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## Chapter 1

# The Escalating Crisis in Judea under Hellenistic Rule

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The Judean texts classified as “apocalyptic” are generally understood as responses to crises. In the standard interpretation, the crisis with which Daniel 7–12, some of the “*Enoch*” texts, and the *Testament of Moses* were struggling is conceptualized as “religious persecution.” More critical historical investigation into Hellenistic imperial culture, however, is discovering that what modern biblical scholars have termed religious persecution was virtually nonexistent and cannot explain how or why a Hellenistic emperor, even the notorious Antiochus IV Epiphanes, would have mounted such a program against “the Jews.”

Obviously, the crisis that evoked these texts was more complex than the standard interpretation has allowed, and requires more detailed investigation and conceptualization. Not only do particular historical events emerge out of previous historical events, but all events in antiquity are determined by political, economic, and religious structures and dynamics. Particular historical conflicts are often rooted in what are almost inherent structural conflicts. It is clear, even from the limited sources for the history of Second Temple Judea, that Judea was not just a place where a religion, “Judaism,” was practiced, and was not even an independent temple-state. Judean society was subject to, indeed a subordinate unit of, a succession of empires. Events and conflicts seemingly internal to Judean society were related to, and even determined by, imperial policy and initiatives. Careful attention to such complex historical factors reveals that the scribal circles who produced “apocalyptic” texts were responding to an escalating conflict between rival factions in the ruling Jerusalem aristocracy that were closely related to rival Hellenistic empires.<sup>1</sup>

### Rival Hellenistic Empires

After Alexander the Great completed his rapid conquest of the Persian imperial armies in the 330s B.C.E., his successors (*diadochoi*) divided up the territories into what became rival empires. Judeans had been ruled for over two centuries by the relatively stable Persian Empire. But Judea now lay in the contested frontier area between the Ptolemies, who ruled Egypt and initially Palestine as well, and the Seleucids, who ruled Syria. These two imperial regimes fought five major wars for control of the contested area in the course of the third century B.C.E.<sup>2</sup> In the course of these prolonged wars, imperial armies moved back and forth through the area, with the resultant destruction of crops, towns, and people in their wake. Daniel 11:5-9 may attest to a scribal memory of the uncertainty over which empire would prevail in the third of these wars (246–241 B.C.E.). In the fourth war (221–219), the Seleucid emperor Antiochus III did take control of some areas of western Syria for a few years. The reference in Daniel 11:10-12 indicates that Judean scribes were still thinking about this conflict over two generations later. In the fifth war (201–200), Antiochus III finally gained control of Palestine, thus bringing Judea under Seleucid rule.

The obvious impact of these prolonged wars on affairs in Judea was compounded by periodic conflicts between rivals for the throne within each empire, as well as regular rebellions of subject peoples, especially against the Seleucid regime. As the Seleucids took control over Judea, moreover, the Romans began intervening more actively in the inter-imperial politics of the eastern Mediterranean. And in what became a central factor in the crisis in Judea, the chronic warfare and extortion by the Romans left the imperial regimes, particularly the Seleucids, desperate for funds.

### The Emergence of Rival Aristocratic Factions under the Ptolemies

The priestly aristocracy, headed by a high priest, that had consolidated its power in Judea under the Persian Empire continued under the Hellenistic empires. The outside observer Hecataeus provides a sketch of the “constitution” (*politeia*) of the Judeans at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period.<sup>3</sup>

[Having] established the Temple that they hold in chief veneration . . . [Moses] drew up their laws and ordered their political institutions. . . . He picked out the men of most refinement and with the greatest ability to head the entire people, and appointed them priests . . . [and] judges in all major disputes, and entrusted to them the guardianship of the laws and customs. For this reason the Judeans never have a king, and representation (*prostasia*) of the people is regularly vested in whichever priest is regarded as superior to his colleagues

in wisdom and virtue, . . . the high priest, who in their assemblies and other gatherings announces what is ordained. (Hecataeus, in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40.3.3-6)

This sketch is similar to Ben Sira's portrayal of the high priest surrounded by the priestly aristocracy in ceremonial assembly at the end of the Ptolemaic period (Sir 50). While the temple-state hardly appears to have been a priestly monarchy under the Ptolemies,<sup>4</sup> the high priest appears to have stood preeminently at the center of a priestly aristocracy.

While the Ptolemies set a military governor over the larger area of Phoenicia and western Syria, they did not continue the Persian practice of assigning a governor to supervise affairs in Judea.<sup>5</sup> Yet while they let the high priesthood run affairs in Judea, there is no evidence that the Ptolemies appointed or formally approved the high priesthood as head of the temple-state to rule Judea. This left the high priesthood vulnerable to the maneuvers of local magnates, just as it stood vulnerable to actions by the imperial regime affecting matters in Judea, as evident from the Judean historian Josephus and from the Zenon papyri discovered in Egypt.

While the Ptolemaic regime attempted to establish a centralized political economy in Egypt, it adapted to local circumstances in Syria-Palestine. To control upland areas, the Ptolemies used military colonies and local "sheikhs" such as Tobiah, in Ammon across the Jordan River. This was presumably the latest head of the Tobiah family that had intermarried with the high-priestly family in Persian times (Neh 2:10, 19; 6:1-9; 13:4-5). According to certain Zenon papyri, Tobiah sent gifts of rare animals, young slaves, and a eunuch to Ptolemy Philadelphus, beginning one letter with "Many thanks to the gods."<sup>6</sup> Clearly this wealthy sheikh had learned how to play the game of Hellenistic imperial politics, including the importance of knowing Greek language and culture. In its drive to maximize its revenues from its subject peoples as well, the Ptolemaic regime made special arrangements through ambitious local power-holders, as evident in the highly romanticized "Tobiad romance" that Josephus reproduces in his account of Judea under the Ptolemies (*Ant.* 12:156-222, 228-36).<sup>7</sup> The source is evidently most credible on the tax-farming practices of the Ptolemaic regime (*Ant.* 12:168-69, 177-78, 181-83), which are confirmed by other evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Some time in the third quarter of the third century B.C.E., Joseph, son of Tobiah by a sister of the high priest Onias and thus already a player in Jerusalem politics, ingratiated himself at the Ptolemaic court with lavish gifts. When the time came for "all the chief men and magistrates of the cities of Syria and Phoenicia to bid for the tax-farming rights which the king used to

sell every year to the wealthy men in each city,” Joseph outbid them all. Having offered to double the regime’s revenue, he was granted the tax-farming rights to all of Syria. In Judea, this meant that he displaced the high priest (his uncle Onias) as the “representative” of the Judeans to the Ptolemies with regard to the imperial revenues. He used his expanding wealth to consolidate his power in Judea and beyond, continuing his lavish gifts to the imperial court. Acutely aware of the importance of Hellenistic culture under the “Greek” Empire, he had all of his sons tutored by the best-known teachers of the day.

The career of Joseph dramatizes both the loss of power by the high priestly office in the Judean temple-state and the rise to power of other ambitious members of the Jerusalem aristocracy. In displacing the high priest as the representative of the Judeans who sent up the tribute, Joseph significantly reduced the high priesthood’s political and economic power within Judea, and the Ptolemies’ reason to support the office. Collection of the imperial tribute by the Tobiad Joseph, and no longer through the high priesthood, now competed with the Temple’s and priesthood’s demands for tithes and offerings. Both in Jerusalem and in his relation with the imperial regime, Joseph came to rival the power of the high priest. More ominously, Joseph’s machinations in the Hellenistic imperial court opened the way for further maneuvering by rival factions that developed in the Jerusalem aristocracy just at the time when the Seleucid regime mounted another bid to take control of the area.

In judgments far more romantic than the “Tobiad romance,” previous interpreters have greeted Joseph as a paradigm of the “young enterprising forces [that] endeavored to break through the constraints of their native land,”<sup>9</sup> and yet also as a powerful Judean who was “able to protect his countrymen from excessive exploitation.”<sup>10</sup> But the only way that Joseph could have expanded the Ptolemaic regime’s revenues from the districts of Syria was to have extracted additional amounts from the peasants, whose produce supported both the temple-state and the imperial regime. Joseph’s new wealth and lifestyle, moreover, can only have raised the horizons of other Jerusalem aristocrats, who in turn sought enhanced revenues to fund a more lavish and cosmopolitan lifestyle. And the only source from which they could generate the desired increase was the need of peasants to obtain loans to meet Joseph’s higher demands for taxes. The added pressures on the peasantry can only have exacerbated indebtedness and accelerated loss of land. The situation would likely have been similar to the Judean aristocracy’s exploitation of the peasants that Nehemiah had attempted to check over two centuries earlier (Neh 5:1-13).

It is not difficult to imagine the impact of the factional rivalry in the aristocracy on scribes who served the temple-state. Not only was it unclear who would be calling the shots in the aristocracy for whom they worked, but the

scribes may have been caught in a conflict between their service to the aristocrats on whom they were economically dependent and their loyalty to the covenantal law of which they were the professional interpreters.

### **Aristocratic Factions and the Seleucid Takeover**

Conflict between factions in the aristocracy increased just before the Seleucid regime took control of Judea, and intensified afterward. There was a clear relationship between the conflict between the rival imperial regimes and the conflict among aristocratic factions for control in Jerusalem. A prominent previous construction of Second Temple Judean history held that long before the Hellenizing reform in 175 B.C.E., the Jerusalem aristocracy was divided between a Hellenizing party that was pro-Seleucid and a more traditionalist party that remained pro-Ptolemaic.<sup>11</sup> Even the fragmentary sources, however, indicate that matters were not so simple. There may well have been more than two factions in the aristocracy; none is identifiably more pro-Hellenistic than another, and their loyalty to one imperial regime or another was determined by shifting power politics at both the imperial and local levels.

According to the “Tobiad romance” included in Josephus’s historical account, Joseph’s youngest son (by a different mother from the other seven sons) picked up where his father left off in skillfully manipulating the imperial regime to his own advantage (*Ant.* 12.186–224, 228–36). Through his father’s “finance agent” (*oikonomos*) at the imperial court in Alexandria, Hyrcanus diverted large amounts of the funds his father was sending to the imperial treasury to pay for lavish gifts to the king and his high-ranking advisers, thus gaining favor for himself at court. Upon his return to Jerusalem, however, his brothers attacked him, each side commanding gangs of armed men. Forced to withdraw from Jerusalem politics, Hyrcanus retreated to the traditional family stronghold across the Jordan, where he gathered tribute from “the barbarians,” presumably as agent of the Ptolemies. Josephus writes of further “factional conflict” between Hyrcanus and the older Tobiad brothers, who were joined by the high priest Simon, son of Onias. This may indicate that some of the older brothers held important positions in the administration of the temple-state.

In the last decades of the Ptolemaic control of Jerusalem, the Tobiads were thus divided, with the Oniad high priest on one side. There is nothing to indicate that one side was more ideologically “Hellenistic” than the other. All of the Tobiads had received tutoring in Greek *paideia*. Their conflict was more likely a simple struggle for power in Jerusalem. And there may well have been other factions within the aristocracy. Hyrcanus’s favor at the court

in Alexandria left his rivals little room to maneuver with the Ptolemies, and so long as the latter held control of Palestine, too blatant an overture to the Seleucids would have been ill-advised.

The situation changed with the new Seleucid move to take control of the area in 201 B.C.E. In response to the “rumors of war,” some of the aristocracy, perhaps the majority (but not necessarily the Tobiad brothers and Onias), evidently cast their lot with the advancing Seleucids, while others (evidently more than just Hyrcanus) remained pro-Ptolemaic. The key indicator that a move toward the Seleucids was advisable was the defection to the Seleucids of Ptolemy, successor to his father Thraseus as the Ptolemaic governor of Phoenicia and Syria. Leading figures in Jerusalem, like other local rulers, would have had contacts with him and known which direction the imperial wind was blowing.<sup>12</sup> Josephus’s account of the war indicates that those in control in Jerusalem decided to support the Seleucids. When a Ptolemaic army under Scopas went to secure control of Jerusalem, they had to defeat the force that was resisting them and install a garrison (*Ant.* 12.132–33, 135). When the now Seleucid governor Ptolemy came to expel the Ptolemaic garrison in Jerusalem after Antiochus III’s victory over the Ptolemaic army at Panion, “the Judeans of their own will went over to him and admitted him to their city and made abundant provision for his entire army and his elephants; and they readily joined his forces in besieging the garrison left by Scopas” (*Ant.* 12.133). The only “Judeans” who could have supplied provisions for a whole army would have been the now pro-Seleucid faction of the Jerusalem aristocracy.

Whether in gratitude for the aristocrats’ support or as a more general arrangement, Antiochus went back to what had been the Persian policy of supporting the temple-state as the instrument of imperial control and taxation of Judea. In a passage that critics deem authentic, in the main,<sup>13</sup> Josephus reproduces Antiochus III’s decree to his governor regarding the Judean temple-state.

Inasmuch as the Judeans . . . gave us a splendid reception and met us with their council (*gerousia*) and furnished an abundance of provisions . . . and helped us to expel the Egyptian garrison in the citadel, . . . we requite them for these acts and we restore their city which has been destroyed by the ravages of war. . . . We have decided, on account of their piety, to furnish them for their sacrifices an allowance of sacrificial animals [etc.]. . . . It is my will that . . . work on the Temple be completed. . . . The timber shall be brought from Lebanon . . . and other materials needed for restoration. . . . And all members of the people (*ethnos*) shall be governed according to their ancestral laws, and the council (*gerousia*), priests, the scribes of the Temple and the temple-singers shall be relieved from the

poll-tax and crown-tax and the salt-tax which they pay. And . . . the inhabitants of the city . . . we shall also relieve from the third part of their tribute, so that their losses may be made good. (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.138–44)

Antiochus thus placed the temple-state in charge of Judea and the gerousia in charge of the temple-state. In Hellenistic political arrangements, the term gerousia referred to the elders or aristocracy of a city or people. Insofar as “the priests, the temple-scribes, and the temple-singers” were all clearly staff working in the Temple, the gerousia must refer to the officers who headed the temple-state. Antiochus makes a significant change from the Ptolemies’ practice of assigning a powerful figure other than the high priest to collect the imperial revenues. The Seleucids thus set the Jerusalem gerousia in charge of collecting the tribute from the Judean peasantry. Besides granting them a third of the revenue for rebuilding the city, they gave tax relief (to enable the temple-state to recover) to the temple functionaries (who surely comprised most of the “inhabitants” of Jerusalem), with the Judean peasants expected to render up tribute as usual.

Conspicuous by his absence in Antiochus’s decree is the high priest. This may be merely an accident, or perhaps Simon II, son of Onias II, had been among the leaders of the faction that Scopas had deported to Egypt just before Antiochus marched up to Jerusalem. Ben Sira, on the other hand, praises Simon for rebuilding the Temple and city fortifications as he stands at the head of his brothers, “the sons of Aaron,” in ceremonial formation in the Temple (Sir 50:1-4). So the Seleucids had evidently placed Judea under the control of the priestly aristocracy headed by the high priest. Yet not only did some of the older factions continue, but new configurations and alliances may have emerged. Prominent priestly aristocrats had not only acquired a desire to participate in the broader Hellenistic imperial culture, but they had learned how to maneuver in imperial politics for position and power. And since the Temple headed the Judean economy, and the priestly aristocracy had charge of both temple and imperial revenues in Judea, and the Seleucid regime was chronically in need of more revenues, factional maneuvering focused on control of the revenue.

In a crucial step that prepared the way for more ominous dealings, the “temple-captain” (*prostates tou hierou*) Simon, of the priestly family of Bilgah (Neh 12:5, 18),<sup>14</sup> invited the Seleucids to expropriate more funds from the temple treasury, although it is not clear what he and those he represented wanted in return (2 Macc 3:4-12). The conflict involved some violence, including some “murders.” In return for his defense of the sacred funds, however, the high priest Onias III, son of Simon II, was retained at the imperial

court (2 Macc 4:1-7). One faction could maneuver the high priest who belonged to another faction into imperial house arrest, and the imperial regime was now intervening far more directly in the affairs of the temple-state.

### Hellenizing Reform and Traditionalist Resistance

In what was probably the most important and brazen step escalating the simmering conflicts in Jerusalem into major crisis, a large faction of the aristocracy took the accession to power of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 175 B.C.E. as an occasion to implement a Hellenizing “reform.” The new emperor was desperate for funds. Jason, the brother of Onias III, heading a sizable party that included some Tobiads, secured appointment as high priest by promising an increase in tribute, from 300 to 360 talents, along with an additional 80 talents. Rivals could now obtain the high priesthood by bidding up the tribute from Judea. Even more troubling to scribal circles as well as to the ordinary priests and Levites, however, was the new “constitution” that Jason and his allies obtained in return for additional funds.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth (*ephebeion*) for [the city], and to enroll the Jerusalemites as citizens of Antioch. When the emperor assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life (*pros tōn Hellēnikōn charaktēra*). He set aside the existing royal concessions to the Judeans . . . and he dissolved the laws of the constitution (*tas nomimous politeias*) and set up new customs contrary to the laws. He took delight in establishing a gymnasium right under the citadel, and he had the noblest of the young men (*tōn ephebōn*) exercise with the broad-brimmed felt [Greek] hat. (2 Macc 4:9-12)

Judeans committed to the sacred ancestral traditions would have been horrified that the dominant priestly elite had so brazenly “abandoned the holy covenant” for the alien customs of the imperial political culture, as indicated by the accounts in both 1 Maccabees (1:11–15) and 2 Maccabees (4:9–17). This move, headed by Jason, has been interpreted as a *religious* reform or a change in culture, a shift from “Judaism” to “Hellenism.”<sup>16</sup> There were indeed religious aspects of it, such as the neglect of the sacrifices, and the forms instituted were indeed from Hellenistic culture. But Jason’s project was fully political. Hellenistic political culture was an imperial continuation of earlier forms of the Greek city-states. The *gymnasion* was the (mainly athletic) training facility for young men preparing to become citizens, that is, members of the corporation of citizens that constituted the *polis*. The *ephebeion* was the corresponding group of young men in training for citizenship.<sup>17</sup> The “ancestral laws” (*patrioi nomoi*) or “constitution” (*politeia*) were the regulations



that governed these and other institutions of the city-state (Herodotus 2:91; Diodorus Siculus 1.81.7; Xenophon, *Cyropaideia* 1.2.2–15).

By instituting the new training system for citizens, Jason and company were changing the *politeia* or constitution of Judea, its “constitutive” stamp (*charaktera*). The account in 2 Maccabees is instructive on this point: Jason had dissolved the ancestral laws of the Judean people and substituted a new way of life and an imperially recognized legal basis for the city corporation thus founded, Antioch (named presumably after its official “founder,” Antiochus IV). Yet while the “reformers” may have “neglected” the sacrifices, they did not abandon the Temple and its sacrifices and did not suppress observance of Judean laws and customs and the traditional way of life of the people. Like other native elites in the Hellenistic empires, they were interested in transforming the political culture of their city. Such indigenous aristocracies established new city institutions following Greek patterns and gave Greek names to local gods and temples in dozens of “new” Hellenistic cities founded under the Hellenistic empires.<sup>18</sup> The subject peoples living on the land that became the territory belonging to the city effectively lost certain traditional “rights” but were otherwise allowed to continue their customary way of life. The Hellenizing re-forming of Jerusalem in 175 was similar.

Yet the change of constitution had ominous implications for the priests, Levites, and scribes. Political rights as well as political power were now monopolized by the elite, “enrolled” as citizens of “Antioch.” Others, including presumably other priestly aristocrats as well as regular priests and scribes, were now mere residents of the city.<sup>19</sup> They were in effect “demoted,” and their professional service in the altar or as scribes was relativized. And a cultural gulf, as well as an economic gap, widened between those who participated in the “reform” and others. What now was to be the role of the scribes who, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, had gone through rigorous learning of the Judean cultural repertoire of Torah, Prophets, and various kinds of wisdom to prepare for their service in the temple-state? At least some of them, like Ben Sira, had been critical—within the sequestered sites of scribal instruction, of course—of their aristocratic patrons for exploiting the poor. Now, however, it was unclear that there was any role for the custodians of ancestral traditions that no longer mattered to the new Hellenistic city-state and its elite citizens. In effect, their positions had been eliminated and their economic support from the aristocrats thrown into question. It would not be surprising if some circles of scribes reacted with at least some sort of resistance to the Hellenizing reform, as hinted in some of the texts to be examined, especially “Enoch’s” Animal Vision.

The powerful Hellenizing faction in “Antioch,” however, now had a more secure base from which they could participate in the dominant imperial culture. Shortly after the change of constitutions, Jason sent a delegation to the quadrennial games in Tyre, presided over by Antiochus (2 Macc 4:18-20). “Antioch” then staged a grand celebration to welcome Antiochus to the city (4:21-22).

### **Imperial Suppression, Scribal Resistance, and Popular Revolt**

Conflict within the reforming faction led to an escalating series of events, climaxing in Antiochus’s invasion of Jerusalem and his violent repression of resistance by Judeans who insisted on their traditional way of life. Three years into the reform and the high priesthood of Jason, Menelaus, brother of the temple captain Simon (of the Bilgah priestly family), in a delivery of tribute to Antiochus, obtained the high priestly office for himself in return for raising the tribute by another 300 talents (2 Macc 4:23-24). The high priesthood was thus removed from the Oniad lineage in which it had been hereditary for generations. The dominant reforming faction in the aristocracy was thus split, as Jason fled across the Jordan, and Menelaus plundered the Temple treasury and continued to wriggle his way around charges by other Jerusalem aristocrats by bribing imperial officials (4:30-50).

Affairs in Jerusalem now rapidly escalated into armed conflict. Despite differences in detail, the accounts in the principal sources agree on a basic outline of events (1 Macc 1:16-23; 2 Macc 5-7; Josephus, *Ant.* 12:242-56).<sup>20</sup> The sequence of events becomes clearer once it is recognized that Antiochus must have invaded Egypt twice. He evidently intervened successfully in Egypt late in 170 (1 Macc 1:16-24). Coming through Jerusalem on his way back, he looted the Temple in an invasion that did not involve any significant violent attack or resistance (Dan 11:28). In the spring of 168, he invaded Egypt again, but this time was checked by Romans and withdrew. Probably during Antiochus’s disastrous confrontation with the Romans in Egypt (had there been a rumor that Antiochus had been killed?), Jason returned to Jerusalem at the head of a sizable force and forced Menelaus and his followers to take refuge in the fortress (2 Macc 5:1-7). Perhaps taking Jason’s successful seizure of Jerusalem as a revolt, Antiochus then sent a large military force, under the command of Apollonius, to suppress the revolt and restore Jerusalem to the control of the highly cooperative Menelaus.

But matters were clearly out of control in Jerusalem and Judea. The now armed conflict between the two factions of the Hellenizing aristocrats is what appears in the books of the Maccabees and Josephus. What does not

appear, except perhaps for hints here and there, but is strongly suggested in some of the texts that will be examined in the chapters below, is that other Judeans were also engaged in resistance of some form. It must have appeared to Antiochus that, since Menelaus and his faction could not hold Jerusalem by themselves, he needed to send in occupying troops to establish a military colony in the city. The military settlers, probably from Syria or Asia Minor, would have brought with them a cult of Baal Shamem, the Lord of Heaven, often identified with Zeus in other Hellenistic cities and sometimes with Yahweh/the Most High. And if the occupying troops either shared or took over the Temple, their sacrifices to the Lord of Heaven would surely have appeared to traditionally oriented Judean priests and scribes as an abominable profanation of the altar.

Although it is not clear just what measures he took, it seems likely that at this point Antiochus ordered the suppression of ancestral law and sacrifices in Jerusalem and Judea. And it also seems likely that these measures were an attempt to counter the continuing resistance of scribal circles and others that was deeply rooted in those ancestral laws and rites. Whatever motivated Antiochus to suppress Judean observances, his measures were counterproductive. In the escalating spiral of violence, the response to Antiochus's repressive measures was wider insurrection and the guerrilla warfare known as the Maccabean Revolt.

### **The Contradiction Confronting the Judean Scribes**

In the late third and early second centuries B.C.E., Judean scribes faced an escalating crisis that they were forced to make sense of. Their role was to serve the temple-state and the priestly aristocrats who headed it from their knowledge of the Judean cultural repertoire of which they were the professional guardians, and to which they had become personally committed. They had devoted their lives to learning Mosaic covenantal Torah, the oracles of the prophets, and the different kinds of wisdom so that they could advise the presiding priests of the Temple, supply knowledge of "the laws of the Judeans" by which the temple-state operated, and coordinate the calendar of festivals in sync with the movement of the heavenly bodies. In the official imperial ideology that informed the establishment of the Jerusalem temple-state, their God was local, "the god who is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3). But Judean scribes were firm in their worldview, deeply rooted in Mosaic Torah and prophetic tradition, that the God of Israel was the creator of the universe and the Lord of history.

The very structure of Judean society under imperial rule placed scribes in a conflict between their loyalty to Judean tradition and their role in the temple administration. There were inevitably circumstances and situations in

which the policies or actions of local and/or imperial rulers went against the laws and traditions to which they were committed. And there were conflicts aplenty in the Judean temple-state, between predatory power-holders and the people, or between rival priestly factions. Much of the Persian imperial interference that we know of (through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah), however, was to favor the dominance of one priestly party over others, or to insist on compromises between rival priesthoods, or to force the powerful elite into at least minimal observance of Judean socioeconomic principles.

Under the Hellenistic empires, however, imperial policies and interactions between imperial regimes and the members of the Jerusalem aristocracy touched off an escalating series of processes and events that posed severe contradictions for the Judean scribes. Rival empires now periodically devastated the countryside and occasionally attacked Jerusalem as they battled back and forth for control of the territories of Syria-Palestine. The Ptolemaic practice of farming out tribute collection to the highest bidders encouraged Jerusalem power brokers, such as the Tobiads Joseph and Hyrcanus, to become more exploitative of Judean villagers than the priestly aristocracy had been previously. Aristocrats developed a desire for a lavish alien lifestyle and fuller participation in Hellenistic political culture. The desire to join the dominant Hellenistic imperial culture became so strong among many of the priestly aristocrats that they obtained imperial blessings on a new Hellenistic “constitution” for “Antioch” in Jerusalem. This abandonment of the traditional covenantal laws as the “constitution” of the temple-state demoted, and perhaps even eliminated, the traditional roles of the scribes, along with those of the ordinary priests. And all of these developments violated the traditional values as well as the laws of the Judeans, of which the scribes were the professional guardians. Finally, the Seleucid emperor imposed an occupying foreign military colony on Jerusalem, along with the cult of an alien god, and took measures to suppress observance of the traditional covenantal way of life. With every one of these major events, the crisis deepened in Judean society, and Judean scribes struggled to understand what was happening in the mysterious ways of God, and how they should respond to the ever-escalating crisis.