

## CHAPTER 18

# Rebellion Against Rome

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### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

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Following Herod's death, Judaea was divided between his three sons. During this period, Roman rule became increasingly oppressive. In response, the Zealots engaged in subversive activities. Under Caligula's rule, Jews in Alexandria pressed for civil rights, thereby provoking a hostile reaction from the gentile community. In 40 CE Jewish representatives led by the Jewish philosopher Philo went to Rome to plead their cause. Undeterred by such protests, the emperor insisted that his statue be placed in Jerusalem. Following Caligula's murder, his successor Claudius was compelled to deal with renewed conflict between Jews and Greeks in Alexandria. Urging tolerance, he abolished direct Roman rule in Judaea. Eventually, however, Judaea reverted to its status of a Roman province. These developments gave rise to increased messianic expectation.

In the Graeco-Roman world, Jews did not occupy positions of economic influence that aroused envy, as frequently occurred in subsequent centuries. Nor were they subject to racial persecution as in the Middle Ages. Instead, both Greeks and Romans objected to Jews on social grounds, giving rise to a general polemic against the Jews and their faith among classical writers such as Cicero, a Roman orator of the first century BCE. In a famous speech, *Pro Flacco*, delivered in 59 BCE, Cicero argues that the Jews represent an element within society that is contrary to the values of Rome. They are the embodiment of barbaric superstition. In his view, superstition is opposed to religion – religion is the essence of the political, cultural and spiritual ideals of ancient Rome. Because the Jews represent superstition, they stand for everything that opposes these values. Judaism, he continues, is inimical to the religion of Rome because it is incompatible with ancestral customs and institutions. Here, prior to the

emergence of Christianity, anti-Jewish sentiment was rampant. You should consider why such attitudes were prevalent in the ancient world. Was such antipathy provoked by alien Jewish attitudes and activities? Is such hostility inevitable wherever Jews are in the minority?

### THINGS TO DO

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- Go to Google. Search for topics related to this period. Also, click on images for illustrations of Roman rulers. Try <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/Romans.html>
- Stay in Google. Type in 'Roman Judaea', 'Claudius Jews', 'Caligula Jews', etc. for information.
- Go to Amazon.com and look up books dealing with this period.
- Look for books on Amazon.com concerning the Sanhedrin at Jamnia.

### A TIPS FOR TEACHERS

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- Show maps from the *Judaism* book to illustrate the revolt of the Zealots.
- Read relevant sections of Josephus' writings to your class about the Jewish revolt against Rome. (See Google for information.)
- Encourage students to read Robert Graves'

- I Claudius* which is a fictionalized account of Claudius' reign. Show them the video of *I Claudius*.
- Stage a debate about Jesus' relationship with the Zealot movement. One side should argue that Jesus was influenced by the Zealots in his reaction to Roman rule; the other side should maintain that his rejection of violence illustrates that he was not part of this rebellion.
  - Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to consider whether Jews will inevitably be subject to persecution if they constitute a minority group. Reconvene the class for a discussion. You should ask them to look up the views of early Zionists who considered this problem (see Chapter 47).