



Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations

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A magisterial history of the titanic struggle between the Roman and Jewish worlds that led to the destruction of Jerusalem.

In 70 C.E., after a four-year war, three Roman legions besieged and eventually devastated Jerusalem, destroying Herod's magnificent Temple. Sixty years later, after further violent rebellions and the city's final destruction, Hadrian built the new city of Aelia Capitolina where Jerusalem had once stood. Jews were barred from entering its territory. They were taxed simply for being Jewish. They were forbidden to worship their god. They were wholly reviled.

What brought about this conflict between the Romans and the subjects they had previously treated with tolerance? Martin Goodman—equally renowned in Jewish and in Roman studies—examines this conflict, its causes, and its consequences with unprecedented authority and thoroughness. He delineates the incompatibility between the cultural, political, and religious beliefs and practices of the two peoples. He explains how Rome's interests were served by a policy of brutality against the Jews. He makes clear how the original Christians first distanced themselves from their origins, and then became increasingly hostile toward Jews as Christian influence spread within the empire. The book thus also offers an exceptional account of the origins of anti-Semitism, the history of which reverberates still.

An indispensable book.

Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations Details

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Margie Dorn says

This book is a "mixed bag." A lot of good research here, but the problem is that the researcher is so very selective in his presentation, biasing the evidence towards the conclusions he desires. The bald statement he makes, that "in fact the Jewish state was characterized less by organized hostility to Rome than by internecine struggles for power," does not take into consideration multiple uprisings--I found it interesting, for example, that "Sepphoris" is not even mentioned once in this 598-page volume, and certainly not found in the index. He mentions the rebel Theudas who brings a group of followers with their belongings to the river Jordan "but whether he intended any action against Rome is unknown," by which statement he seems to be clueless about the great significance of any action whatsoever at the river Jordan in the understanding of the Jewish people.

I did find some support in the work of Rose Mary Sheldon, who "offers a more critical review. Recognising his expertise in both Roman and Jewish history, Sheldon claims that Goodman's arguments in favour of a lack of conflict between Romans and Jews between 6-60 CE "do not hold water". (See Sheldon, Rose Mary (2010). "Rome and Jerusalem: An Ancient Clash of Civilizations - Book Review". *Intelligence and National Security*. 25 (6): 856–861. doi:10.1080/02684527.2010.537882)

I did learn a lot from this book. I respect the research that went into it. I do not, however, recommend the book to anyone except people who do enough reading to be able to fill in his gaps and revise his conclusions.

Dariusz P?ochocki says

Troch? nadto chaotyczne, mimo wszystko pozycja popularnonaukowa, autor uwielbia posta? Agrypy I, którym raczy nas i do którego odwo?uje si? przez wi?kszo?? dzie?a. Troch? po macoszemu przedstawione zosta?y niestety czas herodia?skie, a i powstanie Bar Kochby, za to nale?y pochwali? opis wojny ?ydowskiej, chocia? tu jak wiemy ?ród?a s? ograniczone. Za du?o Rzymu, za ma?o Jerozolimy.

Genia Lukin says

Rather than writing a complete, coherent review I am simply going to list the many points which make this book a serious suspect in my mind insofar as historical writing goes:

* For one, it's simply dull. this is the least of its sins, but even academic writing should be mildly interesting to read.

* The writer creates a somewhat absurd picture comparing the Romans and the Jews of the second temple period in minute point after minute point, which somehow repeatedly gets either reduced to stereotypes where differences are irreconcilable, or smoothed over where it is possible to show by some spectacular way that these differences barely exist.

-The existence of the soul has, apparently, been stolen in an incomplete fashion by the Greeks: it's clearly impossible for anyone to have invented the concept themselves. Which it's certainly true Jews took much in

the way of Greek philosophical tools, it's equally true that very few of the contents managed the cultural transfer and assimilated. They were around, but it was more akin to oil floating on the surface.

-Historiography certainly was not something that Greece had to teach the Jews. The styles of historiographic narrative are markedly different, and clearly influenced contemporary Jewish thought, but Jewish historiography is not nonexistent, as Maccabees attests. The assertion that Jews had "only the haziest idea" of the previous three-hundred years is rankly laughable. Simply because we have no specific texts from the period testifying coherent historiography, is absence of evidence, from which one can hardly draw conclusion, considering the wholesale destruction of the two upcoming revolts. Absence of evidence, Mr. Goodman should know, is not evidence of absence.

* Saying that Romans and Jews lived in perfect accord seems to completely forget the rebellious inclinations of Provincia Judaea, that were there to begin with. The Jews were disinclined to accept Roman rule, having tasted independence with the Hasmoneans, and while it's certainly true that in the beginning the amount of strife and collision was insignificant, minor and overshadowed by mutual benefit, it's equally true that there existed a philosophy crying against government by a foreign power. not by the rich elite, perhaps, but by the poor people certainly. It's easily visible in the grumbling against the population census, the emergence of the Fourth Philosophy, and even the outcry against the Herodian Dynasty.

* Asserting that Antisemitism originates with the Flavian dynasty is putting rather a burden on the Flavian dynasty and simplifying the nature of antisemitism. Not to mention reducing the place of such works as Against Apion. Against Apion rather implies, to most scholars, the relative common distribution of Apion's work and philosophy. If Josephus had to come out against it, Antisemitism couldn't be a complete unknown.

* Implying that the church merely rode on the political coat-tails of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian is very nice for the church, but the attempt to excuse the church from originating and generating a large chunk of European antisemitism is misplaced, as we find it commonly and everywhere.

While Goodman describes with fair accuracy the events leading to the Great Revolt and the Bar Kochba Revolt, his thesis concerning the nature of Roman and Jews relationships fails in the detail, in my opinion.

Jon says

This is ostensibly an in-depth look at the context in which (and causes of) the rebellion of the Jews against Rome occurred around 70 A.D., resulting in the destruction of Herod's temple. The opener sets up the circumstances, detailing the rebellion itself. Goodman, however, wonders why the rebellion occurred, when other cultural entities taken over by the Roman Empire did not have similar rebellions and when the Jews, in many ways, were so well integrated into the system.

He begins by describing the two cities in the first century. Rome was a cultural and political hegemon. Jerusalem was a religious one. Both were international cities, taking in people from around the empire, though for their varying purposes.

Next, Goodman turns to what living in the Roman Empire was like. He starts by looking in part at how Herod Agrippa came to power (via in-fighting among the Jews, who essentially invited the Romans to take over to settle disputes). Agrippa was appointed as king eventually, being a Jewish convert/outsider of sorts but also a friend of a certain Roman politician in power. Although criticized in the New Testament, he was

known for his piety among the Jewish peoples. Maintaining power was a political game, one that often had to do with who was in favor or in charge in Rome.

Goodman then turns to a discussion of diversity in the empire, and as he does so, he rather loses sight of Jerusalem, focusing on various other parts of the empire, in part to help establish how Rome interacted with its various vassals. Of note in this section is how Rome had a certain love for the exotic. Writings often focused on the strange. Our views of the empire largely come from Roman or Greek writers, however (Greece remained the cultural hegemon throughout the eastern empire and Rome adopted many of its customs as its own). One would get the impression that the subject peoples never wrote, but Goodman shows how such peoples did likely write of their own places. Most such writings did not survive, however; in cases where they did, there was usually some reason or advantage for its presentation, such as that of an early Spanish writer. The Jewish people, in this way, were unique, since so much of their writings were preserved.

Next comes a discussion of citizenship. Being Roman initially meant being of the city, then of Italy. But citizenship came to have more and more expansive meanings. One could buy it or be born into a mixed marriage or even be freed as a slave and then granted it. What it meant to be Roman slowly became watered down, until the third century, when all peoples in the empire would be declared citizens. Whether people thought of themselves more as Romans or more as Gauls or whatever subject peoples they were depended on the person. Paul was born Roman, for example, but one would hardly see him as typical--for he was a Jew first. Meanwhile, some Greek writers of the time were thoroughly of the empire, serving in the Senate, though they were not of Roman heritage. To be Jewish carried similar quandaries, since one could convert to Judaism, meaning that ethnicity was only part of the Jewish identity--religion also played its part. If one were of mixed marriage, one was likely a Jew if one's father was Jewish . . . or later, one's mother. The shift from patrilineal to matrilineal heritage happened between the third century BCE and the third century CE.

Differing concepts of time and history also come up. Rome had little sense of deep time--it did not know much about its origins and had to make up parts of its early history. But recent history was well documented. For the Jewish people, it was just the opposite. The Bible goes back to the origin of humanity, and the early history of the Jewish people, their judges and kings, was written out in full. But coming into the first century, history fairly well dropped off after Ezra. There was a lot less written about the Jewish people in the intertestamental era. Romans were heavily concerned about preserving parts of themselves for posterity--making some kind of monument to themselves in terms of their deeds and what they left behind. Jewish people were less interested in this, their faith focusing instead on God and on doing well for him. That said, Herod's building of the temple certainly was an attempt by him to maintain his name and reputation into posterity.

Kinship ideas among the two peoples had similarities and differences as well. The father was largely the head of the household for both. The Jewish people historically had maintained extended families, but by this time the focus was more on the nuclear family, as in Roman society. And yet, in Roman society, this focus was complex. The paterfamilia maintained, in many respects, control over the family to multiple generations. You could be a son or grandson, married and out on one's own, but you were still legally under the paterfamilia's jurisdiction. What mitigated this was the fact that lifespans were typically short(er): fortysomething.

Divorce was fairly common in both societies. Roman marriages were essentially "living together" arrangements and rarely lasted a lifetime. Stepfamilies were the norm, both because of divorce and the shorter lifespans. The Jewish peoples had contractual marriage, but a man could fairly easily divorce his wife (not so easily the wife her husband, as under the law she technically could not).

Friendship among Romans was generally a tit-for-tat sort of thing. If one did someone a favor, then one was a friend. One generally did not do favors for nonfriends, and favors were used to cultivate friendship. Among the Jewish people, there was more of a culture of charity (based on religion), which meant that they had a reputation as a people among whom there were many beggars.

Another chapter focuses on common beliefs. Romans celebrated birthdays; Jewish people generally did not. Romans practiced birth control and considered abortion and infanticide as means toward that. Until a baby was formally recognized by its father, it was not considered a real human; often newborn babies were left out (exposed) when not wanted, allowed to die. A common device in Roman plays was that of the abandoned baby taken in by another family and then reunited as an adult with its biological family. While birth control was practiced among the Jewish people, abortion was generally frowned upon, especially once the fetus took on human features, and infanticide was strictly forbidden.

Ideas of the afterlife varied among both peoples. Historically, Romans had focused mostly on the here-and-now, while the Jewish peoples had a notion of a spiritual realm and a possible afterlife (the resurrection being an item of dispute). Both eventually were heavily influenced by the Greeks and took on Greek beliefs about the eternal soul.

Burial practices among the peoples also differed. Romans burned bodies and preserved the ashes in cemetaries. Poor people were buried together, but as Rome grew better off, they too took to the upper-class way of cremation. Jewish peoples buried bodies whole, often in caverns or in holes covered with stone.

The Jewish peoples had the creation story and one God; the Romans had a pantheon of gods who were not necessarily seen as being intimately involved in human affairs (some were, some not). History started with the foundation of Rome or with the gods, not so much with creation. Astrology was common among both peoples, but mostly later on--probably adopted from Greeks, Egyptians, and Babylonians. Jewish teaching, however, discouraged its practice, and some writers claimed that Abraham had once practiced the art but gave it up when he realized that God created all and had control over all.

The relationship of humans to animals differed quite a bit. Jewish people believed in treating animals with kindness, but also looked at them mostly as creatures for work and food. There doesn't seem to be much of a record of them using animals as pets. Romans, by contrast, were much more affectionate to animals but also much more cruel. Records of animals as pets exist, and some buried animals, like dogs, with epitaphs much as some do today. A dog, among Jewish people, would have largely been for tending sheep or guarding a home. However, Romans also engaged in sport with animals much more--hunting or fighting and killing them in front of an audience, as at the sports arena. Herod's love for hunting is placed, by historians, within a Roman context: it was hunting for sport not food, since the creatures killed were not kosher.

Of particular interest to me was a short section on moral philosophies. Goodman summarizes three Roman systems: Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Cynicalism. Epicureanism has a reputation of being one in which anything goes so far as the pleasures of this life are concerned, for it taught that pleasure is the be all and end all of living. But what this really meant wasn't so much hedonism as it meant avoiding pain. Because seeking one's own pleasure can result in pain, ascetism could be the means by which Epicureans pursued pleasure--avoid difficult situations by avoiding things that would bring them about, such as a public life or politics. Stoicism, by contrast, taught that virtue was the highest thing to be sought, and it was by virtue that happiness was to be gained. Other "goods" (pleasure, riches, and fame) were counterfeits. If attained via virtue, that was fine, but they were not to be sought for their own sake.

Cynicism taught "that life should be 'lived according to nature"'; they rejected cultural norms, materialism,

and strivings after wealth, power, fame, and intellectual high thinking. Concerns about race, sex, and class were all pointless. They were, in a sense, anarchists.

Religion paid little role in these means of deciphering morality. By contrast, for the Jews, religion was, of course, the center of one's moral thinking, and what was right and wrong was laid out in the scriptures. Thinking often focused on gray areas, delineating things the scriptures hadn't outright answered. Ideas of about guilt, sin, and repentence, common in Jewish thinking, had no part in Roman thoughts about morality.

Next comes a discussion of the varying lifestyles of the two peoples, which can be clearly seen in their attitudes toward the body. Romans thought little of nudity, and muscled nude male sculptures, some in actual states of arousal, were common. Genders mixed in the public baths, and lust prevailed. Sex outside of formal marriage, it is implied, was fairly common, even if private (though displays of sex in artwork were not uncommon). Homosexuality was permitted, especially between men of power and weaker men. Jewish peoples, by contrast, had strictures against any sex outside of marriage. Bodies--let alone people or animals--were rarely displayed in art. The emphasis was on purity. When Jewish people engaged in bathing it was in large part often for purification, more so than pleasure or even cleanliness.

For spectator events, the Romans had plays, singing, mime troops, gladiatorial bouts, and chariot races. Jewish life was comparatively staid. Among the spectator (and participatory) events among them was dancing.

Both Jewish and Roman societies had a heavy emphasis on law, with extensive codes. But their attitudes toward war were a bit different. Rome used war as a means of extending power, collecting taxes, and consolidating power (for the emperor). It was heroic. The Jewish nation's attitude toward war was more ambivalent. It could be used for similar things for which Rome used war (extending power over other nations and gaining tributary), but warriors were not typically glamorized in the same sense (and often that glamour went to God, with the warrior himself disparaged for the taking of life). Roman war was vicious, with looting, rape, and other horrors common for the victors, which is one reason it was best to surrender. Romans were also perseverant: a battle might be lost, but Rome would return over and over until it won the war. Jewish credo often emphasized mercy: give the enemy the opportunity to surrender, don't cut down the fruit trees, and so on. Battle rules were written out even in the Bible. Some genocide was mandated (for peoples of Canaan), but rules for other peoples were less total in mandated destruction.

As for who had status and power in each society, Goodman sums it up nicely: "In Rome, political status derived primarily from wealth, noble ancestry, age, and (above all) military glory. In Jerusalem, what mattered was lineage (priestly or royal), learning in the law and (occasionally) a claim to divine inspiration." Romans showed off their power by showing off wealth--paying for people to enjoy the "bread and circus." Emperors often derived from the same family (or adopted family). Wisdom was accorded to age, though they put forth an effort to appease young folk with activities. And of course, success on the battlefield accorded with political power. For the Jewish peoples older generally meant wiser too, but after age fifty, priests were forced to retire. Little was done to "appease" youths, so it seems those in the middle ages were those accorded the most power. More important was being of Levitical heritage and being a scholar. Showing off one's wealth was not generally seen as a necessarily good thing, and one could be a "poor" scholar and have a modicum of respect from among the people.

Jewish people were spread throughout the empire, and their Sabbath and many of their ways came to be known among the Romans. For the most part, the two existed in relative harmony. A large Jewish population lived in Rome itself, and although they were kicked out in 19 and 49, these appear to have been temporary dismissals and perhaps not even in total. In 19, the dismissal may have had to do with various Roman rites

and a turn back toward the gods and symbolic purifying of the city in preparing for the change in emperor. In 49, there apparently had been an uprising by one Christus, but it's also possible that it was simply another purifying of the city. This dismissal is the context in which Paul finds Aquilla and Priscilla in Corinth in Acts, them having left Rome (but later to return, as denoted in the letter to the Romans). At this time, gatherings of Jews weren't allowed, but continuing practice of the Jewish religion could be completed discreetly.

The time from 6 to 66 CE in Jerusalem was one mostly of peace. Goodman recounts the various uprisings that occurred during this time but notes that they were likely minor, since they are barely mentioned (if at all) in Roman records. More often, these accounts come from Josephus (sometimes they're mentioned in the Gospels or Acts). Many such conflicts had to do with Jewish issues and power more than with insurrections against the Roman authorities. And even among the Jewish people, the diaspora Jews did not typically side against Rome in putting down Jerusalem, and the royal family actually supported Rome.

The question arises, then, why the Romans put the Jewish rebellion down so hard and destroyed the Temple. Goodman sees this as largely a fluke. In the quest to consolidate power, the aspiring emperor Vespasian needed a military victory, which his son Titus afforded him, through the conquest of the Jerusalem rebels. (Nero had recently died and various men took the spot as emperor in a short span, fighting among each other.) This demanded swift and heavy action. Even then, according to Goodman's interpretation, there was no plan to destroy the Temple (the Romans did not generally mess with local gods), but the military accidentally laid it on fire, and that was that. (Accounts differ as to the motive, with Josephus claiming accident, but Sulpicius Severus claiming intent.) There was also the issue that the priests had recently begun refusing to offer a sacrifice to God in honor of the emperor. With the Temple gone, the best way to pass off its destruction was to pass it off as purposeful.

Jerusalem itself was torn apart, the Jewish people killed in great numbers (over a million, according to Josephus), with the leftover one hundred thousand or so dispersed throughout the empire after enduring torture, selling into slavery, and so forth. Land in Jerusalem was taken from the Jewish people and handed to others (Gentiles); the priestly class itself disappeared.

Another thing that followed was a tax on being Jewish. The tax was equal to the temple tax; now that there was no temple, Rome claimed the same amount of money and used it to pay for a temple to Jupiter. Over the years, anti-Jewish feelings in Rome grew in part because Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian used the victory over Israel as a way to prop up their power, to emphasize their greatness. Domitian had no victories of his own--he was simply related to the other two emperors--so victory over Judaism was particularly important. Trajan, the next emperor, even invaded Parthia, taking over Mesopotamia, to which many Jews had fled.

The tax was done away with under the emperor Nerva, who was more kindly to the Jewish people, but any hope that the Temple would be rebuilt ended after Hadrian came to power. He reinstated the tax. Although his emphasis was on peace and stability within the empire--thus he built Hadrian's wall on the border with Scotland and ended the Parthian campaign--he saw the Jewish peoples as adding instability. As such, he built a new city atop the ruins of Jerusalem and put a temple to Jupiter near the site of the former Jewish Temple. This, according to Goodman, sparked the Bar Khokhba revolt of 132-35. (Some scholars say that it was the revolt itself that sparked Hadrian to build over Jerusalem, but Goodman comes down on the other side of this debate. What sparked Hadrian to build over Jerusalem, however, was unclear to me in Goodman's text--perhaps, simply memories of the revolt of 115.)

In the third century, emperors finally took an easier hand with the Jewish peoples, removing the tax and allowing them to live by their customs without interference. They did not return to Jerusalem, however,

though many still lived in the land of Palestine (Rome had renamed the region). Julian, just after Constantine, even made plans to rebuild the Temple, though not out of sympathy for the Jews but rather because he was against Christianity and thought sacrifices to be more in line with paganism.

The destruction of the temple in 66 also helped to separate the Jewish people from the sect of Christianity, which had initially been a sect of the Jewish religion. Christians were seen as atheists by Rome, since they did not align themselves with any god to whom sacrifices were owed. By going along with Jewish customs, they were subject to the tax on Jews; by not doing so, they were not subject to the tax, but then they were subject to persecution for not participating in Roman religious/civic rites. That said, Goodman sees persecution as coming mostly from local sources rather than from the empire itself, with a few brief exceptions.

By the time that Constantine made Christianity the official religion, it was a good deal different than its Jewish roots. Gone were many of the Jewish practices: dietary restrictions, the Sabbath, circumcision, concerns with purity. However, there was still a reliance on Scripture (if only metaphorically), a much more prudish attitude toward sex, a hate of abortion, a disdain for the worship of other gods, and an emphasis on charity. Constantine tried to settle various theological disputes to help shore up the unity of the church and the empire. He built Christian churches, where before there had been only house churches, often at the supposed site of martyrdoms. . . .

Gumble's Yard says

Very well written albeit extremely detailed account of the issues leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in the First Century AD.

The first and longest section of the book is a meticulous examination of all aspects of Roman and Jewish culture effectively trying to tease out what led to the clash but often simply serving as an excellently written (but often seemingly undirected) account of Rome/the Roman Empire (emphatically not the Republic) and Judaism/Jerusalem. This covers areas such as morals, identities, attitudes to family and associations, politics and legal issues, diversity and toleration. The main conclusion is that although there were clearly issues that Romans found strange about Jews there was a lot of toleration (not least their dispensation from worshiping roman gods) and no real reason for Jerusalem and the Jews to have special treatment.

The second section covers the destruction of Jerusalem and the following events. The central thesis is that the destruction of the Temple was accidental but that then the new Roman Empire Vespasian (who by coincidence was leading the Roman response to the Jewish revolt) and his son Titus then felt they had to portray it as a deliberate act, especially as Vespasian needed to establish his credentials as a military leader. This in turn led to a policy of vilification of the Jews, a policy continued by subsequent emperors who also had only the Jewish war as an association with military glory or who wanted to prove their descent from emperors who did.

The last part of the book briefly covers the rise of the Church (mainly put down to Constantine's vision and conversion) and the interaction of the Christians with the Jews (who in fact kept their distance from the Jews which had the advantage of being distanced from their vilification but also the disadvantage of not getting their religious dispensation) and a last chapter of anti-Semitism.

Really outstanding account – superbly written and coming across as very well researched and argued.

Mark Sequeira says

Have I reviewed this yet? Excellent, intriguing book that I only have a few qualms with but overall, like Josephus, Alfred Edersheim's Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah and N.T. Wright's "The New Testament and the People of God" and "Jesus and the Victory of God," "Herod" by Richardson, "Pontius Pilate" by Wroe, as well as Richard Horsey's books, this is a great resource for first century Israel and the world Jesus lived in. I am still reading it but think it is a great read so far.

Caroline says

This book is about the run-up to and the aftermath of the Great Jewish Revolt of 66-73 AD and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It explores the tensions and hostilities that led to the war between the Jewish state and the Roman Empire and examines the similarities and differences between the two sides. It also tries to explain why the Roman reaction to the Jewish Revolt was so much harsher than other similar rebellions against the Roman Empire and how it led to the rise in antisemitism through the Roman Empire and subsequently the Roman Catholic Church and medieval Europe. It's a very good book, very thorough and insightful, and very well-written. I'd highly recommend it.

Emily says

This is one of the most sensitive treatments of Jewish-Roman relations and cultural similarities & differences that I have read. It is intended for a mass-market audience, and thus is quite easy to read, although still full of great detail and scholarly discretion. The book is largely focused on first century: he describes the status quo leading up to the first Jewish war with Rome (66-72 CE), ultimately arguing that the conflict arose in response to a series of accidents rather than concrete Roman policy, and that the war was emphatically not the inevitable result of a clash of ancient civilizations ontologically opposed to each other (although I doubt he would argue that in some sense there **was** a clash - it's in his subtitle). He argues that Jewish world - prior to the first war - was not and did not feel perpetually oppressed by Rome. Although he hasn't yet convinced me of that, Goodman argues strongly enough that I will have to reassess my opinions on the nature of Jewish-Roman relations prior to the first war. Goodman emphasizes the political necessity that the Flavian dynasty, having no claim to the Julio-Claudian line, must present themselves as military victors securing Rome against her enemies. The biggest, most significant result of the first Jewish war with Rome, he seems to suggest, was not the destruction of the Jewish temple, but the ramifications of Roman anti-Jewish hostilities on Christian anti-Judaism, which ultimately led to modern anti-Semitism. That's a lot of weight to lend to Vespasian and Titus, but he's probably not overstating the importance of the events of 66-72 CE.

Stephanie Matthews says

A fascinating look at both the Roman and Jewish cultures, considering things that were alike and different. It

wasn't until the last portion of the book that Goodman shifted from analysis to argument for why these two cultures clashed so heavily, and his final argument- and further, why the Jews and the land of Judaea were continually suppressed isn't without debate, but a very interesting and discussion worthy conclusion is made. There were only one or two chapters that became tediously dull which is more the material's fault than Goodman's I think, but overall I was fascinated more than once and thoroughly enjoyed my time spent within these pages.

Monique says

This book depends heavily on one of the only remaining sources for the period, the Jewish general Josephus who became a Roman citizen after the revolt of 66 CE. The author argues that Roman anti-semitism can be dated to the revolt and its aftermath; before that, he shows quite comprehensively, Jews and Romans shared a wide range of cultural and social practices. He includes a huge amount of evidence from Jewish and Roman history, but the argument remains clear.

Tom Stallard says

An insightful and in-depth analysis of the war between Rome and Jerusalem in 66-70AD, discussing the reasons for the war and the ultimate results in subsequent centuries, as well as the legacy we see today. The book itself has incredible levels of detail, sometimes to its benefit and sometimes its detriment. Having become interested in this very specific period of history, it was excellent for me, but I can't imagine the average reader, with a more general interest, would be able to sit through pages of Jewish history and analysis of Roman culture. I also found it distracting that the actual war is covered in most detail at the start of the book, presumably to catch the bookshop browser unaware, making them think the entire book moves at such a pace. I would suggest the causal reader picks this up and the library and reads the first and last chapters.

Douglas says

A massive book which in great detail describes the culture of the Romans and the culture of the Jews explaining how there was no natural animosity between them. And how by the quirks of history the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans followed by Imperial persecution of the Jews by a succession of Emperors, a policy which developed into that of the Christian Church , which blamed the Jews for the death of Christ, after its fortunate conversion of the Empire. And so the Jewish cultural narrative of seeing themselves as victims arose.

Pete daPixie says

Oh mighty tome this is. A brilliant history of two centuries, possibly the most important period in world history. Pompey,Jesus,Vespasian,Titus,Masada,Bar Kochba,Hadrian,Claudius,Josephus. If anyone reads any

history book, this is it, if only to understand the middle east conflict of the 21st century.

David Withun says

This book was not only an excellent comparison and contrast of the Greco-Roman pagan world with that of early Judaism, but also a great introduction to the first century Mediterranean world in general, explaining very well the cultural contexts out of which Christianity and post-Temple Judaism both grew. The only two faults I can find with the book are: 1. there is not enough discussion of the repercussions of the relationship between Greco-Roman pagans and ancient Jews on the Middle Ages and the modern world and 2. the author portrays the break between Judaism and Christianity as a little too clean, perhaps presupposing much later forms of Christianity (Scholastic Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) and tries just a little too hard to show the Christian Roman Empire as inherently antisemitic (for instance: how is a law issued by St. Constantine which gave the death penalty to Jews who stone Christians Antisemitic? seems simply sensible to me). Overall, great book; I do recommend.

Trebenaid says

A well written organized comprehensive look at the cultures of the Romans and the Jews. This book takes you back there during biblical times but without the religious rhetoric that so many histories carry from that era. The jewish religion is looked on objectively. Then it is compared side by side with the Romans' seeming debauchery. But done so in a fashion that does not demean either culture. "Facts, just the facts." And this author researched them. This is a must read for anyone interested in history, but especially for those interested in Biblical history without a religious slant.
