

## I. THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

Over the centuries the term "Apocrypha" has had a variety of meanings for different groups.<sup>1</sup> As employed in post-Reformation Protestant writings it has normally designated some fourteen or fifteen documents, consisting of books or parts of books that emerged in the main from the last two centuries preceding the birth of Christ and the first century of the Christian era. This corpus was but one small portion of the vast output of literature within Judaism during this period of manifest political and religious ferment. Quite possibly the *terminus a quo* of the Apocrypha may have to be placed at an even earlier date than the one just mentioned, since one of the compositions in this literary group may have been written as early as the end of the fourth or the beginning of the third century B.C.<sup>2</sup>

Many of these documents are valuable because they mirror with considerable accuracy the religious, political, and social conditions in Judaea following the close of the Old Testament period proper. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., the empire he had established was divided up among his generals to form five separate provinces. Egypt was placed under the control of Ptolemy I, who acted initially as regent for the mentally infirm half-brother of Alexander the Great. On the death of his protégé in 317 B.C., Ptolemy continued to act as regent for the younger son of Alexander while at the same time consolidating his own power in Egypt. At the same time Judaea was incorporated into the Syrian territory over which Seleucus I Nicator ruled. But in 320 B.C. Ptolemy I invaded Syria and annexed Judaea to his own dynasty, so that by the time the Seleucid regime became firmly established in Syria in 312 B.C., Palestine had fallen under the control of Ptolemy. He proved to be a prudent ruler, who pursued the enlightened and tolerant policies of Alexander, thus speedily winning the confidence of the Palestinian Jews to the extent that many of them emigrated to Egypt, and swelled the numbers of those who had already settled there in previous centuries. In return for his consideration the

<sup>1</sup> *M/A*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *B/G/A*, p. 1.

Jews accorded Ptolemy their complete loyalty, and under his successors the province of Judaea enjoyed a prolonged period of peace and prosperity.

It was the stated policy of the earlier Seleucids generally to adopt an attitude of conciliation and friendship towards the Jewish populace. Following the pattern established by Ptolemy, the emperor Nicator, who had fallen heir to a large portion of Syria and Babylonia following the death of Alexander, encouraged his Jewish subjects to migrate to Asia Minor, and as an added inducement offered them the privileges of citizenship throughout his vast empire. Unlike the members of the Ptolemaic dynasty, however, the successors of Nicator did not display the same enlightened attitude towards the Jews as that manifested by the founder of their regime, and many of the tribulations through which the Jews in Palestine subsequently passed were occasioned by the tyrannical rule of the later Seleucids.

During the reign of Ptolemy I a good deal of grace and prestige was brought to the office of High Priest in Jerusalem by the attractive and imposing personage of Simon I (*ca.* 300-287 B.C.), whom Josephus styled "the Just."<sup>3</sup> To him was attributed the program of Temple renovation undertaken at that time, along with the general repairs made to the fortifications that surrounded the city of Jerusalem. His virtues were lauded in one of the apocryphal writings, the book of Ecclesiasticus, and his influence was so great among the Palestinian Jews that in his lifetime the government of the nation by the High Priest assumed its most attractive form.

The reign of Ptolemy II (285-246 B.C.) was important for the interest he took in the history and culture of the Jewish peoples in his empire. It was during this period that a beginning was made on the enormous task of translating the sacred Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This version, the LXX, derived its name from the tradition that Ptolemy II, acting upon the advice of his librarian, summoned seventy scholars from Jerusalem to undertake the work of translation. As far as the political interests of Ptolemy II were concerned, his activities were directed in the main towards conciliating the Palestinian Jews, and with this in view he constructed a number of cities that served as Ptolemaic spheres of influence, including Philotera, south of the Sea of Galilee, and Ptolemais, located near Mount Carmel on the site of the ancient Canaanite port of Acco. A fresh wave of migrations to Egypt took place under Ptolemy III (246-221 B.C.), and this made for a substantial increase in the size of Jewish communities in such cities as Alexandria. The Ptolemaic dynasty was at the peak of its influence during this period, and the benevolence of Egyptian rule, combined with the material prosperity

<sup>3</sup> AJ, XII, 2, 5.

of the age, furnished a powerful attraction for those Jews who were contemplating the prospect of residing in Hellenized Egypt.

During the reign of Ptolemy III an avaricious High Priest named Onias II decided to withhold the tribute paid annually to his suzerain, Josephus, the nephew of the High Priest, managed to thwart this plan, and as a reward for his services was given the office of tax controller in Judaea by order of Ptolemy. He held this important position for over twenty years, and during this period of administrative supervision he was able to effect a noticeable improvement in the financial condition of his country. It was at this time, however, that the first serious rumblings of discontent with Ptolemaic rule began to make themselves heard in Jerusalem. About 225 B.C. a small reactionary group began an intensive effort to influence the Jews in favor of political alliance with the Seleucid regime of Syria. This movement was particularly gratifying to the Syrians, since from a geographical standpoint Palestine was much nearer to Syria than Egypt. When Antiochus III came to the throne of Syria in 223 B.C., the reactionary group clamored for allegiance to his regime instead of to the Egyptians. This movement brought about a deterioration in relations between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, which was not improved by the occupation of Palestine by the Seleucids in 218 B.C. The following year Ptolemy IV sent an expedition to Raphia, and after defeating Antiochus in battle recovered Palestine for the Egyptian regime. On his return Ptolemy marched through Jerusalem and perpetrated certain acts of desecration in the Temple. Continuing his journey to Alexandria, he punished the resident Jews for the disloyalty of their Judaean compatriots by depriving them of some of their privileges.

A period of political confusion followed the death of Ptolemy IV in 203 B.C., during which Antiochus once again invaded Judaea. An Egyptian force was dispatched to northern Palestine in order to check his advance, but it suffered defeat near Sidon in 198 B.C. Antiochus thereupon occupied Judaea, making it part of the province of Syria, and when Jerusalem capitulated without a struggle the incorporation of Judaea into the Seleucid regime was complete. Some segments of the populace followed the reactionary group in welcoming Antiochus as a liberator, and he in turn continued the tolerant policies that Seleucus I had shown towards the Jews. He appointed Syrian military governors to positions in Judaea, and imposed regular taxes upon the populace. Although he guaranteed the sanctity of the Temple and made adequate grants of money to subsidize the priesthood, his firm control over the territory of Judaea soon made evident the fact that little if anything in the nature of improvement had resulted from the repudiation of Ptolemaic rule. The internecine civil strife typical of the Greek period, coupled with the growing military power of Rome, exercised an important re-

pride was gravely hurt by this action he was wise enough to avoid a costly conflict with Rome by capitulating to the senate's ultimatum. In the meantime Jason had heard a rumor in Jerusalem that Antiochus had been killed during the Egyptian campaign, and on the strength of this information he launched an attack upon Menelaus and his supporters. Rebuffed and threatened as he was, Antiochus determined to vent his rage upon Jerusalem, and in 168 B.C. a detachment of 20,000 men under the command of Apollonius entered the city on the sabbath day and began to eradicate all traces of Judaism. The Temple was profaned and the sacred books of the Law were burned. A Greek altar dedicated to the worship of Zeus was erected in the Temple courts, and the sacrificial rites of traditional Judaism were replaced by pagan rituals, in which the people were compelled to participate on pain of death. In 167 B. C. a royal decree abolished the institutions of circumcision, sabbath observance, and the reading of the Torah.

Those who actively resisted these measures soon found a leader in Mattathias, a priest at Modin near Jerusalem, who had gained some renown by killing an apostate Jew and a Greek officer on an occasion when they were endeavoring to make him participate in idolatrous sacrificial rituals. Mattathias organized a guerrilla campaign against the forces of Antiochus (1 Macc. 2:45), and persuaded his followers that self-preservation took precedence over sabbath observance. On his death in 167 B.C. his son Judas Maccabaeus succeeded him; and, emboldened by initial successes, he launched into systematic attacks against the Syrian forces. The soldiers of Antiochus were defeated at Beth-horon in 166 B.C., and suffered a further reverse the following year at Beth-zur. Taking advantage of the fact that the remaining forces of Antiochus were engaged in crushing a rebellion in Parthia and Armenia, Judas Maccabaeus marched on Jerusalem, occupied the city, reconstructed the polluted sanctuary and restored the daily sacrifice. During the next two years he consolidated his hold on Judaea and prepared for further attacks upon the armies of the Syrian regime. In 163 B.C. he attempted to expel the Seleucid garrison from the old city in Jerusalem, but suffered a defeat near Bethlechem when Syrian reinforcements arrived. However, intrigue in the Syrian empire compelled Lysias, the Syrian regent, to conclude a treaty with Maccabaeus, the terms of which guaranteed Jewish religious liberties. As a result of this expedient the fortunes of the orthodox party in Jerusalem were restored to a certain extent (1 Macc. 6:59).

When the followers of Judas Maccabaeus opposed the appointment of the Hellenist Eliakim as High Priest, a Syrian force was dispatched to Jerusalem to settle the dispute. After a battle near Beth-horon in 161 B.C. in which the Syrian leader was killed, fresh Seleucid reinforcements arrived and by sheer weight of numbers turned the tide

straining effect upon the ambitions of Antiochus, which were further restricted when the Romans invaded Asia Minor about 197 B.C. and subsequently defeated a Seleucid expeditionary force at Magnesia in 190 B.C.

Antiochus III was killed during a revolt at Elymas in 187 B.C., and was succeeded by his son Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.). His reign was marked by heightened tension between the various political and religious factions in Judaea occasioned by a dispute as to whether Temple revenues should be collected by a civil or an ecclesiastical official. One result of this quarrel was that Seleucus IV sent an envoy to plunder the Temple treasury so that he could discharge some of the heavy debts incurred by Antiochus III in his wars against Rome. This intention, which happily for the Jews was frustrated (2 Macc. 3:23ff.), increased the bitterness between the more orthodox Palestinian Jews and their liberal counterparts, who had already succumbed to the blandishments of Hellenism. The latter were endeavoring desperately to end the traditional separation between Jews and Gentiles, employing the language, habits, and traditions of the Greeks as catalysts to this end. The more orthodox Jews still clung to the ideal of Egyptian hegemony, and resisted the encroachments of Hellenism with great vigor, realizing that the moral degeneration, irreligion, and skepticism of Greek culture had nothing in common with the religious traditions of the Torah.

The orthodox party suffered a considerable setback with the accession of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.), whose avowed policy was the dissemination of Greek culture throughout his realm in order to unite the different peoples over whom he ruled and insure the general stability of the Seleucid regime. The character of this proud and extravagant ruler was reflected in the cynical play on words that altered his royal designation from Epiphanes (*illustrious*) to Epimanes (*madman*). Almost immediately after his accession he became involved in a quarrel between the High Priest Onias III and his younger brother Joshua, the latter being a prominent member of the Hellenizing party in Jerusalem, and known widely by his Greek name of Jason. The outcome of this dispute was that Jason replaced Onias as High Priest, and was given a mandate to accomplish the Hellenizing of Jerusalem with all expedition. A number of serious conflicts broke out between the Hellenists and the loyal Hasidim, and these ultimately spread to the Temple priesthood. After three years Jason was supplanted by another pro-Hellenist named Menelaus, who gave Antiochus an even larger bribe than Jason had done for the privilege of being High Priest.

Antiochus launched a military expedition against Egypt in 168 B.C., and was within striking distance of Alexandria when the Roman senate was informed of his actions. An envoy was dispatched immediately with instructions to Antiochus to withdraw his forces, and although his

of battle against Judas Maccabaeus, who perished in the fighting. This defeat, however, did not vitiate the guarantees given earlier by Lysias, and while there still remained a strong Hellenizing faction in Judaea, the majority of the populace supported the Maccabaeans, who became known increasingly by their family name of Hasmoneans. During the succeeding years the degree of intrigue within the Jerusalem priesthood was matched by unrest and internal weakness in the Syrian empire, so that when in 142 B.C. the Seleucid garrison in the old city of Jerusalem capitulated to the forces of Simon, the last surviving son of Mattathias, thereby enabling the Judaeans to shake off the role of tributary to the Seleucids, the triumph of the Hasmoneans was complete.

Under Simon the nation enjoyed a period of religious and economic revival, but his competent leadership came to an untimely end when he was murdered in 134 B. C. by his son-in-law Ptolemy. John Hyrcanus, the one surviving son, succeeded Simon and endeavored to maintain the independence of Judaea, but was finally compelled by Antiochus VII Sidetes (139-129 B.C.) to become tributary once again to Syria. It was during the regime of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.) that the party of the Pharisees was first mentioned by name. Their origin was yet another result of the impact of Hellenizing influences upon contemporary Hebrew life and culture. While many Jews, particularly those outside Palestine, adopted a reasonably tolerant attitude towards a moderate degree of synthesis between Greek civilization and Hebrew religion, there were those who interpreted the slightest incursions of Hellenism as a dire threat to the very existence of the Torah and the stability of the Jewish way of life. The Pharisees were prominent among the latter group, and although they did not exhibit the characteristic conservatism of the Sadducees, who enjoyed the favor of the Hasmonean rulers until 76 B.C., they drew upon a considerable following in Judaea, derived mostly from the artisan and middle classes. By contrast the Sadducees, who came predominantly from the powerful priestly classes, claimed little popular support.

On the death of Antiochus Sidetes, John Hyrcanus launched a successful military campaign against the Edomites, and subsequently besieged Samaria, which fell into his hands after a protracted struggle. He capitalized upon the general debility of the Seleucid domain to extend the boundaries of his own kingdom to something akin to the proportions of the monarchy during the period of Solomon. Towards the end of his reign he broke with the Pharisees, who by this time had become heirs to the ideals of the Hasidim, and sought to accommodate himself to the Sadducees, whose aims were secular and political rather than religious. This change was precipitated by a petition from Eleazar, the head of a Pharisaic deputation to Hyrcanus, suggesting that he should resign from the office of High Priest and remain in his capacity of civil

governor. Although the request was well intentioned, it gave the impression of placing the family affairs of Hyrcanus in a bad light, and had as one result not merely the rise to power of the Sadducees but a decided increase in tension between Pharisees and Sadducees.

The death of Hyrcanus was followed by a period of decline which culminated in the weak rule of Alexander Jannaeus (104-78 B.C.). He was an enthusiastic supporter of Hellenism, an attitude that naturally provoked the resentment of the Pharisees. When civil war finally broke out the latter sought the support of the Seleucids, who themselves, unfortunately, were too weak to be of much assistance. As a result the Pharisees were crushed, and cruel reprisals were exacted as a warning to future rebels. Recompense was forthcoming ultimately, however, for when Jannaeus died in 78 B.C., his widow Queen Alexandra came to terms with the Pharisees to the point where they began to assume the real rule in Judaea, thus reversing the earlier situation completely. The influence of the Hasmoneans declined with the accession of Aristobulus in 68 B.C., partly as a result of the fact that his position was undermined by the intrigue of Antipater, governor of Judaea, and by Hyrcanus II. The latter in particular attempted to usurp the position of Aristobulus, but was thwarted in his immediate objective by Roman intervention in 64 B.C. under Pompey, who deposed Antiochus XIII and made Syria and Phoenicia into a Roman province.

When Aristobulus resisted this movement he was ordered by Pompey to capitulate, and on refusing was besieged in Jerusalem for three months. After a desperate battle the city was captured and the leaders of the insurrection were killed unceremoniously. The Temple was not pillaged, however, and shortly afterwards the sacrificial ritual was resumed. Jerusalem was garrisoned by Roman troops, and the districts outside Judaea were incorporated into the newly formed province of Syria. Hyrcanus was permitted to retain the title of High Priest, but his authority was restricted to Judaea proper. He fell increasingly under the influence of Antipater, father of Herod the Great; and although the Hasmoneans made several abortive attempts to regain power between 57 and 54 B.C., they failed completely in their efforts to overthrow the Herodian dynasty. Before Antipater was murdered in 43 B.C. he established his younger son Herod the Great as governor of Galilee. Herod gained the backing of Rome to support his claim to be the lawful king of Judaea, which proved to be fortunate since he had lost some prestige as the result of a battle with the son of Aristobulus II in 41 B.C. Herod besieged Jerusalem in 37 B.C. and quickly reduced it, thereby bringing the political life of Judaea firmly under Roman supervision and dispelling for ever the Hasmonean hope of independence for the nation. Although Herod catered to the religious feelings of the Jews by enlarging the Temple, his unstable and volatile personality, coupled with numerous

acts of brutality and violence during the thirty-three years of his reign (37-4 B.C.), earned him the general hatred of his subjects.<sup>4</sup>

His son and successor, Archelaus, reigned in Judaea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6, but was no more popular with the Jewish people than his father had been. In the end his oppressive rule led to his deposition by the Roman authorities. Herod Antipas (4 B.C.-A.D. 39), who was mentioned by name in the Gospels (cf. Mk. 6:14ff.; Lk. 3:19; 13:31f.; 23:7ff.), inherited the Galilean and Perea portions of the kingdom, but as a consequence of his marital affairs he incurred the wrath of the Nabatean king, Aretas IV, who defeated him in battle in A.D. 37. Antipas was banished by the Romans in A.D. 39, and Galilee and Perea were added to the territories in the northeast of Palestine over which Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 41-44) ruled. When the latter died suddenly in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2ff.), his son, also named Agrippa, exercised a nominal rule over the northern area of Palestine. He was given the prerogative of appointing the Jewish High Priest, a function that he exercised between the years 48 and 66 A.D. He was unable to prevent the intrigue that led to the outbreak of the Jewish war against Rome in A.D. 66, although he himself remained loyal to the empire until his death about A.D. 93.

It may quite possibly have been the restrictions imposed by Roman rule that furnished much of the impetus for the political and religious intrigue of this period, as well as for the development of a number of communities or religious sects that sought to preserve what they regarded as the distinctive elements of the Jewish tradition. One such political group was the Zealot party, described by Josephus as the "fourth philosophy" among the Jews.<sup>5</sup> It was founded by Judas the Galilean, who led an uprising against Rome in A.D. 6 to signify his opposition to the payment by Jews of tribute to a pagan emperor, on the ground that this behavior constituted an act of disloyalty towards God, the true King of Israel. Though inspired by such notable Jewish precursors as Matthias and Phinehas (cf. 1 Macc. 2:24ff.; Num. 25:11; Ps. 106:30f.), they made little headway against the imperial forces, and their revolt was soon crushed. However, for the next sixty years they engaged the Romans in intermittent skirmishes, meeting with indifferent success. They were active in another uprising against Rome in A.D. 46, and when it failed, two of the sons of Judas who had been taken captive were crucified by orders of the procurator Alexander.<sup>6</sup> Twenty years later a third son, Menahem, attempted to seize control of the anti-Roman movement, which by this time was at its height;<sup>7</sup> and his party fought

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Herods of Judaea* (1938), p. 151; C. F. Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments* (1959), p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> *AJ*, XVIII, 1, 1ff.; *BJ*, II, 8, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *AJ*, XX, 5, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *BJ*, II, 17, 8f.

vigorously against imperial forces throughout the war of A.D. 66-73.<sup>8</sup> Even when the last Zealot stronghold, Masada, capitulated in A.D. 73, the remnants of the party continued to resist the occupying Roman forces in a desultory manner. During their period of political and military activity the Zealots appear to have lived in small communities scattered throughout Judaea, and most probably practiced some form of communal existence.

The cleavage between the religious parties of Judaism was brought into sharp focus by the Roman occupation of Palestine, and even before the end of the first century B.C. the more zealous members of the Pharisaic party had begun to separate into communities. One of these was the "third philosophy" mentioned by Josephus, and known to history as the Essenes.<sup>9</sup> From descriptions of their activities they pursued a communal existence, practiced celibacy and pacifism, engaged in agricultural and other manual work, and spent a good deal of time in the study of their sacred writings as well as in liturgical exercises.<sup>10</sup> According to Josephus, the Essenes were to be found in all the cities of Judaea including Jerusalem. He also furnished a detailed description of their initiation procedures, which were based on a three-year novitiate culminating in a series of solemn oaths. From the accounts given in Josephus the Essenes commenced their day with prayers addressed to the sun, but this record was at variance with that supplied by Hippolytus, who merely stated that the Essenes continued in prayer from dawn onwards and refrained from engaging in conversation until they had sung a hymn of praise to God. The practice described by Josephus may in point of fact have been restricted principally to a small sect associated with the Essenes and known as Sampsaeans, who derived their name from acts of worship paid to the sun as a manifestation of divinity.

Yet another separatist group was that whose remains were discovered near the Wadi Qumran in 1947. It is considered probable that the Qumran sectaries occupied their buildings between 100 B.C. and A.D. 66, though whether they were in continuous residence throughout that period is somewhat difficult to determine. Despite the fact that many scholars have followed J. T. Milik in identifying this community with the Essenes, there are certain notable differences in their way of life as compared with general Essene practice,<sup>11</sup> making it undesirable to consider them as Essenes in the strictest sense of that term.<sup>12</sup> A protest

<sup>8</sup> C. Roth, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, IV (1959), pp. 33ff.

<sup>9</sup> *BJ*, II, 8, 2ff.; cf. *AJ*, XVIII, 1, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 75ff.; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, V, 15ff.; Hippolytus, *Refut.*, IX, 20, 13ff.

<sup>11</sup> R. K. Harrison, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 95ff.

<sup>12</sup> On the etymology of the name "Essenes" see G. Vermès, *Revue de Qumran*, II (1960), pp. 427ff.