

JOSEPHUS ON THE BURNING OF THE TEMPLE, THE FLAVIAN TRIUMPH  
AND THE FALL OF ROME

Paul Spilsbury

**Introduction**

Josephus is frequently accused of being a shameless opportunist whose talent for self-preservation was matched only by his vainglory and his treachery. His remarkable escape from death after the fall of Jotapata is only the most famous example of his ability to squeeze personal advantage out of the rock of calamity (*War* 3.351–354). Indeed, there are numerous other passages in both the *War* and the *Life* in which he records an array of schemes, frequently including cruelty and deception, to extract himself from difficulties of various kinds. Further, in the closing scenes of his *Jewish War*, completed under Flavianic patronage, there are two additional incidents that seem to confirm beyond reasonable doubt all the charges laid against him by modern historians. The first is his apparently sycophantic description of Titus' unwillingness to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem (*War* 6.236–266), and the second is his heartless description of the parade of Jewish captives and sacred objects during the ostentatious triumph of Vespasian and Titus in Rome at the conclusion of the war (*War* 7.123–162). In both of these sequences Josephus appears as little more than a Flavian puppet, a mere mouthpiece for the kind of official propaganda that the new imperial house required to establish its prestige and legitimacy in the eyes of a wary public.

This impression raises questions about the status of Josephus' relationship in later life with the people and values of his youth. Did his services for the Flavian house signal a profound apostasy from the traditions of his fathers, or do we find in Josephus a more complex example of the compromises and accommodations so often the portion of those whose misfortune it is to live

under the yoke of empire?

### **Titus and the Burning of the Temple**

The *Jewish War*'s description of the events surrounding the fateful burning of the Temple is notorious for its disingenuousness.<sup>1</sup> Josephus reports that on the night before the event itself Titus held a council of war in which he argued against the advice of most of those present that the Temple should be spared. In the actual event, though, the temple was burned to the ground after an unruly soldier, "moved by some supernatural impulse," (*War* 6.252) threw a firebrand into the sanctuary. Titus' personal efforts to extinguish the fire, we are told, were thwarted by the recalcitrance of his men (*War* 6.260). The majority of modern historians find this account of events implausible.<sup>2</sup> G. Alon states unambiguously that "we cannot avoid the almost certain conclusion that *the Temple was put to the torch at Titus' behest.*"<sup>3</sup> His argument is based on: (1) comparison with other sources, most notably Sulpicius Severus' *Chronica*, perhaps derived from Tacitus' lost *Histories*, which attributes the decision to burn the Temple to Titus himself;<sup>4</sup> (2) examination of the events immediately preceding and following the burning of the Temple, which indicate that it was always part of the Roman intention;<sup>5</sup> and (3) indications in other parts of Josephus' works where he seems to betray that he knew Titus was to blame for the burning of the Temple (e.g. *War* 7.1; *Ant* 20.250).<sup>6</sup> Alon's conclusion is that Josephus distorted the truth and

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<sup>1</sup>Price 1992 refers to some of the details of Josephus' story as absurd (170–171).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Alon 1977, 252–268; Barclay 1996, 353–354; Goodman 1987, 238; Jones 1984, 54–55; Montefiore 1962; Price 1992, 170–171; Weiler 1968; Yavetz 1975. A notable exception is Schürer 1973, 1:506–507.

<sup>3</sup>Alon 1977, 253. Emphasis original.

<sup>4</sup>On Sulpicius Severus' account, see Bernays 1885 and Montefiore 1962.

<sup>5</sup>Most notable are the facts that Titus executed all the priests (*War* 6.322), gave permission for the sack of the city (*War* 353), and did not punish soldiers who killed the inhabitants of Jerusalem indiscriminately (*War* 6.404). Three years later Vespasian ordered the destruction of Temple of Onias in Egypt (*War* 7.421).

<sup>6</sup>*War* 7.1 indicates that Titus gave orders for "the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground." in *Ant* 20.250 Josephus states plainly that "Titus captured and set fire to the temple

“adjusted” his history to meet “the demands of his benefactors.”<sup>7</sup>

H. Montefiore followed I.M.J. Valeton<sup>8</sup> in the suggestion that Titus ordered that the Temple should be spared while knowing full well that it would not be. In this way, so it is argued, Titus cunningly achieved the double purpose of appearing to be clement while at the same time carrying out the requisite military objective, namely the destruction of this strategic centre of Jewish resistance. According to this theory, then, Josephus’ picture of the council was formally accurate, but “misleading in impression.”<sup>9</sup> Z. Yavetz, has argued that Josephus’ account of the burning of the Temple must be seen within his general tendency to portray Titus in a positive light.<sup>10</sup> Josephus emphasized three major qualities of Titus: political astuteness and diplomatic skill (*War* 4.32, 498), organizational talent and distinction in military operations (*War* 5.52, 53, 61; 3.485–503; 4.70, 112–120).<sup>11</sup> Josephus did not hide Titus’ ruthlessness, but in general hoped to present him as a “true Roman who would punish rebels without pity but would do his utmost to spare the peace-loving population.”<sup>12</sup> Most of all, Josephus tried to depict Titus as τὸ φιλόνηρον φύσει (*War* 6.324, 357). It is surely more than coincidence that in the late 70s in Rome (when Josephus must have been finalizing his work on the *Jewish War*)<sup>13</sup> Titus was trying to rehabilitate his own image “from obedient but dissolute son to pious and responsible successor.”<sup>14</sup> Suetonius states

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and the city.”

<sup>7</sup>Alon 1977, 253.

<sup>8</sup>Valeton 1899, 94.

<sup>9</sup>Montefiore 1962, 162. Sulpicius Severus’s account is seen to have the opposite effect. It was formally incorrect, but more accurate with regard to Titus’ actual intention.

<sup>10</sup>Josephus’ depiction of Titus is in marked contrast to the views expressed in the Talmud and Midrashim where the verdict is “unanimously negative” (Yavetz 1975, 413).

<sup>11</sup>Yavetz 1975, 414.

<sup>12</sup>Yavetz 1974, 418.

<sup>13</sup>On the date of publication for the *War*, see Schürer 1973, 1:47–48.

<sup>14</sup>Griffin 2000, 48. On Titus’ poor public image in Rome before his accession see Yavetz

that Titus' murder of Aulus Caecina "incurred such odium at the time that hardly anyone ever came to the throne with so evil a reputation or so much against the desires of all" (*Titus* 6.2). Later he adds, "... people not only thought, but openly declared, that he would be a second Nero" (*Titus* 7.1). Opportunities to establish a reputation for generosity arose very soon after his accession to the throne in the form of the eruption of Vesuvius on 24<sup>th</sup> August 79 and in the fire and epidemic in Rome that followed in short order.<sup>15</sup> More than generosity, though, "the attribute that Titus most needed to acquire in the public eye was *clementia*."<sup>16</sup> Suetonius describes various measures taken by Titus to bolster his claim to clemency among the Roman elite (Suetonius, *Titus* 9.1; see also Dio LXVI 19.1–2).<sup>17</sup> Even outside the elite circles in Rome, Titus would probably have appreciated any effort to change his image into *clemens*. As Z. Yavetz has stated, "Josephus must have known the situation and as a faithful client understood the hint."<sup>18</sup> The implication is that Josephus' portrayal of Titus reflects the needs of Titus in Rome at the time the *War* was written, rather than the historical reality in Judea a decade earlier. Yavetz, however, is troubled by the observation that "history books were never a major means of propaganda." This leads him to the more dubious conclusion that Josephus "genuinely respected Titus and praised his benefactor on his own initiative."<sup>19</sup>

More recently B. Chilton has offered a different explanation for Josephus' praise of Titus. Josephus flattered both Vespasian and Titus, he suggests, with the hope that they would in due course allow the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and the reestablishment of a Jewish state

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1974, 427–430. On Titus' status and circumstances in Rome from 71, see Crook 1951, 164–172.

<sup>15</sup>On Titus' reputation for generosity, see Griffin 2000, 49–51.

<sup>16</sup>Griffin 2000, 51.

<sup>17</sup>Cf Griffin 2000, 51–52. While Suetonius was apparently satisfied with Titus' rehabilitation, Seneca was of the opinion that Titus' reputation for clemency was preserved primarily by his early death, *De Clementia* 1.9.

<sup>18</sup>Yavetz 1975, 430.

<sup>19</sup>Yavetz 1975, 431.

under the general leadership of the priestly aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> According to Chilton, Josephus “deliberately frames his narrative so as to convey the conviction that the Flavians desired to preserve the Temple, and that only an orderly priesthood could maintain it.”<sup>21</sup> Chilton imagines that Josephus hoped for an arrangement with the Flavians similar to the one the Romans had with the Hasmoneans. He adds, “Josephus openly imagines conditions under which sacrifice might be offered again in Jerusalem. It is for that reason that his own priesthood is crucial to him, and that Titus’s innocence in the cultic arson must be stressed.”<sup>22</sup> Be that as it may, we are still left with the impression that Josephus’ depiction of Titus’ action was governed in large measure by the dictates of self-interest rather than pure historical fact.

### **The Flavian Triumph**

The distaste one experiences when reading Josephus’ white-washing of Titus is only intensified when one reads his dispassionate description of the parading of the Jewish defeat in the triumph of Vespasian and Titus (*War* 7.132–157).<sup>23</sup> Perhaps it might be argued that Josephus did not want to introduce any note of censure into his description of this most important of Roman vanities.<sup>24</sup> After all he had already absolved Titus of blame for the firing of the Temple—it would hardly take a much greater effort to pass over in silence the parading of the Menorah, the table of shewbread and the golden trumpets through the streets of Rome. However, Josephus was in no way averse to expressing deep emotion at the tragedy of the war (e.g. *War* 1.9–12).<sup>25</sup> And so it remains a puzzle

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<sup>20</sup>Chilton 1992, 78. Chilton goes so far as to suggest that Josephus may have been “angling for actual appointment to the high priesthood” (77). On priestly aristocracy as Josephus’ ideal constitution, see Spilisbury 1998, 161–170.

<sup>21</sup>Chilton 1992, 77.

<sup>22</sup>Chilton 1992, 79.

<sup>23</sup>Rajak 1983, 218–221.

<sup>24</sup>On the Roman triumph, see Bergmann 1999; Brilliant 1999; Chapman 2001; Coleman 1999; Payne 1962.

<sup>25</sup>For an analysis and critique of Josephus’ emotional outbursts and their effects on his reliability as a historian, see Mader 2000, 2–5.

as to why Josephus did not indulge the kind of emotions we might have expected of a priest at the sight of the sacred objects being subjected to such indignities.<sup>26</sup>

Josephus would not have been unaware of the importance of the triumph to the people of Rome. This kind of spectacle “provided all Romans with the opportunity to affirm their cohesiveness and their superiority over ‘others’ through the agency of the triumphator.”<sup>27</sup> It is thus perhaps not entirely surprising that in the ‘presence’ of such glorified and ritualized aggression designed in large measure to emphasize the humiliation of the vanquished<sup>28</sup> our narrator should have found he was able only to give a neutral description of events. For the triumph was a kind of theatrical reenactment of the violence that destroyed Jerusalem. Moving platforms several storeys high wound their way through the streets of Rome displaying scenes from different stages of the campaign.<sup>29</sup> In many cases the actors were the vanquished themselves. And displayed along with the violence and subjugation were the *manubiae*—the spoils of war, including most dramatically, as we have already seen, the sacred items from the holy of holies itself. Indeed, H.H. Chapman has shown that by emphasizing the spectacle of the triumph Josephus was in effect drawing attention both to the grandeur of the temple and to the tragedy that had befallen the Jewish people and their city.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>On the profound significance for Jews of the time of the Menorah especially, see Goodenough 1953, 86, 158, 216; 1954, 71–98. Also Eltester, 1957; Haran and Strauss 1972; Wischnitzer 1969.

<sup>27</sup>Brilliant 1999, 222.

<sup>28</sup>Coleman 1999: “. . . humiliation of the conquered enemy was a prominent feature: prisoners of war and hostages were on show, and sometimes the relatives of the conquering king were displayed in chains like slaves . . . . So degrading were these processions that some defeated monarchs attempted modes of escape of varying degrees of desperation . . .” (239–240). See also Brilliant 1999, 227.

<sup>29</sup>On the *pegmata* used in the Flavian triumph, Brilliant 1999, 227.

<sup>30</sup>Chapman 2001. Rajak 1983, 219 suggests that Josephus ended his final book of the *War* not with the triumph, but with the story of Masada in an effort to bring some kind of balance to the final stages of his account. Chapman finds this suggestion unconvincing.

When Josephus came to describe these events several years after the fact he would have known full well that the triumph was but part of a much larger picture of Flavian propaganda. Vespasian and his sons needed to convince the Roman people of the legitimacy of their claim to imperial power.<sup>31</sup> The Jewish revolt supplied them with some of the political capital they needed. M. Goodman has argued that Flavianic “spin” emphasized the restoration of the *pax deorum* by the defeat of the Jews. The implication was that the Roman pantheon had been disturbed by the Jerusalem Temple and now “rejoiced in its destruction.”<sup>32</sup> By exaggerating the magnitude of the war they were able to highlight their own glorious victory as well. A great deal was made of the triumphal procession celebrating the victory over tiny Judea. New coins were struck bearing the legend *IUDAEA CAPTA*.<sup>33</sup> A series of victory arches with graphic reliefs and inscriptions trumpeted the Flavian victory over the Jews.<sup>34</sup> The *fiscus Iudaicus*, the tax imposed on all Jews throughout the empire, further emphasized their subjugation.<sup>35</sup> To add insult to injury, the Jews of Rome would then have witnessed how their former wealth was used not only on the rebuilding of the temple of Jupiter (Cassius Dio 66.7.2; cf. *War* 7.218), but as now also seems likely, on the construction of the Colosseum as well.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>On Flavian propaganda after the war, see Goodman 1987, 236–238.

<sup>32</sup>Goodman 1987, 237. When the temple was captured the troops offered sacrifice to their standards in the outer court (*War* 6.316) as a deliberate act of desecration (238).

<sup>33</sup>See Mattingly and Sydenham 1968, 68, 73–74, 127, 131 and Plate 2.29.

<sup>34</sup>See Dessau 1962, nos. 264 and 265. Also Brilliant 1999, 225–226; Colledge 2000, 970–971; Haran and Strauss 1972, 1363; Leon 1960, 29–30. Toynbee 1965, 55–56. On the significance of the various triumphal monuments erected by the Romans, Brilliant 1991 writes: “arches, columns, cuirassed and equestrian statues, narrative relief cycles, and paintings . . . proclaimed both the alleged *realia* and the symbolic truth of Roman victory and the vanity of the victors” (222).

<sup>35</sup>See Leon 1960, 31; Smallwood 1981, 375–378.

<sup>36</sup>Alföldy 1995; Feldman 2001.

All of this emphasized the defeated status of the Jews. The Flavians treated the former Jewish aristocracy with a hostility usually reserved for foreign enemies, not subjects of the empire.<sup>37</sup> ‘Normal’ Roman practice might have led Josephus and other Jews to hope for the restoration of the ruling class. Perhaps he expected the inclusion of the Jewish cult into the syncretistic cult of a Roman divinity. But neither of these expectations were realized, which leads one to wonder which suffered the greater blow—Josephus’ faith in God, or his faith in his own ability to get what he wanted.

### **Josephus and Providence of God**

If this had been the last we heard of Josephus we might have wondered where Josephus would have gone from here. How might we have imagined he would come to terms with his own experience of Roman power? That this is in fact not the last we hear from him should not desensitize us to how surprising it is that what he actually did was to set about writing not only the account of war we have already cited, but also the massive and unwieldy *Jewish Antiquities* in which he detailed at great length the 5000-year history of his people along with descriptions of many of their laws, institutions and traditional practices. Nor should we fail to note how remarkable it is that, rather than an obscure and comfortable retirement, Josephus opted instead to pen the combative *Against Apion* as further explanation and defence of Jewish history, beliefs, practices and national integrity. His *Life*, a self-serving and tendentious justification of his own dubious actions during the Galilean phase of the war, is perhaps more in line with what we might have expected, but here again we should not lose sight of the fact that this represents a very small percentage of his overall literary output.

Indeed, what we hear most clearly when we listen to Josephus’ later work is neither the shrill voice of strained self justification, nor the obsequious whines of an ancient Uriah Heep, but rather the confident and measured tones of an individual who apparently found a way to integrate the harsh realities of actual experience with the vagaries and ambiguities of faith. This point is seen nowhere more clearly than in the indications in the *Jewish Antiquities* that Josephus continued to

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<sup>37</sup>Goodman 1987, 235.



believe in God's providential oversight of the rise and fall of the great civilizations of the world, including Rome.<sup>38</sup> Josephus' most notorious statements on this subject, of course, occur when, in his role as spokesman for the Romans during the siege of Jerusalem, he counsels the rebels to lay down their arms and surrender. In the course of his oration Josephus states that, "God who went the round of the nations, bringing to each in turn the rod of empire (τὴν ἀρχήν), now rested over Italy." It is thus that he is able to say in the same context that Fortune (ἡ τύχη), that "unconditional, absolute, and predetermined divine favor,"<sup>39</sup> has passed over to the Romans (*War* 5.367). This argument on the lips of the one who later exonerates Titus for the burning of the Temple and revels in the pomp of the Roman triumph has earned Josephus the opprobrium of many over the centuries, but it is not his last word on the subject. When we turn to the *Antiquities* we find the same argument developed further, and with a surprising twist in the tail.

The idea of the rotation of empire from one nation to another is one which Josephus probably derived from the biblical Book of Daniel.<sup>40</sup> In his paraphrase of this book in the *Antiquities* Josephus pays special attention to the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great statue. As in the biblical story, the Babylonian king sees a statue made of different metals: the head is of gold, the shoulders and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze and the legs and feet of iron. And again in keeping with the biblical source, Josephus' Daniel interprets the different materials as successive kingdoms starting with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (*Ant* 10.208–209). This is followed by a power with "two kings," followed by "another king from the west," which in turn is followed by a fourth kingdom with "an iron nature." The implication in all of this is that Daniel's divinely-given foreknowledge of these kingdoms demonstrates God's providence in their rise and

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<sup>38</sup>I have written on this subject in a forthcoming article entitled "Flavius Josephus on the Rise and Fall of Rome."

<sup>39</sup>Cohen 1982, 373.

<sup>40</sup>On the importance of Daniel for Josephus' view of history, see Mason 1994, 190–191. On Daniel's wide-ranging influence in the first century, see Mason 1994, 165–167; Collins 1993, 90–112 (by A. Yarbro Collins).

fall.<sup>41</sup> As the biblical Daniel puts it: it is God who “deposes kings and sets up kings” (Dan 2:21; cf 4:17, 25). “No matter how indomitable the gentile kings may appear, they rule by divine pleasure and can be removed in an instant.”<sup>42</sup>

In yet another dream, this time given to Daniel himself, the prophet divines “what was to happen to his countrymen in the future after many generations” (*Ant* 10.269). From a vision of a many-horned ram and a goat flying out of the west Daniel is forewarned of the kingdoms of the Medes and Persians, represented by the ram, and the Macedonians with their first great king (Alexander), followed by four successors, who are in turn followed by the arch-enemy of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanes (*Ant* 10.270–276). All of this inspires Josephus’ famous reflection on the foolhardiness of the Epicureans who do not believe in divine control of history (*Ant* 10.277–280). The point is that God guides the course of human affairs and the rise and fall of nations happens by his design.

This general point is made also in relation to specific kings in the Daniel cycle. At one point, so the biblical story goes, Nebuchadnezzar lost his rational capacities and was forced to live as a wild animal for seven years (Dan 4). As in the Bible, so also in Josephus’ paraphrase, it is only “after praying to God that he might recover his kingdom” (*Ant* 10.217) that the king is restored to the throne. Nebuchadnezzar, Josephus tells us, “until the day of his death praised God as the possessor of all power and the guardian of men” (*Ant* 10.242). This piety was not displayed by the later king Belshazzar to whom the prophet Daniel reports that because he had grievously blasphemed the Deity by making menial use of the temple’s sacred vessels “God had become wrathful with him and was making known beforehand . . . to what end he must come” (*Ant* 10.243). The writing was (literally) on the wall for Belshazzar. As Josephus tells us, God had “numbered” the time of his life and reign; he had “weighed” the time of his kingship; and was about to “break up” his kingdom between the Medes and Persians (*Ant* 10.243–244). It is striking that it was precisely the treatment

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<sup>41</sup>This is the message of the Book of Daniel itself as well; see Mason 1994, 163.

<sup>42</sup>Mason 1994, 163.

of objects from the Temple which precipitated Belshazzar's demise. Did Josephus think something similar would happen to the Romans for the way they had dishonoured the sacred objects?

In other places Josephus speaks of God's providence in relation to Cyrus and Alexander. Of the former, Josephus writes that God stirred him up to declare, "Since the Most High God has appointed me king of the habitable world, I am persuaded that he is the god whom the Israelite nation worships, for he foretold my name through the prophets" (*Ant* 11.3). Josephus reveals that Cyrus had been reading the book of Isaiah written "two hundred and ten years earlier" (*Ant* 11.5). When Cyrus read the words of the prophet, so Josephus tells us, "He wondered at the divine power and was seized by a strong desire and ambition to do what had been written" (*Ant* 11.6). Later on, Alexander the Great is similarly impressed to find himself in the pages of the Jewish Scriptures (*Ant* 11.337). Here it is the book of Daniel that is shown to the conqueror. Earlier Alexander had astonished his retinue by prostrating himself before the Jewish high priest. In explanation of his actions he relates a dream in which the priest appeared to him as a spokesman of God and assured him that the deity himself "would lead (ἡγήσασθαι) [his] army and give over to [him] the empire of the Persians" (*Ant* 11.334). Here is clear example of God taking sides in a conflict just as Josephus argued that God was on the side of the Romans. It is thus another statement of the conviction of God's providence over the political and military fortunes of the nations of the world.

### *The Rise and Fall of Rome*

Josephus very clearly identified the fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's statue vision with Rome.<sup>43</sup> We have seen already that Josephus described the second kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's statue as having two kings.<sup>44</sup> This is apparently a reference to a Medo-Persian coalition in keeping with Josephus' view that Darius the Mede and Cyrus were relatives (*Ant* 10.248).<sup>45</sup> The third

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<sup>43</sup>For a useful summary of various theories about the identities of the four kingdoms in Daniel, see Collins 1993, 166–170. Josephus was not alone in identifying Daniel's fourth kingdom with Rome.

<sup>44</sup>Dan 2:39 refers only to "another kingdom inferior to yours."

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Mason 1994, 171. Some medieval rabbinic commentators apparently identified

kingdom Josephus describes as being “from the west” thus making clear that he identified this kingdom with Alexander the Great.<sup>46</sup> This leaves Rome for the fourth kingdom with the nature of iron.<sup>47</sup> Josephus also states explicitly at *Antiquities* 10.276 that Daniel predicted the Roman empire. Thus, there is no doubt that Josephus saw Roman ascendancy as part of God’s great “plan” for history. Josephus’ picture in the *War* of God moving the rod of empire from one nation to the other is striking for its passivity in the face of Roman ascendancy. The fact that this picture is itself also an argument for Rome’s eventual demise at some unspecified time in the future is perhaps less often noted.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the rise and fall of nations is a recurrent theme in Greek historiography.<sup>49</sup> Of particular relevance for us is the passage in which Polybius ascribes such thinking to Scipio when he contemplated the end of Carthage (*Histories* 38.22.1–3). In a similar vein Josephus has Titus reflect ruefully on “the power of fortune,” “the quick vicissitudes of war” and “the general instability of human affairs” (*War* 3.396).<sup>50</sup> In an unguarded moment we hear Josephus referring to the Romans as those who are “*now* lords of the universe” (*Apion* 2.41; italics added), thus perhaps betraying a conviction about the temporal finitude of Rome’s rule.

### *Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream*

But the point is made much more clearly than this in the *Jewish Antiquities* in Josephus’ version of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of a great statue. As is well known, the king’s dream concluded with

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Darius the Mede as the father-in-law of Cyrus; see Marcus’s note *d* in the LCL *Josephus* at this point.

<sup>46</sup>Mason 1994, 171.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Collins 1993, 166 n.136. The author of Daniel no doubt intended Alexander as the iron kingdom with his successors as the feet of iron and clay. Josephus omits the biblical detail that the feet were made of both iron and clay, indicating inherent division and weakness (Dan 2:33, 42–43).

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Rajak 1991, 132; Mason 1994, 181.

<sup>49</sup>See de Romilly 1977, 1–9.

<sup>50</sup>I am indebted to Mason 1994, 173 for the references to Scipio and Titus. See also de Romilly 1977, 8–9.

the destruction of the composite statue by a great stone (Dan 2:34–35). Josephus' Daniel describes the scene to the king as follows:

Then you saw a stone break off from a mountain and fall upon the image and overthrow it, breaking it to pieces and leaving not one part of it whole, so that the gold and silver and bronze and iron were made finer than flour, and, when the wind blew strongly, they were caught up by its force and scattered abroad; but the stone grew so much larger that the whole earth seemed to be filled with it. (*Ant* 10.207)

Quite clearly the dream envisages the destruction not only of the first three empires represented by the different metals but of the fourth one as well since Daniel specifies that the “iron” too was made finer than flour and scattered abroad by the wind. A problem arises in Ralph Marcus' translation in the Loeb *Josephus* at this point, however, because he renders *Antiquities* 10.209 to say that the iron kingdom “will have dominion forever through its iron nature.” This gives the impression that Josephus contradicted himself, saying at one moment that the iron kingdom will be destroyed by the stone and at the next that it will endure forever. However this impression is a false one because εἰς ἅπαντα which Marcus rendered “forever” should rather be translated “completely”<sup>51</sup> or, with William Whiston, “οἰερ ἀλλ τῆε εαρτη.” Τῆε ἱρον νατυρε οφ Ρομε, τηερεφορε σπεακσ οφ τῆε μιγητ οφ ιτσ μπεριαλ αρμιοσ ανδ Ρομε<sup>ε</sup> σ ωρλδ-ωιδε κινγδομ, βυτ σαψσ νοτηνιγ οφ επερναλ δυρατιον. Τῆυσ ιτ ισ νοτ συρπρισινγ τηατ ωην Josephus came to the interpretation of the stone he invoked the historian's right to remain silent on things pertaining to “what is to be” (*Ant* 10.210).<sup>52</sup> Even so, Josephus betrays his belief that the stone's destruction of the iron kingdom will occur. Then he adds that those who want “exact information” about “the hidden things that are to come” should consult the book of Daniel for themselves.

Thus there can be little doubt that Josephus anticipated the eventual downfall of the Roman

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<sup>51</sup>Mason 1994, 172; cf. Lindner 1972, 44. Thackeray's translation of the same phrase in *Ant* 4.114 as “perpetual” should be similarly amended. In that context Josephus is emphasizing the world-wide spread and superiority of the Jewish people.

<sup>52</sup>Mason 1994 treats Josephus' argument here as largely genuine (173).

empire,<sup>53</sup> though as has been astutely observed by S. Mason, his expectation was devoid of eschatological urgency.<sup>54</sup> We do not get the sense that Josephus expected the events depicted by the destruction of the statue to happen any time soon. Nevertheless, Josephus apparently thought that the stone represented a definite future event. Thus we are left with the question of the identity of the stone. What did Josephus think would precipitate the downfall of the iron kingdom? This is a question to which Josephus was apparently loathe to give a direct answer. However, in a different context much earlier in the *Antiquities* we are given some clues as to what Josephus' answer might have been had he been pressed to give one.

### *Balaam's Oracles*

In Book Four of the *Antiquities* Josephus relates the biblical story of the pagan prophet Balaam who was hired by the Moabite king Balak to pronounce curses against the Israelites (Num 22). Balaam, whom Josephus calls “the best diviner in the land” (*Ant* 4.104), however, finds that God's favour for the Israelites hinders his imprecatory powers and that he is able only to pronounce blessings. His oracle reveals that God is their ally (σύμμαχος) and leader (ἡγεμῶν) (*Ant* 4.114), and that he has granted them the possession of all good things, by which Josephus primarily means the law of Moses.<sup>55</sup> The oracle also assures the Israelites of perpetual possession of their land and a great increase in their numbers (*Ant* 4.115). In times of peace they will be granted every kind of blessing, and in war they are guaranteed victory. The oracle ends with the assurance that God has the power both “to diminish what is in excess and to make good what it lacking” (*Ant* 4.117).

In a subsequent oracle Balaam foretells the mixed fortunes of future kings. In this context we again encounter an ambiguous reference to what the future still holds. This time Josephus states that by comparing Balaam's prophecies with history we will be able to discern “what the future also has

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<sup>53</sup>Cf. Davies 1991, 174: “. . . in this most pro-Roman of ancient writers toleration, and even enjoyment, of Rome was sweetened by the belief that it was the master of the Jews only for the time being and that its fall and judgement awaited it.”

<sup>54</sup>Mason 1994, 173. See also the comments of Rajak 1991, 132.

<sup>55</sup>Spilsbury 1998, 123.

in store” (*Ant* 4.125). Evidently, Josephus divided the data in Balaam’s oracle into two categories: those prophecies which had already been fulfilled by his own time, and those which were yet to be fulfilled. It is unlikely, of course, that Josephus expected any of his Roman readers actually to consult the biblical oracles of Balaam. As in the Daniel passage Josephus intends to invest the Jewish Scriptures with an aura of mystery and divine authority.<sup>56</sup> This does not mean, though, that we should doubt that Josephus had a genuine exegetical basis for his claim here. As in the Daniel passage, Josephus found in the Scriptures a prophecy that he could relate to a time still in the future. In the present case, though, it is not at all a simple matter to discern which of Balaam’s oracles in Numbers 24 Josephus regarded as already fulfilled and which ones (or one) he regarded as yet to be fulfilled.

There is evidence that Numbers 24:17–19 was regarded in Josephus’ time as a messianic prediction:<sup>57</sup>

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the borderlands of Moab, and the territory of all the Shethites.

However, Josephus generally shows little approval for messianic hopes and so it is unlikely that he would have had sympathy for such a reading. Numbers 24:24 is thus perhaps a better candidate for the passage Josephus regarded as yet unfulfilled: “But ships shall come from Kittim and shall afflict Asshur and Eber; and he also shall perish forever.”<sup>58</sup> Josephus may well have identified those “from Kittim” with the Romans in a manner similar to that known to us from the Qumran

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. Mason 1994, 173.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. *Targum Pseudo Jonathan; Fragmentary Targum*; Origen, *Sermons on Numbers* 13.7. Bar Kochba’s followers apparently found in this passage justification for their view of him; see *Midrash Rabbah Lamentations* 2.2; *jTaanith* 4.7 (68d). For discussion of these passages see Vermes 1973, 165–166, 173.

<sup>58</sup>Brooke 1991 provides the following translation: “Sea-peoples shall gather from the North; and ships, from the district of Kittim. I look and they afflict Eber; but they too shall perish forever!” (156).

pesharim.<sup>59</sup> If this is true he may have read Numbers 24:24 as a prediction of the defeat of the Roman armies. In doing so, he would have been diverging from the interpretation of the Kittim (Χεττιμ) followed by the author of 1 Maccabees (1 Macc 1:1; 8:5)<sup>60</sup> who identified them with the Macedonians. However for our purposes it is more significant to note a connection between Numbers 24:24 and the Book of Daniel. In Daniel 11:30, in a prophecy referring to the aggression of Antiochus Epiphanes the seer states that “ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall lose heart and withdraw.” This is a conscious echo of Numbers 24 which also speaks of the advent of the ships of Kittim. The Kittim in the Daniel passage, though, are clearly the Romans<sup>61</sup> as the translator of the Old Greek recognised — he rendered the term as Ῥωμᾶῖοι!<sup>62</sup> We have already seen that a reading of Daniel was foundational for Josephus’ understanding of history.<sup>63</sup> What I suggest now is that Josephus likely read the prophecies of Balaam in the light of Daniel as well. It would have been a simple thing to read the כַּתִּימ / Ῥωμᾶῖοι of Daniel 11:30 back into the כַּתִּימ of Numbers 24:24.<sup>64</sup> The identification of the Kittim with the Romans in Daniel, therefore, would seem to be decisive for Josephus’ understanding of the Kittim in Numbers.

Josephus read Balaam’s prophecy as a prediction of the demise of Rome. As with the similar prediction in Daniel, though, he exercised the utmost restraint when putting the conviction into writing. One place where he does allow himself a somewhat uncharacteristic flourish is *Antiquities* 4.127–128. In this passage Balaam reveals not only that, thanks to God’s providence, “this race of Hebrews will never be overwhelmed by utter destruction,” but even more dramatically that even though they will from time to time be temporarily defeated, they will always “flourish once more

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<sup>59</sup>See Brooke 1991; Vermes 1975, 216.

<sup>60</sup>For the origins of the term see Gen 10:4 and *Ant* 1.128; cf. Collins 1993, 384.

<sup>61</sup>Vermes 1975, 215; Collins 1993, 384; Davies 1991, 168.

<sup>62</sup>Theodotion retained the term Κίτιοι

<sup>63</sup>Mason 1994.

<sup>64</sup>Davies 1991, 168–170 suggests that the War Scroll was similarly influenced by Dan 11:30.



*to the terror of those who inflicted these injuries upon them*” (italics added). Thus Josephus places into the mouth of the pagan prophet a warning to those who “injure” the Jewish people. The Jews will one day rise up to wreak vengeance upon their enemies. This sentiment, I suggest, is the clue to the identity of the great stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. When the king’s vision of the destruction of the iron kingdom is seen in the light of Balaam’s warning it is difficult to escape the impression that Josephus harboured discreet expectations not only that the Roman empire would eventually be superseded, but that it would be the Jews themselves who would bring about its downfall.<sup>65</sup>

Before leaving Balaam’s oracle we might note one further connection between what he says about the Israelites and Daniel’s description of the stone. In *Antiquities* 4.115–116 Josephus has the seer expatiate at considerable length on the future world-wide dispersion of the Jews. Not only will all earth and sea be filled with their fame, but even more, they will “suffice for the world, to furnish every land with inhabitants sprung from your race.” Indeed, says Balaam, while your race is small enough at the moment to be contained by the land of Canaan, in the future “the habitable world . . . lies before you as an eternal habitation, and your multitudes shall find abode on islands and continent, more numerous even than the stars in heaven.”<sup>66</sup> What is significant about this for our purposes is the way that it provides a striking parallel to the dream-stone: “but the stone grew so much larger that the whole earth seemed to be filled with it” (*Ant* 10.207). Thus, the prediction of the world-wide spread of the Israelites in Balaam’s oracle and the world-filling stone in the king’s dream would seem to be a further indication that Josephus read Numbers 24 and the Book of Daniel in close connection with each other; and further, that Josephus interpreted the stone as the

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<sup>65</sup>This kind of expectation eventually became widespread among the Rabbis; cf. de Lange 1978, 271–272.

<sup>66</sup>Josephus’ biblical source here is most likely Num 23:10 “Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the dust-cloud of Israel?” Josephus here places a positive interpretation on the phenomenon of the Diaspora. A similar view is expressed in *Ant* 1.282 and *Apion* 2.279–286, but other passages display a more ambivalent attitude toward the Diaspora. On these matters see further Spilisbury 1998, 123–124; van Unnik 1993, 137–145. On Jewish attitudes to dispersion more generally, see Gafni 1997, 19–40.

Jewish nation dispersed abroad throughout the world.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

Tessa Rajak suggested that Josephus concluded Book Seven of the *War* with an account of intense Jewish patriotism in an effort to rectify the imbalance created by his overly pro-Roman description of the Flavians. What our reflections on Josephus' attitude to the demise of Rome have suggested is that Josephus continued to redress that balance for the rest of his writing career. Undoubtedly there was a range of complex reasons why Josephus exonerated Titus of the deliberate burning of the Temple, and certainly he seems to go out of his way to glorify his patrons in their triumph at the conclusion of the war. But his later work indicates that Josephus did not abandon his faith in the ongoing providence of God. Nor did he give up hope of the resurgence of the Judean state. Josephus is sometimes more surprising than we might have expected.

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<sup>67</sup>The author of 4 Ezra apparently also interpreted the stone carved from the mountain "without hands" to refer to the Jewish people, though with strong messianic associations as well. See 4 Ezra 13:6–7, 35–36.

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