

# Chapter

# 3

# Roman Domination of Judea

## Divisions Inside and Out

investigate

- Why did the differences among our ancestors cause conflict?
- How did their intolerance bring them to the verge of destruction?
- What can we learn from them so that we use our differences to strengthen the Jewish community?

### Key Words and Places

Essenes	Messiah
Sadducees	Sicarii
Pharisees	Zealots
Crucifixion	Tisha B'Av
Masada	<i>Sinat Hinam</i>
Procurators	



### The BIG Picture

Judea was flourishing. Thanks to Hasmonean conquests, the Jewish state grew to include almost all of biblical Israel as well as land east of the Jordan River and the southern Golan. The Hasmoneans controlled profitable trade routes, and merchants and large landowners thrived. But the less prosperous Judeans carried the heavy tax burden required to maintain Judea's large army. In addition, resentment of the Hasmoneans grew when they forced the non-Jews in their kingdom to convert to Judaism.

While this was a time of great Jewish diversity—political, economic, and religious—it was also a time of intolerance for difference. One group went so far as to distance itself from other Jews by moving to the desert. Another used guerrilla tactics to intimidate those who opposed them. These deep divisions would have been disastrous in the best of times. But these were hardly the best of times. In fact, the Jews were about to battle the most powerful empire the world had ever seen.

63 BCE

- Roman general Pompey makes Judea a Roman province

37 BCE

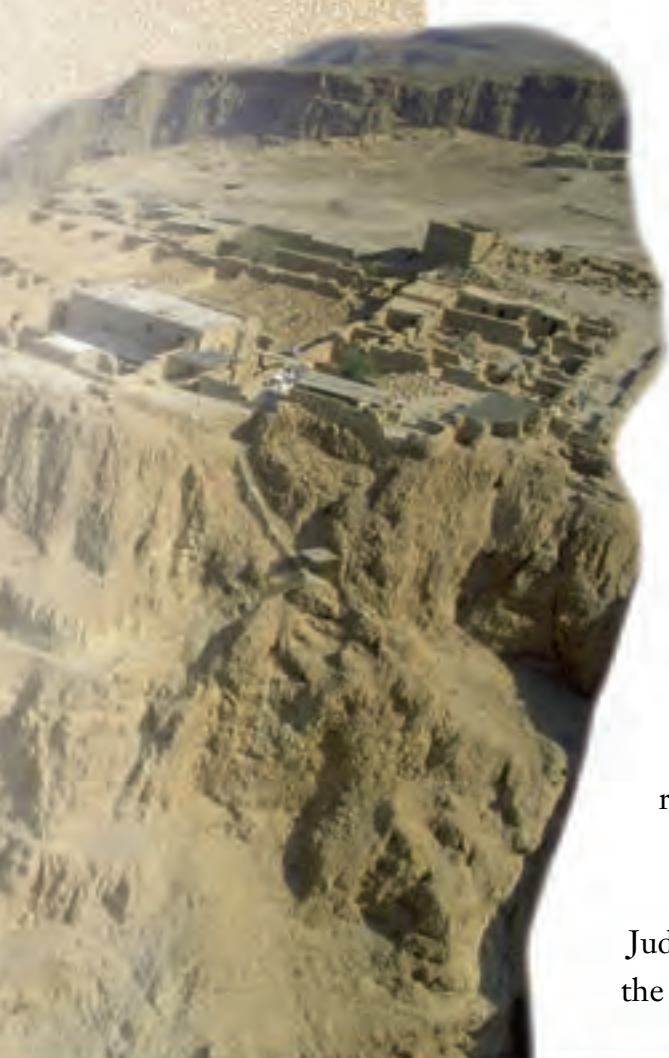
- Romans name Herod "king of the Jews"

10 BCE

- Hillel and Shammai teach in Jerusalem

6 CE

- Zadok and Judah the Galilean lead tax revolt against Romans



## de ded

he Hasmoneans wanted to recapture the glory days of King David and King Solomon. But their devotion to conquering territory and their desire to rule the Jewish State li e the neighboring Hellenistic kingdoms only heightened divisions within the population. onflict increased between the rich and the poor, Jews and non Jews, passionate Helleni ers and traditionalists.

he situation reached a low point in around B E. he Hasmonean ing lexander annai was performing a Su ot ceremony in the emple. Suddenly, the people began to pelt him with *etro i* or citrons.

hy would the Jews attac their ing ne reason lay in the Hasmonean ings' decision to declare themselves both High Priests and ings. ntil then, there had been a separation of religious and political leadership. any also resented the high taxes the ing required to support his numerous military campaigns.

he first to voice their opposition to the concentra tion of power in the hands of the Hasmoneans were the **Essenes**. hey led simple lives that emphasi ed religious ideals and the study of orah in minute detail. anting nothing to do with the Hasmonean leader, or ic ed Priest, as they called him, they moved to the Judean desert, founding the settlement of umran by the edge of the Dead Sea.

43 CE

• **World History:**  
City of London  
founded in Britain

66 CE

• Roman procurator  
Florus robs Temple  
treasury; sparks  
Jewish revolt

70 CE

• Roman army conquers  
Jerusalem; city and  
Temple destroyed

73 CE

• Romans capture Masada;  
Jewish rebellion  
completely crushed



rather than head for the desert, other groups stayed in Judea and struggled for power. Two major rivals actually religious and political parties developed. They were the **Sadducees** and the **Pharisees**. The two differed largely in their social and economic makeup and in their approach to understanding Torah.

The Sadducees were mostly wealthy priests and aristocrats. They traditionally filled the religious and political leadership roles in Jerusalem.

The Pharisees included both priests and nonpriests, rich and poor Jews alike. Most Jews, however, were not members of either party.

Most Jews were poor farmers, craftspeople, and fishermen who did not have the leisure to think about the political schemes of rival groups.

The Pharisees wanted to replace the current leadership because they believed that the powers

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In first-century Judea, there was no clear separation between politics and religion the way there is in the United States and Canada today. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were competing political groups. They also had very different religious beliefs.

The Pharisees believed that the written Torah could only be understood in combination with an oral tradition—teachings passed on by word of mouth. As scholars who were learned in both the written and the oral traditions, the Pharisees considered themselves the natural leaders of the people.

The Sadducees, many of whom were members of the High Priest's family, rejected the Pharisees' oral tradition. They argued that the priests, whom the Torah specified as the religious leaders, were the only ones qualified to interpret the Torah.

of the king and priest should be separated. Understandably, kings do not look favorably on people who talk about replacing them. So, the Hasmonean rulers sided with the Sadducees. That caused the Pharisees to increase their opposition. From there, things quickly turned ugly.

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This brings us back to the unfortunate *etro i* incident in the temple—it was the Pharisees who led the revolt against King Alexander Jannai. Jannai struck back using a slow and painful Roman execution technique called **crucifixion** in which the condemned are hung on a cross. He tortured many of his political opponents through crucifixion.

After Jannai's death, the Pharisees regained political influence. Soon after, they attacked the Sadducees. Unfortunately, the Jews were so busy fighting a civil war that they ignored a much more serious threat—the expanding Roman Empire. In 63 B.C.E., the Roman general Pompey marched into Jerusalem and ended the civil war by making Judea a Roman province.

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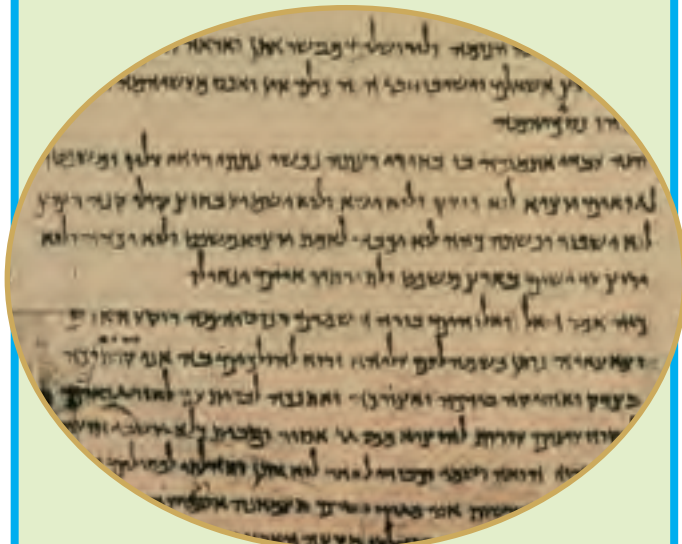
Now Judea was under the authority of Rome. At first, Roman rule was not very different from the rule of the Hasmoneans. Roman leaders were mainly concerned with collecting taxes and keeping the peace. They were content to let a Jewish leader rule the land of Israel, as long as he remained loyal to Rome. In 37 B.C.E., the Romans named Herod King of the Jews. Herod was a general whose family had been forcibly converted to Judaism generations earlier by the Hasmoneans.

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One morning in 1947, a Bedouin shepherd made one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century. In a cave near the Dead Sea he found a group of ceramic jars. Inside were leathery scrolls, many of which turned out to be ancient copies of biblical books, such as the Book of Isaiah.

Known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, these are the oldest copies of biblical texts ever discovered. Scholars believe it was the Essenes who put the scrolls in these caves. The Essenes lived next to the caves, in the settlement of Qumran.

Some of the scrolls teach us about the Essenes. Their community was organized as a commune—a collective in which there is no private property and work is shared equally. Life centered on community meals and prayer.



This scroll of the Book of Isaiah was found in Qumran. Just like Torah scrolls, it has no vowels. Do you recognize any of the Hebrew letters or words?



The archaeological remains of King Herod's palace include remnants of a tower, a courtyard with columns, and a synagogue.

strong leader, Herod brought over thirty years of calm to the land of Israel. He was a master builder of cities and fortresses. He rebuilt Jerusalem and expanded the Beit Hamidash into one of the most beautiful and impressive temples in the Roman Empire. Even the Pharisees, who hated Herod, were forced to admit, "No one who has not seen Herod's building has ever seen a building that is truly grand."

But Herod often seemed not to care about the Jews. His loyalty was to the Romans. In fact, he placed a large Roman eagle, the symbol of Rome's might, on the Temple gate.

When two Pharisees tore it down, Herod had them burned alive. He also deepened the divisions among Jews, and his building programs were costly, the heavy tax burden bringing many farmers to the edge of ruin.

Perhaps most destructive were Herod's fits of violence. He went so far as to murder most of

# Famous ★ FIGURES

## a amma

Two of the most famous Pharisees were Hillel and Shammai, both of whom lived during the time of Herod the Great. Hillel and Shammai were both revered teachers but they often differed in their interpretations of the Torah. The following Talmudic story highlights differences in the temperaments of these two famous teachers.

One day, a non-Jew came before Shammai and said, "I will convert to Judaism if you teach me the whole Torah while standing on one foot." Shammai responded by chasing the man away with a stick. The man then went before Hillel and repeated his challenge. Hillel responded, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and study [Torah]."

Whose response do you think was more appropriate? Why?

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Describe one way you can apply Hillel's teaching in your everyday life.

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*How can greeting others with a smile rather than a frown be a way to follow Hillel's teaching?*

his family, suspecting they were plotting against him. He executed many popular figures including his wife, the Hasmonean princess Mariamne. Fearing attempts on his throne and life, Herod built massive fortresses where he could escape in case of rebellion. His most famous fortress was **Masada**.

## Herod's Roman Control

Herod succeeded in stifling opposition because the people feared him. But soon after he died, in 4 BCE, farmers rose up in protest. Many had been forced off their farms because they could not pay their taxes. Now some became Robin Hood style bandits, stealing weapons, looting royal palaces, robbing travelers, and even attacking Roman soldiers.

The Romans soon took direct control of Judea and clamped down on the bandits. The Galilee and Golan remained under the control of Herod's sons. The Roman Senate appointed special commissioners, called **procurators**, to tend to military, judicial, and civil matters. The High Priest controlled religious affairs and other local matters. The Romans auctioned off the office of High Priest to the highest bidder, who was usually a Sadducee. Many poorer people resented the close relationship between the Sadducees and the Romans, so they turned to the Pharisees as their religious and political leaders.

But even the Pharisees were not fully united on the issue of Roman control of Judea. Some were violently opposed to Roman rule. In 6 CE, a Pharisee named Judas and a popular community leader named Judah the Galilean led a tax revolt against the Romans. Others did not openly oppose the Romans; instead, they prayed to God to send a savior.

## Expectations of the Messiah

In these troubled times, many Jews turned to God for relief. Some believed that God would send a messiah to destroy their enemies and rule them as in the days of old. So they prayed for the coming of the Messiah, for the "End of Days"—the end of their suffering and the start of a more perfect world.

The Hebrew word for messiah, *mashiah*, means "anointed one." In biblical times, kings were anointed with oil. Thus, many people expected the Messiah to be a flesh-and-blood king.



The Golden Gate is located at the south wall of the Temple District of Jerusalem. According to tradition, the Messiah will enter the city through this gate. In 1541 CE, the arches were sealed by the Muslim ruler, Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I, to prevent the Messiah from entering.



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As long as the procurators respected Jewish tradition and didn't tax the people too heavily, things remained relatively calm. But the people's anger toward Rome was building.

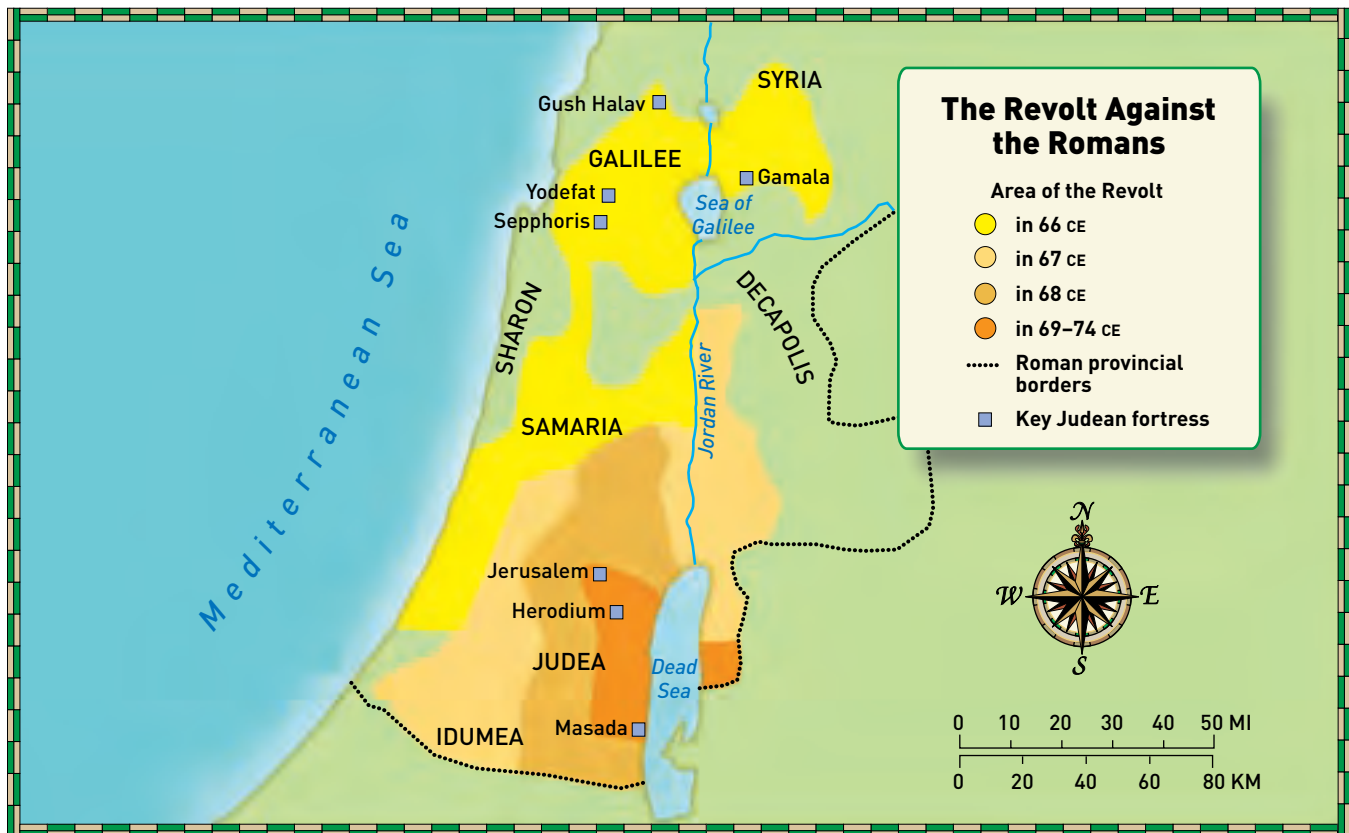
The procurators who ruled in the late 40s and in the 50s CE were especially insensitive and corrupt. Anti-Roman followers of Galilee and Judah the Galilean responded by launching a campaign of deadly tactics. Their group became known as **Sicarii**, or dagger men, because of the small curved dagger called *sicca* that they used to assassinate their enemies. Many of the Sicarii's

targets were Sadducees, who were hated as traitors for cooperating with Rome.

Tensions between the rich and the poor also increased. The poor despised the rich; the rich feared the poor. Desperate Jewish bandits began raiding the farms of wealthy landowners. The anger of Israel was ready to explode.

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The procurator Florus lit the fuse in 66 CE. Concerned with gaining ever greater amounts of gold and silver, Florus robbed the Temple treasury. This outraged Jews



After the war against Rome, it would be almost two thousand years before the Jews would again have a national state.

protested, Herod ordered his soldiers to attack them and loot Jerusalem. The soldiers broke into homes and robbed the protesters, destroyed the marketplace, and slaughtered hundreds, including women and children.

Did Herod want a war badly, yes. Herod would give him a reason to pronounce Jerusalem a conquered city and seize the temple treasury.

Herod got what he wanted, for by now even the Sadducees and more moderate Pharisees were swept up in the wave of anti-Roman fury.

The temple priests declared that they no longer would make a daily sacrifice in honor of Caesar, nor would they stand to protect the Roman Empire. That was as good as a declaration of war.

This would have been the perfect time for Jews to unite against their common enemy. Instead, the conflicts among the various Jewish parties ripped them apart.

At first, the priests and aristocrats controlled the war. But the Sicarii soon besieged Jerusalem, declaring their leader, Judah, to be the Messiah. Herod tried to gain control of the revolt by murdering aristocrats and looting their homes. Then the Sadducees killed the Sicarii leader, the Sicarii fled to Masada, the mountaintop fortress that Herod had built in the Judean desert. There they stayed until the end of the war, praying for God to destroy their enemies, Roman and Jewish alike.

Meanwhile, on the battlefield, Jewish fighters won an early victory over Roman troops sent from Syria to restore order. But the Jewish war



As a general, Josephus was sent to the Galilee to unite and lead the population. The people were divided. On one side were the residents of wealthy cities such as Sepphoris, who believed that a war would bring ruin. On the other were bandit groups made up of the poor. They had no trust in Josephus or in the war leaders in Jerusalem, who mostly came from wealthy families.

Herod's effort was doomed. When the Roman legions under the command of Vespasian attacked in the spring of 70 CE, Jewish resistance quickly collapsed due to infighting. Joseph ben Matityahu, the general in charge, was captured and Rome took control of the Galilee. After his capture, Joseph ben Matityahu became known by his Roman name, Josephus Flavius, and he turned against the war.





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Josephus hated the rebellious Jewish factions, such as the Sicarii and the Zealots, whom he believed had brought the country down. *The Jewish War* was the first book by Josephus. In it he provides an eyewitness account of the war with Rome. Vespasian financed the book, so Josephus avoided accusing him and Titus of wrongdoing. Instead, he blamed the revolt on Jewish hotheads.

In the following passage, Josephus describes the civil war among the Jews: "All [Jews] who were not fighting with the Romans turned their hands against one another. There was also a bitter contest between those who wanted war and those who wanted peace."

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In 69 CE the Roman emperor, Nero, was assassinated. The war came to a temporary halt as Rome was overwhelmed by an internal struggle for control of the empire.

Did the Jews use this opportunity to make peace or even to organize their troops, fortify Jerusalem, and store up supplies? Poor farmers, laborers, and bandits who had been driven out of the Galilee now gathered in Jerusalem and formed a group called the **Zealots**. The Zealots attacked the chief priests and aristocrats Jews who were running the war. Soon, others who also despised the rich and powerful of Jerusalem joined the Zealots.

If this were not enough, the Zealots and the other groups turned on one another. Jerusalem became a battlefield as Jews slaughtered Jews. Leaders of the Pharisees and Sadducees urged the people to end the civil war. No one listened.

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The Romans must have watched in amazement as civil war brought their enemies to the edge of self destruction. In 69 CE, Vespasian was made emperor. He sent his son Titus to complete the military action he had begun.

By the spring of 70 CE, Titus and his army had Jerusalem under siege.amine quickly

These Roman soldiers were members of a special force of bodyguards that served Roman emperors. Titus was a chief officer in the guard before becoming emperor in 79 CE, upon the death of his father.





This is a model of Jerusalem as it appeared in 70 CE, just before the destruction of the Second Temple. The part of the Temple known as the Holy of Holies is in the foreground.

overwhelmed the city. The surviving factions tried to fight off the Roman invaders, but the Roman battering rams cracked the walls of the city.

For the next three weeks, the priests fought bravely to keep the Romans out of the Beit Hamidash. As the fighting raged on the ninth day of Av, a Roman soldier threw a blazing piece of wood into the Temple sanctuary. Flames shot into the air. The Beit Hamidash burned into the next day, until there was nothing left but cinder and ashes.

## Reflection

Centuries after Jerusalem's fall and the Temple's destruction, we continue to mourn our loss.

Tisha B'Av, the ninth of Av, which falls in the summer, is a day of mourning. For a full twenty-five hours, from sundown to nightfall, it is a Jewish tradition to fast. It is not a fast of atonement. Rather, it is a fast of grieving. The Book of Lamentations, which was written after the destruction of the First Temple, is chanted mournfully in the synagogue, like an ancient ballad telling a tale of love and loss. For the twenty-five hours of this holy day, Jews are prohibited from wearing leather and listening to music. Those prohibitions, too, are signs of mourning.

Why do you think the Jewish people continue to mourn the destruction of the Temple?

The observance of Tisha B'Av connects Jewish religious observance with our history. Describe how another holiday links religious observance with Jewish history.

Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. The surviving leaders of the different Jewish factions were led to Rome in chains. Taken with them were the sacred Temple vessels, captured as spoils of war. Jewish tradition teaches that the underlying cause of Jerusalem's destruction was not the Romans but rather the disunity among the Jews and their senseless hatred, *sinat binam*, for one another. Had the Jews been unified, they might have saved the Temple.

## And

Now, only isolated pockets of rebels held out against the Romans. The most serious was the Sicarii stronghold of Masada, which held large stockpiles of food and water. That the Sicarii lacked, though, was a defense against Roman technology. The Romans built a ramp up the western side of the mountain, pushed a siege tower up to the fortress, and battered down the

walls. Rather than risk being taken to Rome as prisoners, most of the Sicarii committed suicide.

Earlier generations than ours often imagined the Jews on Masada as brave fighters and heroes because they refused to give in to the Romans. But, perhaps, they are better seen as symbols of why the Jewish revolt was a failure. The Sicarii were not brave warriors, but extremists who refused to fight alongside other Jews because they despised them as much as they hated the Romans. Almost until the end, the Sicarii were convinced that they were right and everyone else was wrong, that they would usher in the End of Days while all their enemies would be destroyed.

Instead of triumph, the Jewish rebellion was completely crushed. After less than one hundred years of independence, the Jews lost their country and their capital city. They watched their beloved Temple burn to the ground. But all was not lost. How the Jews saved themselves and their religion is the subject of the next chapter.



Masada is located on the top of an isolated rock, at the edge of the Judean Desert. It is the perfect place to build a fortress, high above attacking enemies who have no place to shelter themselves.



# then & NOW

You have seen how, in ancient times, *sinat ĥinam*, senseless hatred, led to civil war and contributed to the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of our homeland. Unfortunately, we have not always learned the lessons of those who came before us. For example, in 1995 Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister of Israel, was working to establish peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Jews around the world were filled with hope. But on November 4, 1995, Yigal Amir, an Israeli Jew who opposed the peace process, assassinated Rabin.

1. Is it possible to treat people with respect even if you don't always agree with what they say or do? Why or why not?

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2. How can following Hillel's teaching, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others," help us avoid the consequences of *sinat ĥinam*?

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. Describe two dos and don'ts that can guide you when expressing disagreement with others.

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