dark ages. Their learning encouraged the development of a more rational approach throughout Europe, which was reflected in the production of the ‘Glossa Ordinaria’, a standardised commentary based on the works of Jerome, Gregory and Augustine<sup>87</sup>. It was initiated by Anselm from his base in Laon, a cathedral town in Northern France. The ‘Ordinaria’ provided the biblical student with explanatory notes on each verse of the bible. Also in Northern France, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhak (aka Rashi) wrote a seminal commentary on the Hebrew Bible which focused on a philological approach to the text. It was Rashi who first pointed out that the opening line of Genesis could be translated as “In the beginning of God’s creation of the Heavens and the Earth, the Earth was Void and Chaotic...” instead of “In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth, and the Earth was void and chaotic” with consequent implications with regard to whether God created the earth out of nothing or simply filled and ordered a previously existing earth. In Spain, Abraham ibn Ezra was developing a historical criticism in which priority was given to the literal sense. Amongst other things, he realised that Moses could not have written the opening verses of Deuteronomy since the writer claimed to be writing from the ‘the other side of Jordan’, somewhere that Moses never reached. But the rationalist approach was countered by the Kabbalist, who revived the mystical sense in Jewish tradition. They argued that there was nothing special about the literal Torah – even the Gentiles had produced greater works.<sup>88</sup>

By the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, the development of the printing press gave birth to the idea that everyone should be able to read the bible for themselves. Perhaps the greatest of Martin Luther’s many achievements was his translation of the bible into German. His attack on the failings of the church led him to proclaim that any person equipped with the bible is to be believed above any pope or council without it. The process of making the bible available in the vernacular was such a revolutionary change that for a time the mere possession of even a part of the Bible in the vernacular was a dangerous offence. But eventually secular rulers saw that a bible in their own language weakened the power of Rome and enhanced their own nationalism. In 1611 the King James Bible was published backed with the full authority of the monarch.

But the protestant reformation, which proclaimed that the ordinary person could interpret the bible as he or she saw fit, led to a proliferation of sects with different interpretations of key passages. Wars broke out which were caused or exacerbated by religious differences. Some sects could see no resolution to these differences other than through setting up colonies of like-minded people in new lands.

<sup>86</sup> Iranaeus; against heresies 4:26:1. Quoted by Karen Armstrong (2008) p. 106.

<sup>87</sup> The Glossa Ordinaria was initiated by Anselm of Laon in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>88</sup> Zohar III, 152a; quoted in Karen Armstrong (2008) p 151.

The bible was used to justify taking the land of indigenous peoples. It was also used in support of the institution of slavery, but the slaves interpreted the exodus story very differently from the way their owners did.

In the modern age, most of us who hear or read the Bible do so as part of program of small daily or weekly snatches suggested by a lectionary. Few of us read any of the works within the bible as a literary whole in the way we would read almost any other book that can be found outside the reference section of a library. We therefore deny ourselves the enjoyment of the carefully constructed structures and intricate cross references that the biblical authors have put into their works, nor do we really get to know and appreciate the styles of the individual authors. I hope that the preceding chapters might have encouraged the reader to occasionally read some of the Bible with the aim of enjoying the whole work of a particular author simply for the pleasure and overall insights that the writer hoped to be able to give.