

230 BCE – 400 CE: Rule of Rome

Second Temple Period

After Rome conquered the whole of Italy it turned its sites on the rest of the Mediterranean. The first to fall to Rome was the Carthaginians during the Punic Wars (264 and 146 B.C.E) which were fought in Tunisia. “Between 215 and 148 B.C.E., Rome fought five major wars, mostly in Macedon and Anatolia, against Antigonid and Seleucid opponents. The Romans did not immediately annex lands in the eastern Mediterranean but, rather, entrusted them to allies in the region. Nevertheless, by the middle of the second century B.C.E., Rome clearly ranked as the preeminent power in the eastern as well as the western Mediterranean.”¹

After a revolt against the Seleucid Empire – an ally of Rome – the Hasmonean Dynasty ruled over Judea (as Israel was now called) from 142-129 BCE. After the Seleucid Empire dissolved the area of Judea was under complete autonomous rule until the time when Pompey annexes the land of Israel.² In 64 BCE Pompey marched into Syria and deposed King Antiochus XIII Asiaticus and reconstituted Syria as a Roman Province. In Judea, Pompey interfered in a struggle between the Sadducees and the Pharisees both of whom were vying for prominence. In 63 BCE, after a brief struggle in which the Temple was in Jerusalem was stormed by the Romans, Pompey installed his nominee as High Priest and head of the local government. As a result, Judea was ultimately annexed by Rome.³

In 37 BCE Herod the Great was established as the Jewish Roman ruler over the land of Israel. He had Antigonus II, the last Hasmonean king of Israel, murdered and married the Hasmonean princess Mariamne I.⁴ Herod had complete authority over the land of Israel and he was very ruthless in his rule. He established a lackey in the position of the High Priest and if he displeased Herod, Herod would have him killed and replaced with another lackey.⁵ Herod was known for his building projects with his most well-known construction project which began in 20 BCE. It was at this time that the Temple Mount was expanded to its current size and the Temple was rebuilt. This project continued until 72 CE.⁴ It was during the time of Herod that the houses of Hillel and Shammai were established in the land of Israel. Hillel was known for his gentleness, kindness, and care for humanity. He was considered more liberal in his teachings of halakhah. Shammai was known for his quick temper and impatience. He was known for the strictness in his teachings of halakhah.⁶

After Herod's death Rome established direct rule over the land of Israel. A Jew named Philo Judaeus lived in Alexandria, Egypt under Roman rule. Philo was known for his attempt to synthesize Greek philosophy and Jewish philosophy. According to Josephus it was Philo who was selected as the representative of the Jewish community to speak with Gaius.⁷ Approximately 30 years after Rome established direct rule over the land of Israel the Jewish leader and historian Joseph ben Matityah (better known as Flavius Josephus) is born. He was a military leader during the First Jewish Revolt who eventually surrendered and went on to write histories under the auspices and protection of the Romans. Gamaliel I was born about 10 years after Josephus. He was the grandson of Hillel the Elder and became an important member of the Sanhedrin. He was the first person to be given the title Rabban. He was known as a scholar of the Oral Law and established a number of lenient ordinances.⁸

In 66 CE the First Jewish Revolt against Rome began. The anti-Roman rebels known as the Zealots are considered the ones who instigated the revolt. The anti-Roman feelings of the Jews was already exacerbated nearly 30 years earlier when Caligula demanded that his statue be placed in the Jerusalem Temple and worshiped as a god. Due to Roman violations against the Temple, Torah Scrolls, and Jewish practices as well as the crushing taxes the Jewish people decided to throw off the shackles of the Romans in the land of Israel.⁹ In 70 CE Vespasian led the Romans to retake Jerusalem and eventually destroy the Temple. It was during this time that Vespasian gave Yochanan ben-Zakkai permission to establish a yeshiva at Yavneh which eventually became the center for Rabbinic Judaism. The revolt ended in 73 CE with the fall of the last holdout of Jews at Masada.⁴

Post-Second Temple Period

Approximately 45 years after the end of the First Jewish Revolt Rabbi Akiva became active in consolidating Rabbinic Judaism. Akiva developed a method of linking each traditional Jewish practice to a basic teaching in the Tanakh. This material was later systematized and became the Mishnah.¹⁰ The Bar Kokhba Revolt (also called the Second Jewish Revolt) took place between 132 and 135 CE. "Rabbi Akiva was also involved during the revolt and supported Bar-Kokhba. During the revolt itself, the Jews gained enormous amounts of land, only to be pushed back and crushed in the final battle of Bethar."¹¹

The year after the revolt was suppressed Hadrian renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capatonlina. He built a pagan temple over the site of the Second Temple and Jews were forbidden from dwelling in Jerusalem. Judea was renamed Palaestina as an attempt to minimize

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Jewish identification with the land of Israel. Hadrian's successor, Antonius Pius, did repeal many of the harsh policies that were instituted against the Jews of Israel. His successor Lucius Septimus Severus treated Jews relatively well. Under his rule Jews were allowed to hold public office and exempted them from and formalities that were contrary to Judaism.⁴

In approximately 200 CE the Mishnah was compiled and edited under the direction of Judah HaNasi. He also relocated the center of Jewish learning in the land of Israel from Beth Shearim to Sepphoris in 203 CE. In 212 CE the Roman Emperor Caracalla allowed all free Jews within the Roman Empire to become full Roman citizens. In 220 CE the Babylonian Jewish Academy was founded by Rab in Sura. From this time through 470 CE the Amoraim flourished. The commentary from the Amoraim, along with the Mishnah, became the Babylonian Talmud. Under Emperor Alexander Severus (222-235 CE) Jewish rights, including visiting Jerusalem, were revived.⁴

The Council of Elvira, one of the first Christian councils, forbade intermarriage and social interactions with the Jews in 306 CE. In 313 CE Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity and announced the Edict of Toleration legalizing Christianity and essentially declaring Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. Two years after embracing Christianity, Emperor Constantine limited the rights of all non-Christians in his first anti-Jewish act.⁴ In 330 CE Constantine moved the seat of the Empire to Constantinople and established the Byzantine Empire. As part of the establishment of the Byzantine Empire, Jerusalem also became part of the newly formed Empire. In 339 CE Constantine forbade intermarriage with Jews. Circumcision of heathens or Christian slaves was declared punishable by death.¹² Emperor Julian II (361-363 CE) abolished the special taxes that had been imposed upon the Jews. He also gave the Jews permission to rebuild and repopulate Jerusalem. One of the most remarkable endeavors of Julian II was his initiation to restore the Jewish Temple.¹³ Jews in the land of Israel remained under Roman rule until 639 CE when the Muslim invaders wrestled the Levant from the Byzantine Empire.¹⁴

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