

meaning “unveiling.” A significant theme of these writings entails the future vindication of the righteous. This hopeful outlook should not be surprising during this turbulent time when the Jewish people painfully watched the disintegration of the Hasmoneans—a family who initially brought hope of Jewish independence and religious purity. The second category of writings is *pseudepigrapha*, meaning “false name.” Similar to the Apocryphal books, the *pseudepigrapha* often draw the reader’s attention to future events.

While the Jews excluded both the Apocrypha and *pseudepigrapha* from their Hebrew Scriptures, this body of literature provides us with insight into intertestamental history and the mind-set of many individuals who lived during this period. Some of this literature was apocalyptic. *Apocalyptic literature* allegedly revealed through the use of symbolic imagery what God was doing in heaven in an attempt to encourage his people who were suffering on earth. This literature helps us to understand the background of such New Testament texts as Jesus’ Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25), 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation.

Variety Within Judaism

Because of these diversified Jewish sects and writings, we need to be cautious when saying, “This is what the Jews believed in the first century.” Which group of Jews? Even within a particular sect, there was diversity. For instance, some Jews believed in a coming prophet like Moses, others spoke of a kingly messianic figure, while others held to a priestly Messiah. These various opinions can be detected in the crowd’s response to the identity of Jesus (cf. Matt. 16:14). Some literature even uses the term “*Judaisms*” in reference to this variety that existed within Judaism during the intertestamental or New Testament eras. Just as there is much variety in thoughts and beliefs in modern-day Christianity, there was variety in first-century Judaism.

The Story of Brutality and Resistance: The Romans

Rome Conquers Jerusalem

Internal family disintegration among the Hasmoneans eventually served as a “welcome mat” for Rome. After a three-month standoff, the distinguished Roman military leader Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C. Pompey entered the temple, murdered the priests, and entered the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest could enter.

Despite his offensive entrance into the temple, Pompey surprisingly allowed ongoing Jewish worship and appointed the Hasmonean Hyrcanus II as high priest. Hyrcanus, though, repeatedly demonstrated his weakness as a leader. Seeing an opportunity to promote his own interests, a Judean official, Antipater II, offered his support to Hyrcanus. Antipater was an Idumean, which means he was at least partially of Edomite descent. He encouraged Hyrcanus to side with Julius Caesar against Pompey, and this allegiance proved to be very successful. In return for his help, Antipater requested that his son, Herod, become governor of Galilee.

Though young and inexperienced, Herod quickly proved himself a capable leader by bringing political stability in the Galilean region. Within a few short years, Rome appointed Herod “King of the Jews.” Many devout Jews, however, could not accept the fact that their so-called king was of Edomite descent and that his appointment was granted by the Gentiles. The Hasmoneans, former keepers of the

monarchy, were openly dissatisfied with this new transition of power. In attempts to win their support, Herod banished his first wife and their child and married one of the Hasmonean princesses, Mariamne I. While Herod possessively loved her, in the end, he selfishly killed Mariamne I, three of his own sons, and eventually the entire Hasmonean family.

Herod’s Building Projects

Herod was also a builder. In addition to many other structures, he built an artificial harbor of over forty acres at Caesarea, established a palace on a plateau thirteen hundred feet above sea level at Masada, and built an impressive palace right next to the temple in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, though, Herod’s most amazing feat was his renovation of the Jerusalem temple. Expanding the temple complex to over thirty-five acres, Herod constructed the largest holy structure built in the ancient world. Of this temple, Josephus, the Jewish historian, said, “Being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays.”¹ While most Jews disdained Herod, they benefited from the stability and grandeur he brought during his thirty-plus-year reign. Though Herod did offend the Jews on numerous occasions, his building of the temple served the Jews well. The amazing Jewish temple constructed by Herod became the focal point of life among first-century Jews.

Governors and Herods

Upon Herod’s death in 4 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his surviving sons—Archelaus obtained Judaea and Samaria, Antipas claimed Galilee and Peraea, and Philip inherited the territories north and northeast of the Sea of Galilee. While Philip’s reign (4 B.C.–A.D. 34) was rather insignificant for our story, Antipas’s reign (4 B.C.–A.D. 39) bears much relevance. Frequently referred to as simply “Herod” in the Gospels, Antipas was known for his weaknesses, his beheading of John the Baptist, and his presence in Jerusalem during Jesus’ trials. Archelaus was the cruelest and most incompetent of the Herodian rulers. Because of his wicked reign, God directly commanded Joseph to take his wife and baby Jesus to Nazareth, a village not included in Archelaus’s territory. Rome deposed Archelaus in A.D. 6 and restructured Judaea as a Roman province under the control of a governor, or prefect, who was appointed by the emperor of Rome. Of the fifteen Roman governors who managed Judaea, three of them are specifically mentioned in the New Testament: Pontius Pilate, Felix, and Festus.

Our story would be incomplete without addressing two additional Herodian rulers. Herod Agrippa I was the first of these distant relatives of Herod the Great. Because of his close ties with the Roman emperor Caligula, Agrippa inherited territories belonging to Philip and Herod Antipas, and he eventually obtained the land of Judaea. An advocate of Judaism and a persecutor of the early church (cf. Acts 12:1–24), he ultimately died from divine judgment. His son, Agrippa II, who reigned for fifty years, interviewed Paul during Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment (Acts 25–26).

Jewish Life Under Roman Rule

The Herodian family was ultimately accountable to Rome. Thus, the Jewish people had to pay taxes to Rome. The average Jewish person paid up to 50 percent in