בס"ד

"For the Freedom of Jerusalem": The Jewish Wars with Rome

Book proposal

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*1. Brief Description*

The book will describe the long struggle of various groups of Jews in Palestine/Judaea to liberate themselves from Roman occupation and establish an independent Jewish entity. It will focus on the years 6-200 CE, with special emphasis on 136-66. It was in this period that Judaea moved directly under Roman rule, and during which two major revolts took place: the Great Revolt of 66-73 and the Bar Kochba rebellion of 132-136. Their failure to obtain freedom from Rome as well as the Roman response brought about enormous social and cultural change in Jewish society and way of life. The book will address three key questions:

1. What motivated Jews to rebel continuously against Rome for nearly a century despite their repeated failures?
2. How did Rome meet the military, political and ideological challenges posed by Jews?
3. What consequences did this military-political struggle have on Jewish society and Judaism in the long run?

The uniqueness of the book lies in both its chronological scope and methodological approach and the way it interrelates the two. As explained below (section 3), the book's singularity from a chronological perspective lies in its review of one particular historical phenomenon: the military confrontation between the Jews (as opposed to the Hasmoneans and their supporters’ opposition to Herod's rule) and the Roman government from the moment of the first Jewish uprising in 6 CE, through two major revolts, to Judaea’s de facto and even de jure reconciliation with Roman rule. This leads to the book’s second unique feature, namely, its integrative approach to history's many faces. Although national uprisings generally manifest themselves in military clashes and can thus be described by the conventional methods of military and political history, they are primarily the result of social circumstances and are often precluded by ideological motivation. A deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the repeated Jewish revolts requires an integration of military, political, social and cultural history. For this reason, the book is based on a wide variety of ancient sources including the writings of Josephus and the Roman historians (Tacitus, Suetonius, etc.), Jewish Literature (Qumran, Talmudic Literature, Philo) and rich archaeological finds.

*2. Outline of the book*

The introductory section sets the chronological boundaries of the period in question and discuss the sources available to us for reconstructing it. It also addresses the methodological issues arising from the use of literary and archaeological finds. From this point on, the book proceeds chronologically:

*Chapter One: From Sponsorship to Roman Republic (6-26)* . The chapter opens with the factors that led Augustus to transfer Judaea from a Romanian protectorate governed by Herod's House to a Roman province controlled by a Roman governor. The bulk of the chapter deals with the ideological and religious tension in Judaean society in the aftermath of Rome's political decision. On the one side, were those who held a radical ideology of freedom, which regarded Roman rule as a religious prohibition and backed the rebellion during the census of Quarinius (6 CE). On the other, those who believed in the idea that Jewish culture and lifestyle could be reshaped in a way that required neither a political nor national center.

*Chapter Two: The Governor and the Emperor - Two Turning Points (41-26)*. The fourth decade of the first century saw two turning points in the Romans and Jews’ assessments of each other. During his term in office, Pontius Pilate repeatedly harassed the Jewish religion and its Temple. This led to violent clashes with some Jews and a wider diffusion of the ideology of liberty. Several years after Pilate's removal, Emperor Caligula demanded that his statue be placed in the Temple. This order probably caused many Jews in Judaea to lose faith in the benefits of Roman rule and provided fertile ground for a growth in the number of supporters of the religious ideology of liberty.

*Chapter Three: Broken Dream - from Agrippa to Florus (66-41)* . Agrippa's brief monarchy (41-44) resurrected the hope of regaining political independence in a peaceful manner. However, this hope was dashed by his death. Regular friction with Roman governors led to greater frustration and a firmer embrace of the ideology of liberty, followed by sporadic revolts. Clearly, the Roman government did not understand the social and cultural processes affecting Jewish society and continued to view the various manifestations of rebellion as sporadic eruptions. Moreover, the Roman governor’s tendency to rely on the non-Jewish population helped escalate Roman-Jewish antagonism.

*Chapter Four: To Revolt or Not to Revolt? (Spring 66 - Fall 66).*  At the heart of this chapter lies the dilemma faced by the Jewish population as to whether the time had come for an all-encompassing revolt against Rome. Two events will be highlighted:

1. The refusal to offer sacrifices to the peace established by the Emperor in the summer of 66 was most likely meant to signal the gravity of Jewish anger to the Romans, but was instead interpreted as a call for rebellion. At this point, however, most Jews probably did not yet support the revolt.
2. The event that motivated many Jews—including some in the upper classes—to join the rebellion was no doubt Castius Galus's failure to take control of Jerusalem and his defeat during the withdrawal from Jerusalem in November 66.

The chapter will also look at how military events were interpreted by the Jews from a religious perspective and the various reactions it generated. On the one hand, many in the Jewish community regarded Gaius’s retreat as divine endorsement of the revolt. On the other, communities such as Sepphoris chose to cooperate with Rome and even gave it political and cultural expressions.

*Chapter Five: The Galilee - The Cradle of the Historian and the General* - (Spring 67 - Winter 67).This chapter follows Flavius Josephus’s preparations for the clash with the Roman army. Relying on literary sources and archaeological findings, it examines the military steps taken by the Romans in Galilee and their social and ideological implications. The focus will be on the characters of Flavius Josephus and John of Giscala. While the first was convinced that the failure of the revolt in Galilee required the adoption of a religious approach to the acceptance of Roman rule, the event led the second to assume a radical concept of liberty and become a prominent leader of the rebellion.

*Chapter Six: Civil War - Between Rome and Jerusalem (Winter 68 - Summer 69)*. This chapter reviews the links between the civil war in the Roman Empire (The Year of the Four Emperors, 69 AD) and events in Judaea. In particular, it emphasizes the social polarization that characterized Jewish society for decades. This division contributed to the fact that, rather than present a united front to the crisis, Jewish society collapsed into a civil war with social and religious dimensions.

*Chapter Seven: For the Freedom of Jerusalem - Siege and Destruction (July 69 - Summer 73)*. This chapter continues to follow the political decisions and military moves that led to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. It analyzes military and political decision-making processes from two different perspectives: that of the rebels, whose ideology of radical freedom steadily intensified, and that of Titus and the Roman army, who were trying to decipher the importance of the Temple to Jewish society.

*Chapter Eight: Judaea Capta or from Jerusalem to Yavneh? (96-73)*. The destruction of the Temple led to a new appreciation of Judaism by both the remaining Jewish leaders and the Roman government. This chapter will examine the change and continuity in demographics, social norms and religion in Jewish society after the event, and will look particularly at whether the failure of the revolt led to a decline in the ideology of radical freedom and the rise of alternative ideologies. In terms of the Roman side, it will examine Flavian propaganda regarding the triumph over the Jews as well as the implications of the state’s punitive measures—most notably the Jewish Tax—on the image of Jews in the eyes of Romans and the Jews themselves.

*Chapter Nine: From the Jewish Tax to the Revolt of the Jewish Diaspora (96-117*). This chapter looks at how Roman policies formulated against Judaism and Jews after the Great Revolt as well as the arrival of former rebels from Judaea in Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean Basin resulted in social and ideological changes that led some of these communities to organize an insurgency against Rome. In particular, it will examine whether the available meager sources allow us to establish links between the radical ideology of freedom that developed in Judaea and the ideology that inspired the rebels in the Diaspora.

*Chapter Ten: To Revolt or Not to Revolt (II) - The Causes and Circumstances of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (117-132)*. The reasons underlying the Bar Kokhba revolt are still disputed. This chapter deals with two interrelated factors: first, the Roman policy towards Jerusalem, including its decision to establish a foreign city named Aelia Capitolina; and second, the religious-redemptive meaning attributed by the Jews to these Roman measures. It also examines whether connections can be drawn between the ideology of liberty that underpinned the Great Revolt and the religious-redemptive ideology that prompted the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Finally, it examines the involvement of sages in the leadership of the rebellion and especially the sayings of Rabbi Akiva.

*Chapter Eleven: From the Redemption of Israel to the Destruction of the House of Israel - The Bar Kochba Rebellion (132-136).* This chapter offers as detailed a picture as possible of the war between the Jews of Palestine and the Roman army. The chapter is based on a careful analysis of archaeological remains, most notably, the complexes and caves in which Jews sought refuge, the numismatic finds and the letters of Bar Kokhba. It also examines whether these sources provide evidence of Jewish opposition to the revolt. Two questions receive special attention: Whether Jerusalem was conquered by the rebels, and the extent of the Galilean participation in the uprising.

*Chapter Twelve: From Rebellion to Reconciliation (140-220)*. The two post-revolt generations saw a fundamental transformation in Jewish-Roman relations, ranging from regular, high-intensity conflict to completion, reconciliation and even collaboration. At the center of this chapter lies the question of whether this shift was due to the punitive measures taken by the Romans after the Bar Kokhba revolt, when they destroyed the Jewish community in Judaea and eliminated the supporters of the radical ideology of liberty, or to internal processes in Jewish society that allowed for the rise of a Jewish perspective and lifestyle that did not rest on national sovereignty. The nature of this post-destruction/s Judaism will be examined from three different angles, which complement each other even if they do not coincide: the rise of the synagogue as a communal institution, the cemetery in Beth-Shearim as a window on the Jewish elite and the Mishnah as guide to and representative of a new kind of Jewish lifestyle.

*Chapter Thirteen: Jewish Revolts - Another View*. The failure of the Jewish revolts played a significant role in the formation of the Christian identity. This chapter reviews the responses of the Christian and Judeo-Christian communities to these failed uprisings and, in particular, the religious significance that they attributed to them. It discusses both the historical events that impacted the Christian community in Jerusalem and the cultural history and ideological developments expressed in the writings of the early Church Fathers.

*Epilogue: Then and Now*. The failure of the Jewish revolts is commemorated in the Jewish world by a series of religious rituals and fasts. The persistence of the memory of the destruction indicates that the interpretation of the events leading to it and their causes occupies an important place in the political and cultural discourse of Jewish and Israeli society. A contemporary review of these events raises a host of historiographic and historiosophic questions on the nature and significance of history.

*3. Competing works*

The uniqueness of this book lies first and foremost in the period that it covers. Its chronological framework has a direct implication on the way in which the historical narrative is presented and long-term processes are taken into account. The last two decades have witnessed a tendency among historians to take on long rather than short stretches of time. Two important recent books that appeal to the general public bear out this phenomenon. Martin Goodman's *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*, published by Penguin Books in 2007, covers the period from Herod's rise to power in 37 BCE to Constantine's victory in 312 CE—some 350 years! The book includes long introductory chapters describing major themes in Jewish and Roman culture and society (pp. 394-33), followed by another 200 pages of historical narrative. Goodman describes the ups and downs of Jewish-Roman relations in broad, spectacular brushstrokes. Naturally, a review of a period this long does not allow for a detailed description of political and military maneuvers that occurred over weeks and months. It can therefore not follow the complex and intertwined dynamics of military measures and policy decisions, or their cultural and conceptual implications. Furthermore, the broad chronological framework of Goodman's book leads him to underestimate the importance of the Jewish revolts in the years between 66 and 136.

By contrast, Steve Mason's *History of the Jewish War A.D. 66–74*, published three years ago by Cambridge University Press, focuses on a period of only eight years (74-66), those of the Great Revolt. The book is a great scholarly achievement from every possible angle. Its limited chronological timespan allows Mason to describe various events of the Great Revolt in detail and to offer a scholarly discussion of the literary and archaeological findings. By the same token, its narrow scope prevents the author from dealing with the long-term effects of the revolt, and even more so from covering the social and cultural history beyond these particular years.

Noteworthy too are a number of recently published books that tend towards one or the other of these chronological approaches. Two detailed studies of the Bar Kochba revolt have come out in the last five years. William Horbury’s *Jewish War under Trajan and Hadrian* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) covers merely the two decades (115-136) in which the Diaspora and Bar Kochba revolts occurred. Horbury's principal argument is that the two uprisings actually comprised a single war. Menachem Mor's *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE* (Brill, 2016) likewise focuses on a short historical period and is similarly intended for scholars.

Conversely, several recent publications present a broader view of the Jewish world in ancient times. Most notable of these is Seth Schwartz's *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 CE* (Princeton University Press, 2001). As with Goodman's book, the broad chronological range here does not allow for a careful reading of the dynamics of particular events, but rather presents a summary of the cultural changes that took place in Jewish society and way of life. This is also the case with Simon Schama's magnificent *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BC - 1492 AD* (Harper-Collins, 2013).

The singularity of the proposed book, “For the Freedom of Jerusalem," lies in its chronological scope. The work will cover seven generations, granting its author a chance to closely examine the relationship between macro and micro history. As a result, it can follow military moves and policy decisions in relative detail, but at the same time discern the broader chronological framework and how these events impacted the culture and lifestyle of the Jews. The advantage of targeted studies such as those by Mason, Horbury and Mor is their focus on a specific event, which they can analyze in detail. Similarly, despite this book’s longer timeframe (6-200 CE), it focuses on a single phenomenon: the military confrontation between Jews and Romans. The military, social and cultural aspects of this story have not yet been the subject of a specific monograph. My hope is that this book will fill this scholarly lacuna.

*4. Apparatus*

4.1 Maps - Since the book reviews demographic developments and military moves on both the international and local scale, it will include eight maps to assist and orient the reader:

1. Map of the Roman Empire in the first century CE including the places of Jewish settlement.
2. Map of the Land of Israel in the first century CE including the places of Jewish, Samaritan and Greek settlement.
3. Map of the battles in the Galilee during the Great Revolt.
4. Map of the military maneuvers of Vespasian and Titus in Judea.
5. Map of Jerusalem during the Great Revolt.
6. Map of the Diaspora Revolt.
7. Map of the hiding places and caves used for refuge during the Bar Kokhba revolt.
8. Map of the Jewish towns in Palestine at the end of the second century CE.

4.2 Photographs: The book deals with and discusses many archaeological finds, especially coins, armaments, hiding places and ancient scrolls. It will include approximately 25 photos illustrating these finds.

*5. Schedule* - I hope to present a first draft within 18 months from the time I begin writing.