

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, Judaism Before Jesus,

Session 12, The Coming of Rome

© 2024 Tony Tomasino and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Anthony Tomasino and his teaching on Judaism before Jesus. This is session 12, The Coming of Rome.

So, we are at another turning point in the history of the Jews.

We are coming to the time of the Romans. So, when we last left our heroes, or we might say in this case our antiheroes, we were in the midst of a struggle for supremacy in Judea. Salome, who was on her deathbed, had named her son Heraclius II as her successor.

He was her elder son. He had been serving as high priest. But it seemed her younger son, whose name was Aristobulus II, he had ideas of his own.

And so, he invaded Jerusalem, laid siege to the temple, and eventually worked out a deal with Heraclius. Now, Heraclius was not an ambitious person. He really wasn't.

He was much more of a phlegmatic kind of personality. Aristobulus was much more of the aggressive fellow. But when Heraclius was presented with a deal, a proposal that would allow him to retire and to get a nice little pension that he could live off of for the rest of his life, he kind of thought of that as a deal that he couldn't refuse.

And so he abdicated the throne and the high priesthood. Comes with a package deal. And he retired to the land of Idumea.

Why Idumea? Well, to get him out of Judea, for one thing, where he was not going to be any kind of a lightning rod for any kind of resistance against Aristobulus. And he thought he could live a nice, quiet little existence in Idumea. Now, it would have been a nice, quiet little existence except for the presence of a fellow by the name of Antipater, who was the governor of Idumea at that time.

He was a native. He was an Idumean. So, this means he was of that line of people who had been forced to convert during the days of John Hercules, probably not him personally, but very likely his father, you know.

So, he was a convert to Judaism. He was not well regarded as being a convert to Judaism, but he was a very wealthy man, and he was a fairly powerful man. He was also a very, very crafty man.

He saw the arrival of Heraclius II as an opportunity to enrich himself by taking this fellow under his wing. The first thing he needs to persuade him of is the fact that his life is in danger. You know, seriously, I mean, do you really think that Aristobulus is going to let you live? You're a threat to him, man.

You know, you could undermine his power. You could take away his position. He is not going to leave you safe and sound here.

If I were you, I'd be watching every shadow. I'd be watching all around the corners because you never know where an assassin might be lurking. There's probably some truth to what Antipater was saying at this point.

You know, Aristobulus was a very ambitious person, and Heraclius was a threat to his authority. So, Heraclius decides, well, gee, what am I going to do? And Antipater says, well, we've got to get you back installed as the leader of the Jews and get Aristobulus out of there. So, Antipater bankrolls Heraclius to hire some mercenaries.

And these mercenaries are going to reinstall Heraclius back on the throne. Back on the throne of Jerusalem. So, Heraclius marches to Jerusalem with his troops.

They lay siege to the temple where Aristobulus is held up. And both brothers eventually realize that he's not going to be able to break through the walls with this little troop of force that he has at his disposal. It's then that they receive the news that Rome has arrived in the east.

See, Pompey, the Roman general, had originally come to the east in order to settle some affairs in the province of Pontus, which is up in the northern areas around Asia Minor. And up there, he's going to try to put down the potential of rebellion and add this as a province to the Roman powers. And while he's there, he decides that he is going to deal with the remnants of the Seleucid Empire as well, which at this point could hardly be called an empire at all.

The Seleucids were tearing each other apart. They were fighting over who was going to be the leader, who was the successor, who was legitimate, who was not legitimate. And Rome saw the problems in Syria as a potential threat to their business interests.

And I say, Rome really never did anything in this era without a good reason. They were extremely practical people. And they saw Syria as a potential threat to easy trade.

They saw the possibility that Syria might be invaded by Parthia. And Rome was afraid of Parthia. Parthia was big.

Parthia was strong. Parthia had clashes with them before. If Parthia were to come in and conquer Syria, then that could mean some trouble for Rome in the east.

So, they decided that it was time to add the Syrians, the Syrian empire, Seleucid empire to their realm as well. So here they are. Pompey is in the city of Damascus in Syria.

And he's trying to take care of the matters there. Heraclius and Aristobulus decide to take it upon themselves to appeal to Rome for some help in solving their little problem of succession. Both of them thought that they had the better claim.

Aristobulus, basically because of his own personality and his own powers of persuasion and so on, and Heraclius because he had actually been named the successor. So they both send their envoys to Pompey. What happens there? Well, we'll take a moment here to talk about where Rome came from in this whole thing and what Pompey was doing here.

The city of Rome was founded about 625 BC, according to everything we can tell. There are a number of different legends that circulate about why Rome was founded and how it was founded. Probably the most famous one is the idea that there were these two brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were the sons of Mars and Nymph.

The story says that they were nursed by a she-wolf, so there's a kind of famous statue with these two little boys nursing at this she-wolf. But at any rate, the idea that Rome had these divine origins was nothing unique at all. Pretty much every city claimed some kind of divine origins in those days.

But for about more than a century, really, Rome was elected by the king and was ruled by elected kings. That's kind of almost like a sort of contradiction of terms when you think about it. You know, kings usually aren't elected.

Kings are usually born into the role, but not in the case of Rome. They had their kings elected from the ruling noble class. So, in 500 BC, they changed their government form and they became a republic.

And the republic was led by senators who were also elected for their place. Again, all the nobles got the chance to vote for who they wanted to be their senators. But the form of government that they settled on seems to us in ways very enlightened compared to governments that were run by some tyrant or despot of some sort or other or by a priest of some sort.

But rather, they've got this group of people who get together and democratically make their decisions about what they're going to do. Well, what they were going to

do is expand. Soon, they found that their city of Rome was not big enough to contain their needs or their ambitions.

And so, they began to go out and have conquest and negotiation with other cities there in Italy. All through the Italian peninsula, they had this policy where once they would conquer somebody or perhaps negotiate with them, the cities that they conquered would be actually granted citizenship in Rome. So, let's say you're in a city several hundred miles away from Rome, but you would have all the privileges of a citizen who lives within the city of Rome itself.

So, you can get your votes, you can get public funds, and all these wonderful things. There is so much of a sense of camaraderie built among these Italian cities that a little bit later when, a fellow by the name of Hannibal, who was from Carthage, decided that he was going to march against Rome after a number of conflicts between them, he tried to get some of these Italian cities to join him in rebellion. And they all refused.

Not because they were afraid of Rome so much but because they liked the benefits of being part of Rome's empire at that point. Anyway, this is how things kind of continued until 210 BC. In 210 BC, Rome had to annex the city of the island of Sicily because it was being used as a base for invasions and so on.

So, they decided they wanted to take Sicily. But when they got to this point, they decided that they could not extend to Sicily the same kind of rights that they were giving to the cities in the Italian peninsula for a number of different reasons that were involved with that. But one of the main reasons was because they just didn't feel like it had the same levels of sophistication and so on.

So instead, what they did was they named the island of Sicily to be a province. And this became the first province of the Roman Empire. And as a province, they were governed by a military kind of leadership and didn't have the same kind of rights as citizens of Rome would have and had to pay taxes to Rome.

It didn't really feel nice to be part of a province for the most part. But on the other hand, the Romans did offer protection. They offered some order.

And if there were local troubles of various sorts, like the kinds of things that were going on with the various factions in the Seleucid Empire, the Romans would come and sort it out. And when the Romans came and sorted things out, they stayed sorted out. So, let's talk about Pompey here for a minute.

So, in the later Republic, the provinces are mainly administrated by generals. They serve as a kind of defensive frontier for the Roman Empire. And so, Pompey was sent to the east in order to add Pontus to the control of the Romans.

And he also made this decision that it would be in his best interests and the best interests of Rome to bring Syria under control as well. And so, it's while they're there dealing with Syria that these emissaries arrive from Judea and say, hey, we would like you to sort out some problems for us. We're having a little bit of a friendly disagreement between brothers here.

Now, the Jews actually had a little bit of history with Rome, and not much history, but a little bit of history. Judah had first made formal overtures to Rome in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. And there was this kind of mythology that they had developed that said that the Jews and the Romans were kind of distant cousins of one another.

So that was sort of their appeal. They had gotten this letter back, which is recorded in—I believe it's in Books of the Maccabees—which talks about how they would have this covenant of brotherhood with the Romans, as far as we can tell, that never really paid them any dividends whatsoever. It was just more of a formal document.

That was it. So Pompey arrives in Syria. Hyrcanus and Aristobulus both appeal to him.

They say, hey, you know, we're your allies. We want you to sort this thing out. And I'm sure Pompey said, who? What? But anyway, so they look it over.

And sure enough, Pompey says, OK, I'll tell you what we're going to do. He says I've really got to figure things out and straighten things out here in Syria. So, both of you guys just sit tight.

And eventually, I'm going to figure this all out. Well, Aristobulus gets cold feet. He thinks that things are not going the way that he expected them to go.

And so, he immediately takes off back to Jerusalem and begins to fortify the city, just in case it appears that the Romans are going to try to take it from him. Well, Pompey's response is pretty much as you would expect. Pompey said, well, Syria can wait.

I want to deal with this little nasty upstart here first. So, he immediately goes to Jerusalem and lays siege to the city. Three months it takes him to besiege the city in order to gain entry into Jerusalem.

He breached the gates of the temple on the Day of Atonement in 63 BC. According to Josephus's accounts, the priests refused to leave their prayers and refused to turn away from performing their sacrifices.

And Pompey's troops cut them down at the altars. Furthermore, Pompey insisted on entering the Holy of Holies itself. You know, this is kind of like the sort of thing that gets you struck by lightning bolts in the Old Testament.

But he goes into the Holy of Holies because he has heard a little bit of stories about this kind of thing. And he wanted to see what was really there. His report was nothing.

But that didn't stop the rumors from flying, of course, about the donkey's head and all these kinds of things. He restored Heraclitus to the high priesthood. And he actually offered sacrifices there in the temple for the Lord God as a way of showing his honor to the religion of the Jews.

So, he wasn't all bad. On the other hand, the Dead Sea Scrolls, that text I mentioned earlier, 4QMMT, states very explicitly that the Jews should refuse any sacrifices from Gentiles because they're simply sacrificing to demons. But anyway, what happened to Aristobulus and his sons? Well, they get taken to Rome as captives.

And hereby hangs a tale because, apparently, Roman prisons leaked like Sims for some strange reason. Maybe it was just like low security prisons. Or maybe there were a lot of people there who were very easily bribed.

But it seems like keeping Aristobulus and his sons locked up was next to impossible. Anyway, so after Heraclitus is installed as high priest, well, we've got some issues here that we are going to have to deal with according to the Romans. After he enters the city, he has to deal with, as I say, the settling of the events here.

But he leaves in charge a fellow by the name of Gabinius. Gabinius is one of his officers. Gabinius is an interesting fellow.

We actually know quite a bit about this guy. He had a very long and storied career and had a lot of hands in various aspects of Roman politics. And it's kind of funky.

We don't hear about him very much. But Gabinius, I'm pretty sure that's the lawn mowing guys. Let me check out.

OK. Are we OK? OK. So, let's see here. Let's find out where I am in my notes here.

So, after Aristobulus was taken to Rome and after Heraclitus was placed in the position of high priest, the Romans determined that his civil authority should be curtailed. And so, Rome put Jerusalem pretty much under the administration of Gabinius, who was this very able politician for a while. But Heraclitus had the responsibility of making sure the taxes were paid and the usual things that the high priest had to do.

But as far as the administration of the armies and that kind of thing, well, the Romans decided to take control of that themselves. Antipater took advantage of the situation. Antipater continued to manipulate Heraclitus.

And the Romans recognized Antipater as being a rather able politician himself. And so, he was managing to make a spot for himself. One of the things that were done now is Judea was forced to release some of their Greek-inhabited territories, territories that had been conquered by Aristobulus and Alexander Junius.

Now, what happened here once these cities were released from Jewish control is that the Jews living in those places were now *persona non grata*. And so many of them returned to Jerusalem and a kind of a, well, you wouldn't call it a suburb, but a settlement grew around Jerusalem, which swelled the population and really taxed the resources of Jerusalem at this point. So, the crowd of refugees, the Romans required the taxes to be increased now because you need to pay for your Roman privileges, the privileges of being controlled and being protected by the Romans, we shall say.

You might imagine that this does not sit very well with the people of Judea at this point. So, let's talk a little bit about Heraclitus and what happens here. As we say, even though he is the high priest and we might say the titular authority in Jerusalem, Antipater, and the Romans are really the ones who are calling the shots at this point.

So, Antipater, power behind the throne. We're going to have a number of struggles here now for who is actually going to control Jerusalem. As I mentioned, the Roman, let me see, what am I saying? The Roman prisons seem to leak a lot.

Alexander, the son of Aristobulus II, escaped in 57 BC from Rome, and he seized several fortresses throughout the land of Judea. He managed to set himself up very well in those places. A revolt breaks out in Jerusalem itself, as there is a party that favors having Alexander as the high priest and leader, and Gabinius, the Roman general, is forced to put down this revolt. Well, he accuses Heraclitus of being essentially incompetent and because Heraclitus is incompetent, he decides that Heraclitus still actually has too much power.

So, Gabinius rescues him and he then proceeds to do a kind of a reformation of the Judean lands and province. He, we sometimes call these reforms of Gabinius, but Gabinius was actually in charge of reforming several policies around the Roman Empire. But some of the things he did, he sends Alexander back to Rome after he gets him out of Jerusalem.

He allows Heraclitus to remain the high priest. At this point, he's completely stripped of civil power. And Judea is broken up into five administrative districts.

Each one is given a council to act as its legislator, and each one is selected from the people, from the noble people of the Jews. We have another jailbreak. So, after the nation has been kind of reorganized here by Gabinius, we have yet another son Aristobulus himself this time and his son Antigonus, who escaped from Rome, and they now again return to Judea.

They raise an army and they attempt to take Jerusalem once again. Gabinius once again has to put down the rebellion and Aristobulus gets sent back to Rome. But interestingly enough, Antigonus is allowed to remain in Judea.

Why, pray tell, is Antigonus allowed to remain in Judea? Well, apparently his mother, Antigonus' mother, begged and pleaded for Gabinius to allow him to remain because, you know, a mother shouldn't be without her son. I don't know what exactly she said. Apparently, this woman had remarkable powers of persuasion because the Romans agreed to Antigonus to remain in Judea.

A year later, Alexander raises yet another army. Once again, this revolt too is crushed by the Romans. So over and over again, throughout this period, we see a continued struggle for who's going to control Jerusalem.

We've got Hyrcanus, who's the high priest. We've got Antipater, who's kind of the power behind the priest. We've got the Romans, who are trying to keep things in order as best they can.

And then we've got Aristobulus and his sons, who keep making all kinds of trouble. Now, the Romans, part of the reason why they can't deal with this problem in Judea decisively is because they're having some problems of their own. The Roman Civil Wars at this time.

In the provinces, we have these various generals who are each vying for power and to increase their own territories and holdings. Territories meant money, and these people were becoming very wealthy by doing these kinds of campaigns that they were doing in the provinces. They also had a problem with the Roman Senate.

The Roman Senate did not trust the generals, in part because the generals were untrustworthy, but they had had some problems in the past with troops being brought into Rome and attempted coups by the Roman generals. The Senate wanted to keep the generals far away with their armies, as much as they could. The generals are starting to form these unions, if you will, the triumvirates, as we call them, in order to increase their own power, but also to keep from tripping over each other.

It's like each one says, okay, we'll stay in our territory, you stay in your territory, and we can help each other as need be. The first triumvirate consisted of Pompey, of

course we know him well by now, a fellow by the name of Julius Caesar, we'll be hearing more about him later, and a fellow by the name of Crassus. These three generals formed this alliance, the first triumvirate.

When Crassus died in 53 BC, the first triumvirate kind of dissolved. War broke out between Caesar and Pompey in 49 BC. As we said, each one of these men is very ambitious; each one is trying to increase his own holdings, and in increasing their own holdings, they're getting in each other's way, and that results in these battles and wars between the generals.

When the generals in the provinces are fighting one another, everybody suffers. In part, and one of the themes that we're going to be seeing throughout this whole period, these generals need funds in order to equip their armies to be able to fight against one another. Where are they getting those funds? They're getting them from taxation by raising the taxes on the people in the provinces. Judea was initially forced to support Pompey.

Of course, Pompey had been the guy who had been the fellow that had been in the east already, sort of like the devil, you know kind of thing, but eventually Pompey was assassinated, and this kind of freed Judea from the grasp of Pompey, and they sort of now felt the need to ingratiate themselves to Julius Caesar. They were afraid actually that they were going to be punished by Julius Caesar, but that was not the case, because it would not have been in Julius Caesar's best interest to punish the Jews. In fact, they're thinking they were doing precisely what they should have done as the people who were part of the Roman Empire.

You support the general who is over your realm. So, what's going on in Judea at this time? Plenty is going on in Judea at this time. Julius Caesar decides he's going to have to travel to Egypt to intervene in a civil war.

What civil war are we talking about here? We are talking about a brother and a sister who have gone to war over who is going to rule Egypt. This brother and sister also happen to be husband and wife, by the way, because this is how far things have gone in Ptolemaic Egypt. Essentially, like the ancient pharaohs of old, where the pharaoh would often typically marry his sister because they wanted to keep the bloodlines pure, the Ptolemies have adopted that same practice.

Now, in this case, the brother and sister happen to hate each other. So, we've got the Ptolemy, we've got Cleopatra VII, and each one of them wants to be the king or the ruler, and each one of them is trying to kill the other. Well, civil war in Egypt does not do well for Rome's interests because they depend upon Egypt for food to serve the needs of the empire.

So, Julius Caesar goes, he's going to try to put down Cleopatra and to assure that Ptolemy remains on the throne. So, he's waiting in an ante room for his audience with Ptolemy when a couple of people come marching in carrying this big rug. They unroll the rug in front of him, and what should be inside this rug but Cleopatra? So, Cleopatra presents herself before Julius Caesar, and immediately he is struck by her beauty, falls in love with her.

When Ptolemy shows up for his meeting with Julius Caesar, with the great general, he sees that he has been trumped in a way that he could not possibly hope to trump. So, Ptolemy is then locked up, and Caesar is planning on making Cleopatra the ruler of Egypt. Well, for the people in Egypt, this was not acceptable because they still preferred Ptolemy for the most part.

And so, the people in Alexandria rose up and laid siege to the palace. Caesar is trapped inside the palace, and at this point, his troops are insufficient to extricate him from the problem here. Well, Antipater sees an opportunity.

And so, he brings the Jewish troops, and he brings a bunch of mercenaries from Nabatea and other areas, and they march down to Egypt, which is a fairly easy march for them, and they proceed to extricate Caesar from the palace where he is trapped. As a favor for their assistance, Julius Caesar names Antipater to be the procurator of Judea. Heraclius gets another title.

He is called the Ethnarch. Now, what are the differences between these titles? We really don't know, because the fact is they seem to change significance quite a bit from time to time. So, it's kind of difficult to keep them all straight, but procurators seem to have been more of a military title, whereas Ethnarchs seem to have been more of a civil title.

At least at this point, we can say that. Furthermore, this was a very, very important point. Well, yeah, furthermore, Antipater's sons, Phasaël and a fellow by the name of Herod are made governors, and we're going to talk more about Governor Herod and, of course, a lot more about Governor Herod.

They are named governors. Herod is given the region of Galilee to be his region, but Herod immediately causes trouble, because once he's named as the governor of Galilee, there is a riot that breaks out there in Galilee. Well, Herod puts down the riot with a great deal of ruthlessness, and a whole bunch of Galileans are killed.

So many so that the Jewish Sanhedrin felt that he had gone overboard, and they decided to teach this young man a lesson. So, they called him to appear before the Sanhedrin to answer for his actions of having killed these Galileans. Well, Herod agreed to appear before the Sanhedrin, and he came marching in with his army, intent on killing the entire Sanhedrin.

Antipater, fortunately, was able to rein him in and told him, no, son, you don't do that. We are going to play this nice and simple and easy. Then he went to the Sanhedrin and persuaded them Sanhedrin to not press any kind of charges against Herod and rather just overlook the whole incident and go back home again, which the Sanhedrin grudgingly agreed to do.

Herod, right from the very first get-go, shows the kind of man he's going to be: a man of great passion and a man of great ambition and a man who does not take insults lightly. Okay, now here's a point I really want to point out here is one of the favors that Julius Caesar granted to the people of Judea, knowing, of course, a little bit about their history by this point, knowing about the way that Antiochus Epiphanes had attempted to force them to convert to Hellenism and to Greek religion. Julius Caesar passed a law that made Judaism a protected religion in the Roman Empire.

This meant that Jews could not be forced to convert. They could not be forced to worship the emperor. See, at this point, the royal cult of Rome was spreading throughout most of the provinces.

It was viewed as being a sign of your dedication, of your willingness to be a team player, to set up an altar to Caesar as the spirit of Rome in the middle of your cities and then to make sacrifices to Caesar. Well, the Jews were exempted from that requirement. Rather, what they were required to do is to offer a daily sacrifice to the Lord for the benefit of the emperor.

And they continued to do this all the way up until the time of the Great Revolt when they cut off that offering. But at any rate, the fact that Judaism is now a protected religion would come in handy a little bit later when the Jews were finding themselves getting embroiled in issues with people like Caligula and Nero, who really took their own press releases seriously and thought that they actually were gods. And we've talked about Philo of Alexandria quite a bit.

Philo had to go to Caligula when Caligula had insisted that a statue of himself be placed in the temple in Jerusalem. And he had presented his arguments and, you know, we're a protected religion. Man, you can't do this to us.

Eventually, Caligula, it was kind of like this bizarre sort of twilight zone kind of thing because Caligula takes them and shows them all around Rome and he says, look at all these wonderful things I've done. Look at these beautiful things I've built. And then finally he tells them, if you Jews can't believe that I'm really a god, I guess you're just crazy.

So, there's nothing I can do with you. Go back home. Anyway, 44 BC, the assassination of Julius Caesar.

Well, when Julius Caesar is out of the way, we have Cassius and Mark Antony, two other generals who are now fighting for control basically of the Roman Empire. Not, well, that's not the empire yet, the Roman Republic. They're fighting not only over control of the provinces but also for control of Rome itself.

And, you know, this is what happens when we were probably familiar with the story of Julius Caesar being stabbed to death by all the members of the Senate. It's because these people were becoming too powerful, and the Senate saw them as a threat. And so Julius Caesar had to be put out of the way really because of his great popularity and because the fact that they were afraid that he was going to become an emperor, and the Senate did not want that.

Now, Cassius and Mark Antony, now they're the ones who are playing their hands to see which one of them can become the most powerful man in the Roman Republic. At 43 BC, Cassius is defeated by Mark Antony. And at that time, the Jews were being forced to support Cassius up to this point.

And now they're, once again, fearful. What is this going to mean for us? Because we supported the enemy of Mark Antony. Well, Mark Antony again says, hey, you're doing what you're supposed to do.

I'm not going to punish you for that. So, the Jews found themselves, once again, coming out on the really not as bad as things could have been at this point. So, this is 43 BC.

43 BC is going to be another significant year for events in Judea because in 43 BC, Antipater, the father of Herod, is poisoned to death. And Herod, of course, could not prove who had done it. But that didn't matter because Herod had his suspicions.

And so, Herod had the assassins assassinated. And he was called again before the Roman governor for this. And the Roman governor said that's what I would have done.

So, he was not in any way punished because of that. But his own power, of course, begins to grow because of this incident. Mark Antony defeats Cassius, takes over Syria-Palestine in about 42 BC.

And once again, because of all these campaigns, because of the amount of money he has used trying to build his empire and win over Cassius, Mark Antony is broke. And so, Mark Antony has to raise the taxes once again. This does not make the Jews happy at all.

Something else is going on here, and another reason why he has to raise the taxes is because he's gotten himself entangled with that lady Cleopatra. And there's this wonderful story about when Antony first defeats Cassius, that Cleopatra knows she needs to win over the new lord of the east. And so, she decided to put on this incredibly lavish display of wealth.

She had a barge plated with gold, sails with gold threads through them, and herself dressed up as the goddess Aphrodite.

She had a bunch of scantily clad nymphs before her. This ship went to meet Mark Antony. And as he sees the ship coming ashore, gleaming in the sun, you know, there are probably two thoughts going through his mind.

Both of them have to do with lust, you know. But one is, man, oh man, look at the money. And the other is, I want this lady.

Mark Antony was kind of a common man sort of guy. He was from the lower classes. He wasn't one of these highfalutin kind of Roman guys.

He worked his way up through the ranks. The idea of having this woman who had been the lover of Julius Caesar as his own lover was just too good for him to imagine. What he discovered, though, was that Cleopatra had pretty much nearly emptied the banks in order to do this massive display of hers.

Now, Mark Antony found himself trying to raise money to continue supporting Cleopatra in the lifestyle that she was accustomed to. Once again, Antigonus, son of Aristobulus II, is still running around Judea. He decides to make an alliance with the Parthians.

And essentially, what they do is the Parthians are going to provide him with the troops that he needs to conquer Jerusalem and take Jerusalem away from the Romans. And the Parthians think anything that gives Rome a black eye is a good thing, for one thing. And that's probably part of it.

Another part of it is he's offered them a lot of money. And money talks. And so, he has this Parthian group of mercenaries, this Parthian army that comes down and accompanies him to Jerusalem.

While Antony is away in Egypt, whining and dining Cleopatra, the Parthians overrun Palestine. And they invade Judea in 40 BC. Hyrcanus is deposed as a high priest.

And they cut his ears off. Why would they cut his ears off? Because anybody with physical defects of this sort was not permitted to serve as a high priest. The idea was that you had to be without any kind of blemish.

So, by cutting his ears off, they made it clear that Hyrcanus would never be high priest again. Phasaël, which is the other son of Antipater, he was the governor of Jerusalem at this time. He's captured.

He manages to get a message to Herod, telling Herod that he needs to flee because of the invasion of these Parthians. Phasaël himself commits suicide. He throws himself onto the ground and bashes his head on the rock.

And thereby he escapes from being tortured by the Parthians. Herod makes his way out of Judea. And he decides to make his way to Egypt, where he's going to try to meet with Mark Antony and try to call in some debts and maybe see if he can raise some money so he can get himself back up to Judea and get his country back.

But Antigonus reigns now as king and high priest of Judea. And his reign is going to last for three years, from 40 to 37 BC. Now, we can't really say that the reign of the Hasmoneans is over, but we can see that it's coming close to its end, right? Antigonus is the son of Aristobulus.

Aristobulus is of that lineage. Antigonus, some people have said he is the last of the Hasmonean rulers. That's not quite accurate.

Because one of Herod's grandsons is going to become ruler. And Herod himself is not a Hasmonean, but his wife was. So, through the Hasmonean line, a little bit later on, one of Herod's descendants is going to become king over this region yet again.

And then still following him, his son is also going to be given a rather significant area over which to rule. So, this isn't quite the end of the story of the Hasmoneans, but we're getting close. Let's talk about those Hasmoneans.

Were they really heroes or were they not heroes? And this is something which has been debated, actually, for a very long time. Because the Jews, for many, many ages, did not like these guys and tended to vilify them. Even though we have, of course, the Hanukkah and all that kind of thing.

The later rulers of the Hasmoneans were generally regarded poorly by the Jews. Even today, the opinions vary widely. Some scholars claim they saved Judaism.

I remember reading this quote in one of the histories a while back. It said that the Hasmoneans literally saved Judaism from extinction. That's how they worded it.

And I saw those words and my jaw dropped. I was like, wait a minute. There were only Jews in Jerusalem? Excuse me? No, there were Jews all over the place.

There were Jews in Parthia. There were Jews in Egypt. There were Jews over in Greece.

You weren't saving Judaism. You were saving a specific brand of Judaism that existed there in Jerusalem. And that, at least, we can give them some credit for.

Yes, they saved the Jews in Jerusalem from being persecuted and being forced to abandon their religion. And the fact, of course, that Jerusalem was considered such a central city and such an important place for Judaism, that is saying a lot. Could somebody else have done it? Maybe.

But the fact is, nobody else did do it. It was the Hasmoneans who did it. They did fight to preserve their traditions.

But on the other hand, they also sacrificed some very cherished traditions in that whole process. For instance, the sanctity of the Sabbath day. Like right at the very beginning of the revolt, they decided, eh, the Sabbath day, sabbash mabbeth.

If you attack us, we're fighting. You know? The Zadokite succession of priests. For ages untold, every high priest in Jerusalem had been a descendant of Zadok.

And now they abandon that tradition and install themselves as high priests and kind of thumb their nose at a tradition which really had its roots in the Bible itself. And where God had pronounced that he had a covenant of peace with the line and family of Zadok. Even more egregious, they abandoned the Davidic line of kingship.

The Bible says that God had promised to David that he would have a perpetual line of kings and that that line would never die. And yet the Hasmoneans in the time of Aristobulus on had abandoned that tradition by claiming for themselves the title of king. Interesting things about these Hasmoneans who were so opposed to the Greek culture.

Each one of them took Greek names. They adopted many Greek trappings of power. They treated their enemies in very similar ways to the ways that the Greeks would have treated their enemies.

And as I read the story of the Hasmoneans and of their later years in particular, I'm reminded of the lines from a rather famous book. The book titled Animal Farm. If you've ever read that book, you know the story here that the animals take over the farm and they start off with these high principles of all animals are created equal.

After a while, as the pigs start to assert their power and dominance, they come to the point where they say, well, all animals are created equal, but some animals are more equal than others. At the very end of the book, the pigs sell off the other

animals from the farm to the humans. The pigs sit down, dine with the humans, and enjoy a drink with them.

And it says that the animals that remained in the farm looked through the windows. And it says the creatures outside looked from pig to man and from man to pig and from pig to man again. But already it was impossible to say which was which.

I think that's what happens with the Hasmoneans as well. And isn't it kind of ironic that a pig would be the animal that could provide us an analogy for the transformation of the Hasmoneans as they become much more comfortable in that world of Hellenism and the political intrigues of the Seleucid Empire.

This is Dr. Anthony Tomasino in his teaching on Judaism before Jesus. This is session 12, The Coming of Rome.