בס"ד

**Introduction: From Kingdom to Roman Province, or from Liberty to Bondage**

In the summer of 161 BCE, two Jews from Jerusalem made their way to Rome: Eupolemus son of Yohanan and Jason son of Elazar. Their journey came in the wake of several years of impressive success. What began as the rebellion of a small, isolated religious group had become a series of triumphant battles against the Seleucid Empire. Winning round after round, Judah Maccabee, leader of the rebellion, forced the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, to allow the Jews in Judea to maintain their faith and way of life. He estimated that once the Seleucids returned and organized their army they would take revenge, and he was right. Now it was time for diplomacy. Eupolemus and Jason set out to make a pact with the world's leading power, the Roman Republic. They fulfilled their mission perfectly, as the wording of the alliance, preserved in 1 Maccabees, shows:

23 Good success be to the Romans, and to the people of the Jews, by sea and by land for ever: the sword also and enemy be far from them, 24 If there come first any war upon the Romans or any of their confederates throughout all their dominion, 25 The people of the Jews shall help them, as the time shall be appointed, with all their heart: 26 Neither shall they give anything unto them that make war upon them, or aid them with victuals, weapons, money, or ships, as it hath seemed good unto the Romans; but they shall keep their covenants without taking anything therefore. 27 In the same manner also, if war come first upon the nation of the Jews, the Romans shall help them with all their heart, according as the time shall be appointed them: 28 Neither shall victuals be given to them that take part against them, or weapons, or money, or ships, as it hath seemed good to the Romans; but they shall keep their covenants, and that without deceit. 29 According to these articles did the Romans make a covenant with the people of the Jews (1 Macc. 8:23–29).

A century later, Pompey the Great conquered the Land of Israel and disbanded the Hasmonean kingdom (63 BCE). Then, after ruling for more than 130 years, the Romans, led by Titus, destroyed the Jewish Temple (70 CE). For many Jews, Rome had by then become the embodiment of the fourth beast in the vision of Daniel (Daniel 7), a terrifying, nameless creature that would crush the whole world. As if to prove them right, Vespasian minted coins with the inscription “Judaea Capta”—Judea is captive. A generation later, Tacitus, one of the greatest Roman historians, would describe the Jews as a misanthropic nation: “Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity” (Tacitus, *History*, 5.5). The Jews, he added, despise Roman customs: “The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor” (ibid., 4). Seventy years later, the Jews and the Romans clashed again in the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–136). After the insurrection was quashed, the Jews called Rome "The kingdom of Evil, which destroyed our homes, and burned our halls, and exiled our land" (BT Git. 57b). Indeed, the Romans even forbade Jews from entering Jerusalem. How did Jews transform from friends of the Romans to a race known, by the latter, to be “in the contempt of the gods” (Pliny, History, 13, 46)?

Seventy years after the Jewish settlement in Judea was completely destroyed in the Bar Kokhba revolt, a new chapter began. According to a famous Jewish legend, a secret tunnel connected the home of the Roman emperor with the house of the Jewish leader, Rabbi Judah the Patriarch. The Church father Origen also testifies to the good relations between the Jewish Patriarch, who probably represented the Jews of Palestine to the Roman authorities. How did the enmity and hatred between Judah and Rome, which had acquired mythical dimensions during the first century CE, transform into completion and acceptance during the second century and into the third?

The purpose of this book is to unravel the complex relationship between Judah and Rome and between Jews and Romans. I review three interrelated axes that shaped the ups and downs of this bond:

**Jewish–Roman relations**: We need to formulate this concept with the utmost caution in light of changing historical circumstances. At the beginning of the period covered, from the second century BCE to the second century CE, two fairly well-defined political entities may indeed be discussed: the Roman Republic, headed by the Senate, and the Hasmonean state headed by the eponymous dynasty. Whereas Rome remained a recognized political entity with a fairly clear hierarchical system, the situation across the Mediterranean became quite complex. Pompey's conquests annihilated the Hasmonean state (63 BCE) and cost the Hasmoneans their crown. John Hyrcanus II descended to the rank of *ethnarch—*ruler of an *ethnos*, and his activity was limited to intra-Jewish relations. Later, Herod the Great did receive the title of King from the Romans (39 BCE) but remained essentially a vassal. Several years after his death, Judea became a Roman province (6 CE). While the Romans appointed no official to liaise with the Jews, they recognized the high priests and Herod's descendants as the Jews’ representatives. The undermining and disintegration of the Jewish leadership opened the door for lesser local personalities to attain promenance on religious, economic, or social grounds. No one could speak any more about a relationship between Judea and Rome, nor even between the Roman ruler and the Jewish people. Instead, the Roman government maintained diverse ties with various Jewish groups. Thus, as Rome engaged in military struggle against the Jews during the Great Revolt (66–70 CE), the Jews of Sepphoris were granted protections and urban autonomy in exchange for their opposition to the revolt. The existence of Jewish communities in and outside the Roman Empire only complicated the situation: Are all the Jews the same? How should Romans join Judaism should be treated? The complexity of Jewish identity and the Jews’ different social and political frameworks created a policy riddled with internal contradictions.

**Ideology and religion**: The relationship between Jews and Romans nourished and nurtured images that the Jews and, to some extent, the Romans absorbed into their cultural and ideological conceptions. These ideological positions, in turn, motivated concrete relations between the sides.

Of course, we need to be cautious regarding the use of terms such as ideology, religion, and nationalism, to name only three. These concepts have strict definitions and uses in modern Western history. One cannot speak of “ideology” in antiquity the same way that one would talk abou about communism, liberalism, and so forth. Moreover, the current distinction between “religion” and “ideology” did not exist in the ancient world. In fact, “religion,” as we understand it today, did not exist; the prevailing perceptions of and attitudes toward all aspects of human existence were different then.

In this book, I probe the link between political activity and thinking and attempt to decipher the metaphysical meaning of political reality. I ask whether and how different Jewish groups developed different metaphysical and political attitudes towards Rome. The disparities that I report in this context are reflected in both the various policies that Jews adopted toward Rome—confrontation, acquiescence, or cooperation—and the cultural-religious question: How does God expect us to act in relation to Rome? Is a covenant with Rome desirable or forbidden?

For the Romans, the Jews were but one stone in a large mosaic of enslaved peoples. From a military point of view, they were a nuisance, sometimes a stubborn one, but certainly not an existential threat that might shake the Romans' worldview. However, the way the Romans perceived the Jews did change over time. Another aspect worth examining is whether and how the Romans’ acquaintance and encounter with Jews contributed to the metamorphoses of the Roman Empire in the centuries to come. Is it possible that the very encounter with the Jews, even with its violence, created more fertile ground for the acceptance of Judaism’s daughter, Christianity?

**Socioeconomic conditions**: The violent clashes between Judea and Rome pitted a civilian population organized in a military setting against a professional and skilled army. For a mass of civilians to be willing to risk their life and wealth in a military struggle, two elements must be present. One, of course, is an ideology that views the enemy as negative and dangerous to society’s continued existence. The second is a sense of such deep despair and frustration, that the feels spreads that there is nothing left to risk. The latter component mainly concerns the socioeconomic status of the population. The wealthier one is and the greater one’s physical comfort, the less likely one is to endanger them by embarking on a rebellion. In contrast, the worse a person's socioeconomic situation is, the more willing she would be to risk her paltry assets in the hope of bettering her state through rebellion . Karl Marx understood this well when he implored the workers of the world to unite and overthrow the existing order because “you have nothing to lose but your chains.” The same was true of the Jewish uprisings. I will examine the how socioeconomics contributed to the outbreak of the clashes and consider how aware the Romans were of the problem and how they tried to deal with it. On the Jewish side, ideological-religious fault lines in society often overlapped with class divisions. This phenomenon had implications for the leadership of the Jewish elites, the negotiations with the Roman government, and, ultimately, the extent of Jewish society’s mobilization in the struggle against Rome.

These three processes—political, ideological, and socioeconomic—are intertwined. To understand the Jewish–Roman conflict, one needs to develop a multidimensional picture based on these three axes and, even more so, of the people and groups who lived, dreamed, and fought in those ancient times. In this chapter, I discuss the beginnings of these three processes, from the first diplomatic meeting between Jews and Romans during the Hasmonean rebellion (161 BCE), until Judea became a Roman province in 6 CE.

**The Hasmoneans: From Religious Revolt to Nation-State**

The two diplomats sent by Judah Maccabee to Rome, Eupalemos the son of Yohanan and Jason the son of Elazar, embody in their names the changes that took place in Judea in the first half of the second century BCE. Both fathers bear distinct Jewish names. Yohanan is definitely known to have been a descendent of one of the prestigious priestly families. Elazar, father of Jason, was probably also a priest. But the two priests chose epitomically Greek names for their sons: Eupalemos and Jason. That they did this attests to the rapid Hellenization of the Jerusalem priestly class and the elite of Jewish society in a process that likely began with the conquest of Judea by the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, in 200 BCE. The popularity and sympathy for Greek culture among the Jerusalemite elite and especially in the priestly circles collided with a counter-movement among Jews who fought to preserve Jewry’s ancient traditions.

The cultural confrontation and social tension soon escalated into violent conflict between the two groups. Hellenizer priests aspired to make Jerusalem, for all intents and purposes, a Hellenistic *polis*. Wrestling competitions and sporting parades, under the auspices of the Temple priests, began to be held throughout Jerusalem. Tensions between the two groups mounted as the Hellenizers enjoyed the support of King Antiochus IV. When the clash between the groups became violent, Antiochus intervened by banning the observance of the Jewish religion.

It was at this stage that resistance to Hellenism and the Hellenizers became a direct confrontation with the Seleucid Empire. A priestly family from Modi'in, the Hasmoneans, spearheaded the uprising. Nothing is known about the family’s origins. The fact that the family hailed from the city of Modi'in indicates that it was not part of the priestly elite located in the economic and cultural center, Jerusalem. This was the first manifestation of a phenomenon that would recur in ensuing centuries: the will to rebel and the initial organization of the rebellion originated among the rural, remote, conservative population, far from the administrative and cultural center.

Judah Maccabee, the third son of Mattathias the Hasmonean, became the leader of the rebels and won a series of thrilling victories over the Seleucid forces. In this way, he conquered the Jerusalem Temple and resumed the sacred service there in accordance with Jewish law. Antiochus was in the midst of a campaign in the East when he learned of the military failures at home. Realizing that he could not afford to wage war on two remote fronts, he abolished the religious decrees and restored Jewish religious autonomy. At this point, the rebellion should have ended: the edicts were rescinded, the Temple was purified, and the sacred rite resumed. Nevertheless, military clashes with the Seleucids continued, probably due to continued tension among various segments of Jewish society on cultural and religious grounds. Then Judah Maccabee took two actions that would carry the Hasmonean uprising into a new era.

Thus far, Judah Maccabee’s actions were restricted to Judea, a fairly small geographical area (about 2000 square kilometers) inhabited by Jews only. However, Jewish settlements also existed elsewhere in the Land of Israel and even east of the Jordan River. The Hasmoneans’ successes prompted the Hellenistic majority in Galilee and Gilead to harass the Jewish minority there. Judah Maccabee, responding to the appeals of local Jews, fought on their behalf against the non-Jewish authorities. His responsiveness involved two ideological elements that were unrelated to the primary objectives of the Hasmonean uprising. First, the Jewish minorities predicated their request for aid on grounds other than religious restrictions or persecution. Second, Judah was willing to fight for other Jews even if they were not in his region. Thus it seems that his motives were not only religious. His activities surely indicate his awareness of an ethnic affinity with Jews outside Judea. But was he motivated only by his sense of responsibility, or did Judah Maccabee have more far-reaching thoughts and plans?

Let’s go back to our two diplomats in Rome. The covenant between Judea and Rome juxtaposes two sides identified by ethnic identity—“the Romans” and “the Jews.” They are seen as equal political entities that have common interests. Reading the covenant, one is hard put not to be impressed by the gap between the polite diplomatic formulations and Judah’s status as the leader of a guerrilla group that achieved some local successes, but lacks any mark of sovereignty. It is precisely for this reason that the covenant hints at Judah's aspirations. The rebellion that began in opposition to religious decrees and aimed to restore the order of the good old days became, within a few years, a national struggle for the establishment of a political entity for Jews.

Judea’s outreach to Rome and the latter’s response can be well understood in view of the power relations in the eastern Mediterranean. Since 191 BCE, Rome had shown great interest in this part of the world. By stopping Antiochus III's expansionist attempts at Magnesia (191 BCE), Rome made its interest in the East clear: to prevent the establishment there of any significant political power. To this end, Rome pursued a policy that supported anyone who challenged Seleucid hegemony. In 168 BCE, with violent clashes already under way in Judea, Rome demonstrated the seriousness of its intentions. That year, Antiochus IV succeeded in scoring a victory over the Ptolemaic army, and Seleucid forces seemed poised to capture Egypt. Now it was time for the Roman eagle to show its strength. Roman Senator Gaius Popillius Lineas met with Antiochus IV near Alexandria. Wasting no time even to sit down, he read to Antiochus the Senate resolution that required Antiochus to leave Egypt immediately. Antiochus asked for time to consult his people. In response, Lineas brandished a vine branch and used it to draw a circle around the king. “You can leave this circle only after you submit your answer to the Senate resolution,” Lineas advised him. Within moments, Antiochus announced that he was leaving Egypt. It was during his retreat to the north, defeated and humiliated, that he vented his wrath on the Jerusalem Temple and apparently looted it as well. The Jews’ harsh reaction to his petulant violence led him to impose the religious decrees. The connection between the two episodes did not go unnoticed by any party in the Middle East.

After Judah Maccabee had proved himself to be a reliable and significant agent in the Seleucid Empire, it was only natural for him to approach Rome with a proposed alliance. The Romans, in turn, were interested in encouraging elements that could inhibit and counterbalance the Seleucid Empire. Thus, the pact between Judea and Rome served both sides’ military and political interests. Once the political circumstances changed, plainly one would expect the terms of the covenant to undergo revision as well; perhaps the alliance itself might founder. Still, one cannot help but wonder at the “cunning of history,” which made the Romans the first in the ancient world to recognize the Jewish people as an independent political entity.

**The Hasmonean State, the Hasmonean Kingdom, and the Roman World: Nationhood and Religion**

Several months into the alliance with Rome, Judah Maccabee’s death in a battle with Seleucid forces (160 BCE) plunged the rebellion into its most severe crisis to date. Bacchides, the Seleucid general who killed Judah, removed Hasmonean supporters from all key positions. A coalition of Hellenizers and religious pietists who did not share the Hasmonean national ideology confronted the Maccabees. The Hasmoneans went underground. Leadership of the rebellion passed to Jonathan, Judah’s brother. A combination of mistakes by Seleucid loyalists, Jonathan’s military prowess, and rivalries among claimants to the Seleucid crown allowed Jonathan to take over large parts of Judea. More importantly, he secured the high priesthood for himself (152 BCE), thus becoming the Jews’ recognized religious leader. Jonathan now held the *duo gladii—*secular authority by virtue of his military leadership and religious authority as the High Priest. This combination of authority would become a characteristic of Hasmonean leadership. Although it aroused fury against the Hasmoneans, it also left a deep imprint on factional and sectarian Jewish society.

The unification of religious and national leadership, although not alien in the ancient world, was not part of the Jewish tradition. With the sole exception of Moses, who was at once lawgiver, founder of the Tabernacle, and the Israelites’ leader during their journey through the desert, all Jewish leaders were content with either the sword or the crown. Balancing the king’s secular leadership during the First Temple period and the Peha governorship during the Persian era stood the prophet or the high priest as the nation’s interlocutor with God. The fusion of the two leadership functions in one individual gave it immense prestige and power. It also precipitated the development of a national-religious ideology that saw an inherent connection between the degree of religious independence and prestige and that of national autonomy. The violation of national sovereignty was deemed tantamount to religious persecution, and political attempts to attain sovereignty and independence were viewed as elements of a religious campaign through which God's command would be fulfilled. Although unequivocal wording of this kind should not be applied to the Hasmonean era, within just a few generations, such an ideology would find clear formulation and enthusiastic support.

Even though the Hasmonean leadership displayed various manifestations of sovereignty and recognition, Judea remained subject to the Seleucid authorities. Only in 140 BCE did Judea become an independent political entity with its own currency, recognized by the Jewish people and the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings. An instructive expression of the Hasmonean self-concept came a few years later. The Seleucid king Antiochus Sidetes (129–138 BCE) demanded that Simon, the brother of Judah and Jonathan who had risen to the Hasmonean leadership, return parts of Hasmonean-held territory to the Seleucid government. Simon’s answer is a significant landmark in the formulation of Jewish national ideology:

Then answered Simon, and said unto him: We have neither taken other men’s land, nor holden that which appertaineth to others, but the inheritance of our fathers, which our enemies had wrongfully in possession a certain time. Wherefore we, having opportunity, hold the inheritance of our fathers (1 Macc. 15:33–34).

This wording is surprising in its modern conception of the nation. The land belongs to the nation; therefore, the nation has the right to take “back” parts of its usurped historical homeland. Simon argues for continuity between the Biblical kingdom of Israel and his own time, and between ancient Israel and the Jewish people in his day. From a group persecuted for their way of life and religious belief, the Jews of Judea became a sovereign nation with territory, to which it was connected by historical legacy.

John Hyrcanus, son of Simon, continued this policy of expanding the Hasmonean state. The religious-national ideology was expressed in an inscription featured on his coins: “Yehohanan the High Priest and the Council of the Jews.” Jewish sovereignty rests on two legs: The title of the High Priest defines the religious status of the ruler; the “Council of the Jews” implies the Jewish people. Both Simon and John Hyrcanus continued to cultivate the alliance with Rome. Some of the documents pertaining to it are drafted in considerable detail, indicating a clear Roman commitment to protect Judea and, even moreso, to respect its sovereignty. For example, the Romans warn kings and states throughout the Mediterranean to respect Hasmonean sovereignty over the coastal cities of the Land of Israel and to remit the taxes demanded of them (Ant. 14:249–250). This alliance of mutual interest persisted into the second Hasmonean generation—for the time being.

**Sects and Parties in the Hasmonean State**

The blending of religion and nationhood in Hasmonean ideology is clearly expressed in the following story:

Now about the high priest Hyrcanus an extraordinary story is told, how the Deity communicated with him, for they say that on the very day on which his sons fought with Cyzicenus, Hyrcanus, who was alone in the temple, burning incense as high priest, heard a voice saying that his sons had just defeated Antiochus. And on coming out of the temple, he revealed this to the entire multitude, and so it actually happened (Ant. 14:282).

When the sons of John Hyrcanus besieged the city of Samaria (107 BCE), the town’s Hellenistic inhabitants called the Seleucid king, Antiochus IX Cyzicenus, for help. For the Hasmoneans, it was another battle in the ongoing struggle to restore Jewish sovereignty and another episode in the confrontation with the Seleucids. At the same time, John Hyrcanus entered the Holy of Holies to fulfill his duties as high priest. In the midst of his service, God foreshadows him with a promise of victory. Religion and nationhood, the sacred and the profane, and the heavens and the earth are sympathetic. Of course, the establishment of such an ideology was a goal of the Hasmonean rulers, who were also high priests. The question is what other groups in Jewish society thought of it.

The first to be harmed by the Hasmoneans’ ascent was, of course, the previous leadership. The Hasmonean priestly family was seated in Modi’in, just a day’s walk from Jerusalem. They may have taken part in the temple service from time to time, especially on festival occasions, but the temple leadership rested on a limited cadre of priests. The high priest was a descendant of an old dynasty of high priests, the Zadokites, who had held the position since the beginning of the Second Temple period. Indeed, according to popular tradition, Zadok, the patriarch of the family, had received the appointment from King David. Before Jonathan became a high priest, however, a member of his family does appear to have held the post. According to a scholarly reconstruction, after being ousted by Jonathan, he joined a radical religious group seated in Qumran in the Judean Desert. In due course, the members of this sect would call him the "teacher of righteousness.” His religious conceptions, eschatological hopes, and attitude toward contemporary events in Jerusalem are found in texts that belong to what are known today as the Dead Sea Scrolls—a collection of some 950 objects—scrolls and scroll fragments—that include biblical texts, commentaries, and detailed records of the sect’s special laws and eschatological expectations. Most scholars identify the Qumran group with the Essenes.

The religious observances of the Qumran sect stand out for the severity of their laws of ritual purity, their unique 364-day calendar, and their cooperative economic framework. Given that the purity laws and the calendar were different from those in effect in the Hasmonean-administered Jerusalem Temple, the sect considered the Temple an unclean and sinful place. Despite their emphasis on religious laws, the scrolls also address political aspects. The sect expected two messiahs to arrive: the “Messiah of Aharon,” a high priest who would install the Qumran cult in the Jerusalem Temple. Alongside and subordinate to him would be the “Messiah of Israel,” probably a scion of the Davidic house who would lead the nation politically. The texts of the sect emphasize the subordination of the “Messiah of Israel,” i.e., the secular authority, to the “Messiah of Aharon,” the religious authority. Indeed, it is precisely the religious dimension of the group that emphasizes the existence of a “secular” messiah alongside the religious one. Thus, since the Hasmonean days, the Jewish future can no longer be imagined only in religious terms and as pertaining to human–God relations. The existence of an active political entity became an integral part of the imagined future.

The Qumran sect, however, was but one rather isolated group. What about the rest of Jewish society? Was the national-religious ideology that served the Hasmoneans first and foremost acceptable to everyone else? Jewish society at that stage of antiquity featured two powerful groups: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The origin and meaning of these epithets are unclear, but Josephus, rabbinic literature, New Testament literature, and other Second Temple texts yield a careful portrait. Josephus describes the theological and religious differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees, but also provides quite a bit of information about their socioeconomic background. Of the two groups, the Sadducees were part of the priestly aristocracy and, as brethren in tribe and class, supported the Hasmonean dynasty unreservedly. They also exhibited religious openness, at least in the sense of countenancing free interpretation of the Torah without subordination to any interpretive tradition. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were a religious elite. In this respect, they resembled the people of Qumran. Unlike the Qumranites, however, who chose to seclude themselves from general Jewish society in the service of their religious rigor, the Pharisees engaged the public and sought to attract it to their religious positions. In contrast to the Sadducees, they adhered to an interpretive tradition regarding the Torah and its commandments, one that they considered binding.

Despite the Pharisees’ religious dimension, their powerful influence on the Jews of Judea and the great prestige that they enjoyed privileged them with growing political power. It is therefore no surprise that they frowned on the Hasmoneans’ unification of religious and secular functions, the *duo gladii*. Indeed, a fascinating story recounted by Josephus and in rabbinic literature tells of a feast in which Pharisees and Sadducees took part. The banquet was held in honor of the victory of a Hasmonean king, apparently Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE). During the fest, one of the Pharisees snapped at Jannaeus: “You have a royal crown; give the priesthood to Aharon’s seed.” That is, double-dipping in power is unacceptable; Jannaeus should settle for political leadership and leave the office of the high priest to someone else. Like the Qumranites, the Pharisees were also reluctant to unite the two swords. The Pharisees paid dearly for their confrontation with King Jannaeus. Various traditions describe how Jannaeus annihilated the Pharisee leaders, violated their laws, and slaughtered their supporters in the hundreds. Even after Jannaeus’ death (76 BCE), however, the Pharisees remained a dominant force. Jannaeus’s widow, Queen Salome Alexandra, entered into a power-sharing arrangement with them, realizing that this was necessary to unite the people after the incessant civil wars of her husband's days. Thus, according to several traditions, Pharisees held senior executive positions and advised the queen. If so, although concentrating on religious activity and teaching Torah and the commandments, the Pharisees did not refrain from taking part in government. Three generations of Hasmonean rule had managed to assimilate into the Jewish public sphere a national-religious ideology that sees a connection between religious duty to heaven and national sovereignty on earth.