Bs’d

*For the Freedom of Jerusalem: The Jewish–Roman Wars*

Book Proposal

Meir Ben Shahar

**Outline of the book**

*Introduction: From Kingship to a Roman Province or From Liberty to Slavery*

After the first achievements of the Hasmonean rebellion, Judah Maccabee, the leader of the uprising, sent a diplomatic expedition to Rome (162 BCE). In its wake, Judaea and Rome formed an alliance and concluded a mutual defense agreement. About a century and a half later (40 BCE), a descendant of the Hasmonean family, Antigonus II Mattathias, launched a rebellion against Rome.

The reversal in Jewish–Roman relations was the result of two interrelated processes: the creation of a religious ideology encouraging political independence on the Jewish side, and a change in Rome’s policy in the Middle East. The Introduction will examine these changes and their consequences from the covenant between Judaea and Rome (162 BCE) to the death of Herod (4 BCE).

At its outset, the Hasmonean rebellion was seen by contemporaries as a response to Antiochus IV’s religious persecutions, with the goal of restoring Jews’ religious autonomy. This was achieved with the purification of the Temple and the abolition of religious decrees with Antiochus’s approval (164 BCE). However, the Hasmoneans continued the rebellion in an effort to establish an independent entity until they attained this goal in 140 BCE. The establishment of the Hasmonean kingdom instilled the importance of political sovereignty in the ideological and religious beliefs of the Jews of Judaea and, among some groups, stirred hopes of restoring the kingdom of the House of David, a hope that had lain dormant for centuries.

At this point, I will clarify the use of the terms ‘nationalism’, ‘independence’ and ‘liberty’ in their historical context, in order to avoid the anachronism of using them in the customary modern Western sense. I will investigate the activities of the Hasmonean kings in relation to Jewish communities in the Diaspora in order to understand how they perceived the connection between their kingdom and those who identified as members of the Jewish ethnos around the world.

When Rome took over Judaea after some seventy years of independence, appointing protectors to administer the region (John Hyrcanus II [63––40 BCE] and then Herod [37–4 BCE]), they encountered fierce resistance. During this period, the ideological opposition to Rome grew and increased. Rome became identified with the ‘fourth beast’ of Daniel's vision, and so the political struggle became a religious one as well. Here I will discuss the rebels’ violent actions and the consolidation of intellectual and religious elements in their anti-Roman ideology. Violence against Rome and its protectors in Judaea fomented hostile perceptions of Jews and Judaism in Rome. I will briefly discuss the manifestations of anti-Jewish hostility in Cicero and other Graeco-Roman writers and political leaders.

Although the tensions inherent to the situation had already erupted several times, Herod managed throughout his reign (37–4 BCE) to prevent significant outbreaks of violence. He based his policy on striking a balance among the political component of his rule—absolute loyalty to Rome— and the national-religious component, expressed in the construction of the Temple, support for Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and so on. Herod also tried to obliterate local rivals by importing high priests from Jewish communities in Egypt. By means of this complex balancing act, Herod was able to avert violent clashes as long as he lived. But peace ended as soon as his son Archelaus came to power in 4 BCE (ruling until 6 CE). It was then that Rome began to reevaluate Judaea and its Jews.

*Chapter One: From Sponsorship to the Roman Republic (6–26 CE)*.

The chapter begins by listing the factors that prompted Augustus Caesar to transfer Judaea from the status of a Roman protectorate governed by the Herodian dynasty to that of a Roman province controlled by a Roman governor.

It was the relentless stress in Judaea’s relations with Rome and its representatives, along with a new attitude toward the status of the sponsoring kingdoms, that transformed Judaea into a Roman province. As stated, these political processes were intertwined with, and amplified by, cultural-religious-social processes, and vice versa. In the next section I examine how Augustus’s decision was implemented and how it affected Rome’s attitude during the term in office of the first four governors:

* The decision to turn Judaea into a Roman province entailed a comprehensive census of the Jewish population and its property. This precipitated the first violent rebellion against Rome, the Quirinius revolt (6 CE), waged by members of the lower classes who feared the economic consequences of the census. Historically, this rebellion constituted a significant landmark in consolidating the Jewish view of the Roman Empire as the embodiment of evil and malice. From then on, anti-Roman ideology would become increasingly religious and eschatological.
* The first four governors (6-26 CE), however, managed to prevent another violent outbreak. They understood that the religious-national ideology was neither monolithic nor universally accepted among the Jews. They respected religious autonomy (I will examine archaeological and literary evidence of this), giving weight and prestige to the high priests. Thus, a Jewish leadership was created that, while pro-Roman, was perceived by the public as a legitimate representative of Jewish interests. In this manner, those who believed that the Jewish culture and lifestyle could be reshaped in a way that required neither political nor national sovereignty found encouragement.

However, as I clarify at the end of the chapter, the Roman policy was based on internal contradictions that could not persist for long. Therefore, from the days of Pontius Pilate (26-36 CE) onward, Jews and Romans embarked on a course of political and religious confrontation, in which both these elements were sometimes indistinguishably combined.

*Chapter Two: The Governor and the Emperor—Two Turning Points (26–41 CE)*

The fourth decade of the first century CE saw two turning points in the Roman and Jewish assessments of each other. Pontius Pilate (Roman governor of Judaea, 26–36) took a hostile and violent approach compared with his predecessors. Both literary and archaeological sources indicate various ways in which he harmed Jews and their religious beliefs. Jewish hostility toward Rome took two forms:

1. spontaneous violent outbursts against Roman forces in Judaea;
2. the proliferation of messianic and eschatological movements that looked forward to a cosmic, transformative event that would topple Rome.

As the manifestations of hostility increased, Pilate had to exert greater and greater force to repress them, and Judaea began to be perceived as a chronic problem in Roman eyes. The story of Jesus and his disciples reveals the Jews’ messianic and national expectations and the Roman governor’s aggressive measures. The political conflict with Rome was also enmeshed in an already-ongoing intra-Jewish social polarization. The Gospels reveal the alienation between the lower strata, which supported the radical movements, and the priestly and the Pharisaic elites, which collaborated with the Romans.

Several years after Pilate’s removal, Emperor Caligula (37–41) demanded the installation of a statue of himself in the Jerusalem Temple. The Jewish mobilization against him in response encompassed Judaea and the Diaspora, especially Egypt. I will focus on the unique situation of Egyptian Jewry and the activities of this community and its leader, the philosopher Philo, who tried to convince Caligula to decide to remove the statue from the Temple. In view of this Jewish unity, Jews and Romans alike assumed that the Jewish public was capable of united political and perhaps even military action. This awareness was expressed several decades later in the preparations for the Great Revolt and in the measures that Rome took after suppressing it.

The most serious consequence of the Caligula affair was the loss of faith among many Jews that Rome and the Roman Emperor would defend them and their religion. This distrust made fertile ground for the further expansion of radical ideas and movements that began to weigh seriously the possibility of taking up arms against Rome.

*Chapter Three: The Broken Dream—from Agrippa to Florus (41–66 CE)*

After Caligula’s death, the Romans appointed Agrippa, Herod’s grandson, as King of Judaea. The appointment was seen by many Jews as marking Rome’s withdrawal from Judaea. Paradoxically, it may have accelerated the ideological and social processes that led to the Great Revolt. Agrippa reigned for only three years (41–44) until he passed away. Some of his actions fostered hopes of restoring Jewish sovereignty; another aspect of his policy, however, was the continuation of the Herodian tradition of cooperation with Rome. His untimely death makes it impossible to determine his policy unequivocally. Either way, the hopes he raised contributed indirectly to the consolidation of anti-Roman feelings and ideology.

After Agrippa’s death, Judaea again became a Roman province. During this time (44–66), three mutually reinforcing processes convinced many Jews there was no way out but a revolt against Rome:

* The Roman governors began to rely more and more on the Graeco-Syrian population of Judaea, placing its representatives in key positions and allowing them to exercise the governor’s police powers. This fed hostile images on both sides. The Graeco-Syrians’ hostility toward the Jews seeped into the minds of Roman officials; by the same token, the Jews saw the Romans as heirs and collaborators of the Graeco-Syrians, with whom they had been in ongoing conflict since the Hasmonean period. Here I discuss some manifestations of this conflictual triangle, which pushed the Jews to the brink of revolt, most notably the tensions between Jews and Greeks in the capital of the province, Caesarea.
* Frustration over the ‘revocation’ of Jewish independence/sovereignty after Agrippa’s death, along with the declining influence of the Jewish leadership on the Roman governorship provided a significant boost to the development of eschatological and messianic expectations.
* Polarization within Jewish society between the wealthy priestly elite, in tandem with some of the Pharisees, and the lower social strata. This made the recognized Jewish leadership, comprised of priestly and Pharisaic families, irrelevant to growing segments of Jewish society.

These three processes created despair and frustration in the present, and fueled hopes of radical change that could not be satisfied by normal politics alone. I discuss several examples of relatively large groups headed by charismatic leaders who promised to immediately bring about religious and national redemption. Although the Romans were able to cope with sporadic outbursts, they failed to rebuild trust in themselves and in the aristocratic Jewish leadership. Moreover, much of the elite felt that the Roman policy had settled in favor of the non-Jewish population, requiring them to seek popular support among the Jews of Judaea. One outcome was the ascendancy of commitment to the Jewish population and its radical hopes over cooperation with the Roman governorship.

By this time, two ideological extremes jelled. At one end, current mainly among the descendants of Herod's house, there was cooperation and full acceptance of Rome. In contrast the “Zealots” (*Qanaim*), fused religious obligation and national sentiment inextricably. For them, accepting Rome’s rule was no less than idolatry, and necessitated war to the death for independence. Most of the Jewish public wavered between these two extremes.

*Chapter Four: To Revolt or Not to Revolt (I) (Spring 66–Autumn 66)*

At the beginning of this chapter, I briefly review the events that led to the deterioration of Jewish–Roman relations during the year 66: Rome’s favoring of the Greek population in Caesarea and provocative activities by Roman forces in Jerusalem, such as a massacre of Jewish demonstrators.

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 are highlighted:

1. The refusal of senior Temple officials to offer sacrifices to the Roman Emperor in the summer of 66. They most likely meant this as a sign of the gravity of Jewish anger against Rome. The Romans understood it as a call for rebellion. At this point, however, most Jews probably did not yet support the revolt.
2. Castius Galus’s failure to take control of Jerusalem and his defeat in the withdrawal from Jerusalem in November 66. This event motivated many Jews—including some in the upper classes—to join the pro-rebellion camp.

In this chapter I also look at how the Jews interpreted military events from a religious perspective and the various reactions that the events generated. Many Jews regarded Galus’s retreat as a divine endorsement of the revolt; others, however, chose to cooperate with Rome and did not shy away from expressing this cooperation.

*Chapter Five: Galilee—Birthplace of Historians and Generals (Spring–Winter 67)*

The chapter follows Flavius Josephus’ preparations for the clash with the Roman army. Relying on literary sources and archaeological findings, I examine the military steps taken by the Romans in Galilee and their social and ideological implications. The events in Galilee served to clarify the fracture lines in Jewish society as well as influencing Roman policy during the uprising itself. Among the Jews, three different groups coalesced:

* In Sepphoris and other wealthy cities, opponents of the uprising toughened their stance. They made sure to express allegiance to Rome and were rewarded generously, as both literary and archaeological sources show.
* Josephus is a typical representative of the Jerusalem elite that joined the rebellion but was aware of the dangers involved. His surrender and move to the Roman side was an extreme step by someone whom until then had commanded the uprising. As I show later, however, others in his social circle would follow his lead, one way or another.
* John of Giscala represents the Jewish leadership that embraced the Zealots’ ideology and saw war with Rome as more than a military confrontation meant to attain realistic goals. This ideology incorporated powerful religious motifs that essentially obviated any possibility of compromise or surrender later in the rebellion.

*Chapter Six: Civil War—Between Rome and Jerusalem (Winter 68–Spring 70)*

This chapter reviews the links between the civil war in the Roman Empire (the Year of the Four Emperors, 69) and events in Judaea. After the conquest of Galilee (November 67), no significant military developments occurred due to the civil war that followed the assassination of Nero (June 9, 68). This gave the Jews a respite that they interpreted in contradictory ways. The moderate Jewish leadership probably sought to end the conflict peacefully by concluding a comfortable surrender agreement. The radical groups saw the Roman civil war as a clear sign that God himself was on their side. The internal debate in Jewish society escalated into a bloody civil war, including the murder of moderate leaders and the strengthening of the radical groups. The ideological radicalization of the rebellion was accompanied by a fierce struggle among the rebel factions themselves, presumably due to their divergent and contradictory religious conceptions and hopes.

On the Roman side, as the Jewish rebellion grew, it became apparent to Vespasian that suppressing the rebellion could be a powerful propaganda tool with which to consolidate his rule. I discuss the significance of his coronation as Imperator on July 1, 69 in Caesarea for both Romans and Jews

*Chapter Seven: For the Freedom of Jerusalem—Siege and Destruction (Spring 70–Summer 73)*.

This chapter continues to track the political decisions and military moves that culminated with the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. It analyzes military and political decision-making processes from two different perspectives: that of the rebels and that of Titus and the Roman army.

The continuation of the siege forced each side to examine the other and to seek ideological and political justifications for its moves. In the rebels’ camp, the religious ideology that opposed any surrender to Rome grew stronger, as did expectations of immediate intervention by God. The combination of religious radicalization and famine induced a reign of terror among the rebels, culminating in mass suicides in Jerusalem and Masada.

From the Roman side, the rebels’ toughness was interpreted as a characteristic of Judaism and Jews. For Rome, too, the war transformed from a military combat into a struggle to eradicate the symbols of Judaism. This is manifested in Titus’s decision to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem at the end of the rebellion and, even more so, in the decision to close the Temple of Onias in Egypt. The latter act turned a spotlight on the role of the Diaspora Jewry in the uprising, and I devote a brief discussion to it.

*Chapter Eight:* Judaea Capta *or from Jerusalem to Yavneh? (73–117)*

The destruction of the Temple led to a new appreciation of Judaism among the remainder of the Jewish leadership and the Roman government as well. In this chapter, change and continuity in demographics, social norms, and religion in post-rebellion Jewish society are examined.

Although the uprising was suppressed, the ideology that had fed it endured, as did expectations of radical change. I look at the changes in messianic expectations through the lenses of texts that were produced at the time [Ezra IV, Baruch II, etc.]. Then I follow the paths by which messianic and rebellious ideas reached Diaspora Jewish communities, especially in Egypt.

Concurrently, religious conceptions began to emerge that internalized the loss of the Temple and sovereignty, preferring to concentrate on healing the rifts within Jewish society. It is possible that the center founded by Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai in Yavne, along with his successor Rabban Gamliel’s activities, were intended to fulfill these goals. Yavne’s influence on the political aspects of Jewish life and hopes, however, was limited (see below). The main contribution of the Yavne center was the creation of a religious system that did not center on the Temple.

Like the Jews, the Romans reevaluated Judaism and the Jews. Their punitive measures, most notably the imposition of a special tax on all Jews in the Empire called *fiscus Iudaicus*, gave the impression that, in Roman eyes, the campaign was not a conflict between the Jews of Judaea and the Roman army but a clash of civilizations between Rome and Judaism. The victory march and the monuments erected in Rome contributed not only to the glorification of the Flavian dynasty but also to the concretization of the image of Jews and Judaism as anti-Roman.

The Diaspora uprising (115–117) was a direct result of the ideological and social processes described. Jews in the Diaspora, especially in Egypt, Libya and Cyprus, interpreted the Roman policy as anti-Jewish and reacted in alignment with the radical ideology that emanated from Judaea. On the other side of the divide, the Diaspora rebellion reinforced the Roman view that there was a problem with Judaism *tout court*. Here, too, as in the Great Revolt, the Romans resorted to total suppression, resulting in the destruction of the Jewish communities in Egypt and Libya. The uprising probably left a strong impression on Hadrian, one of Trian’s generals who had taken part in quashing it.

*Chapter Ten: The Bar Kokhba Revolt (117–136)*.

The underlying causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt are still disputed. Here I deal with two interrelated factors: first, the Roman policy toward Jerusalem, including the decision to establish a pagan city there and rename it Aelia Capitolina after Emperor Hadrian; second, the religious-redemptive meaning that the Jews attributed to these Roman measures. I examine the possibility of drawing connections between the ideology that underpinned the Great Revolt and the Diaspora Revolt and the religious-redemptive ideology that prompted the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Simon Bar Kusba (Bar Kokhba), the leader of the insurrection, apparently enjoyed the support of the rabbis and the vast majority of the public in Judaea. In view of this, I examine the connection between the social situation in Judaea and the religious-messianic ideology.

The second part of the chapter offers as detailed a picture as possible of the war between the Jews and the Roman army. This section is based on a careful analysis of archaeological remains, most notably the hiding complexes and the refuge caves, numismatic finds, and the Bar Kokhba letters. I also ask whether these sources provide evidence of Jewish opposition to the revolt. Two questions receive special attention: Did the rebels conquer Jerusalem, and to what extent did the Galilee participate in the uprising?

The third part of the chapter deals with the results of the revolt. From the demographic perspective, the Jewish community in Judaea ceased to exist. The Romans were not satisfied with the physical destruction that resulted from the war; they added several punitive measures: They renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina and called the province of Judaea Palestina; Jews were banned from entering Jerusalem and, apparently, some of the Jewish religious commandments were disallowed in public for a certain period of time. These punitive measures indicate that Rome considered the religious element a significant part of the war against the Jews. At the same time, the rabbis expressed their hostility to Rome in harsh words, e.g., by calling Rome the kingdom of evil.

*Chapter Eleven: From Rebellion to Reconciliation (140–220)*

The end of the previous chapter describes the intensification of conflict between Jews and Romans. The two post-revolt generations, however, saw a fundamental transformation of the relations between the sides. Jewish life in Galilee experienced a cultural and social boom. The Jews had a strong leadership, headed by a Roman-recognized Patriarchate; even the Church Fathers attested to its power. More importantly, under Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (180–220), the Mishna—a set of laws and regulations for managing all aspects of Jewish life—was redacted.

At the center of this chapter, I ask whether this shift was the outcome of 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 of internal processes in Jewish society that abetted the emergence of a Jewish perspective and lifestyle that did not rest on national sovereignty and a Temple. I examine the nature of this post-destruction/s Judaism from three different but complementary angles: the rise of the synagogue as a communal institution, the cemetery in Beth-Shearim as a window onto the Jewish elite, and the Mishna as a guide to and representative of a new modality of Jewish life.

*Chapter Thirteen: Jewish Revolts—Another View*

The failure of the Jewish revolts played a significant role in the formation of Christianity. This chapter reviews the responses of the Christian and Judeo-Christian communities to the failed uprisings and, in particular, the religious significance they attributed to them. The first part of the chapter describes how, under Paul, the radical social movement founded by Jesus adopted a passive political agenda. The contrasting positions of Jesus’s disciples and the majority of the Jewish population were reflected in the Great Revolt. While many Jews took part in the rebellion in one way or another, the Christians, including Jewish Christians, left Jerusalem and moved to Pella at the very beginning. The failure of the Great Revolt gave Christians a basis for deepening their rift with Jews and Judaism and evidence for their argument that Christianity was intended to replace Judaism.

Jews who were aware of these ideological processes reacted by raising barriers and excluding Christians, whom they now called *minim* (heretics). Nevertheless, in-between groups that wished to belong to both religious worlds still existed at this time.

The failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt, of course, intensified the Christians’ arguments against Judaism. I follow the escalating manifestations of hostility on both sides and their effects on the patterns of Judeo–Christian conflict over the generations.

*Epilogue: Then and Now*.

The Jewish world has commemorated the failure of the Jewish revolts by mandating a series of rituals and fasts. Perpetuating the memory of the destruction was in the interest of both Jews and Christians. The Jews remembered that they would always be strangers in other countries, awaiting their longed-for return to the Promised Land. For Christians, the destruction was the ultimate proof of Christianity’s victory over Judaism. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the memory of the destruction and the futility of the rebellions have occupied a significant place in internal Jewish and intra-Israeli discourse. The Epilogue examines how the Ninth of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple, has become a day dedicated to the political and ideological rifts in Israeli and Jewish society.