

I. The dilemma: Jews facing a hostile world

1. Tacitus, *Histories* 5.3–13 (ca. 105 CE)

3 Most authors agree that once during a plague in Egypt which caused bodily disfigurement, King Bocchoris approached the oracle of Ammon and asked for a remedy, whereupon he was told to purge his kingdom and to transport this race into other lands, since it was hateful to the gods. So the Hebrews were searched out and gathered together; then, being abandoned in the desert, while all others lay idle and weeping, **one only of the exiles, Moses by name, warned them not to hope for help from gods or men, for they were deserted by both, but to trust to themselves, regarding as a guide sent from heaven the one whose assistance should first give them escape from their present distress.** They agreed, and then set out on their journey in utter ignorance, but trusting to chance....

4 To establish his influence over this people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor....They abstain from pork, in recollection of a plague, for the scab to which this animal is subject once afflicted them.... **They say that they first chose to rest on the seventh day because that day ended their toils; but after a time they were led by the charms of indolence to give over the seventh year as well to inactivity.**

...

5 Whatever their origin, these rites are maintained by their antiquity: the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity. They sit apart at meals, and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference. Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice, and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account....

12 The temple was built like a citadel, with walls of its own, which were constructed with more care and effort than any of the rest; the very colonnades about the temple made a splendid defence. Within the enclosure is an ever-flowing spring; in the hills are subterranean excavations, with pools and cisterns for holding rain-water. **The founders of the city had foreseen that there would be many wars because the ways of their people differed so from those of the neighbors: therefore they had built at every point as if they expected a long siege; and after the city had been stormed by Pompey, their fears and experience taught them much...**

II. Torah as a bridge to the Greek world

2. Philo, *Life of Moses*, 2.29–44 (ca. 40 CE)

(29) Ptolemy, surnamed Philadelphus ... having conceived a great admiration for and love of the legislation of Moses, conceived the idea of having our laws translated into the Greek language; and immediately he sent out ambassadors to the high-priest and king of Judea, for they were the same person. (32) And having explained his wishes, and having requested him to pick him out a number of men, of perfect fitness for the task, who should translate the law, the high-priest, as was natural, being greatly pleased, **and thinking that the king had only felt the inclination to undertake a work of such a character from having been influenced by the providence of God**, considered, and with great care selected the most respectable of the Hebrews whom he had about him, who in addition to their knowledge of their national scriptures, had also been well instructed in Grecian literature, and cheerfully sent them. (33) And when they arrived at the king's court they were hospitably received by the king ... So when they had won his approval, they immediately began to fulfill the objects for which that honorable embassy had been sent ... (36) They judged this place to be the most suitable of all the spots in the neighborhood for them to enjoy quiet and tranquility in, so that they might associate with the laws alone in their minds; and there they remained, and **having taken the sacred scriptures, they lifted up them and their hands also to heaven, entreating of God that they might not fail in their object. And he assented to their prayers, that the greater part, or indeed the universal race of mankind might be benefited, by using these philosophical and entirely beautiful commandments for the correction of their lives.** (37) Therefore, being settled in a secret place ... **they, like men inspired, prophesied, not one saying one thing and another another, but every one of them employed the self-same nouns and verbs, as if some unseen prompter had suggested all their language to them.** ... (40) [Hence,] **these translators [were] not mere interpreters but hierophants and prophets** to whom it had been granted it their honest and guileless minds to go along with the most pure spirit of Moses. (41) On which account, even to this very day, **there is every year a solemn assembly held and a festival celebrated in the island of Pharos, to which not only the Jews but a great number of persons of other nations sail across**, reverencing the place in which the first light of interpretation shone forth, and thanking God for that ancient piece of beneficence which was always young and fresh. ... (43) In this way those admirable, and incomparable, and most desirable laws were made known to all people, whether private individuals or kings, and this too at a period when the nation had not been prosperous for a long time. And it is generally the case that a cloud is thrown over the affairs of those who are not flourishing, so that but little is known of them; (44) and then, if they make any fresh start and begin to improve, how great is the increase of their renown and glory? **I think that in that case every nation, abandoning all their own individual customs, and utterly disregarding their national laws, would change and come over to the honor of such a people only; for their laws shining in connection with, and simultaneously with, the prosperity of the nation, will obscure all others, just as the rising sun obscures the stars.**

III. Jewish history as a bridge to the Greek world

3. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.1–17 (93/94 CE)

5. I have taken in hand the present task thinking that it will appear to all the Greeks deserving of studious attention. For it is going to encompass our entire ancient history and constitution of the state, translated from the Hebrew writings. ... 9. I took into account, not incidentally, both whether our ancestors were willing to transmit and some of the Greeks themselves were eager to know about our affairs. ... 11 ... Eleazar, second to none of the high priests among us, did not begrudge the aforementioned king the enjoyment of this advantage. He would by all means have declined unless it had been our tradition to hold nothing in secret of the things that are beautiful. 12 I truly thought that it was fitting for myself to emulate the magnanimity of the high priest and to suppose that even now there are many who are eager for knowledge similar to the king. ... 14 **On the whole, one who would wish to read through this history would especially learn from it that those who comply with the will of God and do not venture to transgress laws that have been well enacted succeed in all things beyond belief and that happiness (*eudaimonia*) lies before them as a reward from God.** 15 Therefore I now call upon those who will come upon these books to turn their thoughts to God and to judge whether our lawgiver comprehended his nature worthily and has always attributed to him deeds that are befitting his power, preserving the discourse about him pure from every unseemly mythology that is found among others. ... 17 This narrative will in due course set forth the precise details of what is in the Scriptures according to their proper order.

4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.6.1

Having discussed the various kinds of virtue, of friendship and of pleasure, it remains for us to treat in outline of **happiness (*eudaimonia*)**, inasmuch as we count this to be the end of human life.

IV. Jews as the best of the Greeks: Conceptualizing *hilkhot kashrut* in Greek terms

5. Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96–106 (c. 60–c. 130 CE)

Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds, and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating swine's flesh, from which their father abstained, and that of man; and in time they take to circumcision. Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practice and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses handed down in his secret tome, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcised to the desired fountain.

6. 4 Maccabees 5:5–27 (c. 70–100 CE)

When Antiochus saw him he said, "Before I begin to torture you, old man, I would advise you to save yourself by eating pork, for I respect your age and your gray hairs. Although you have had them for so long a time, it does not seem to me that you are a philosopher when you observe the religion of the Jews. **When nature has granted it to us, why should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal? It is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful, and wrong to spurn the gifts of nature.** It seems to me that you will do something even more senseless if, by holding a vain opinion concerning the truth, you continue to despise me to your own hurt. Will

you not awaken from your foolish philosophy, dispel your futile reasonings, adopt a mind appropriate to your years, philosophize according to the truth of what is beneficial, and have compassion on your old age by honoring my humane advice?...

When the tyrant urged him in this fashion to eat meat unlawfully, Eleazar asked to have a word. ... **You scoff at our philosophy as though living by it were irrational, but it teaches us self-control so that we master all pleasures and desires, and it also trains us in courage, so that we endure any suffering willingly; it instructs us in justice, so that in all our dealings we act impartially, and it teaches us piety, so that with proper reverence we worship the only living God. Therefore we do not eat defiling food; for since we believe that the law was established by God, we know that the Creator of the world has shown sympathy toward us in accordance with nature by giving the law. He has permitted us to eat what will be most suitable for our lives, but he has forbidden us to eat meats that would be contrary to this.**

7. Letter of Aristeas 139–148 (mid-second century BCE)

139 When therefore our lawgiver, equipped by God for insight into all things, had surveyed each particular, **he fenced us about with impregnable palisades and with walls of iron, to the end that we should mingle in no way with any of the other nations, remaining pure in body and in spirit, emancipated from vain opinions, revering the one and mighty God above the whole of creation. ...** 142 And therefore, so that we should be polluted by none nor be infected with perversions by associating with worthless persons, he has hedged us about on all sides with prescribed purifications in matters of food and drink and touch and hearing and sight. 143 In general all things are to the natural reason similarly constituted, being all administered by a single power, and yet in each and every case there is a profound logic for our abstinence from the use of some things and our participation in the use of others...

144 ... **the laws [of *kashrut*] have all been solemnly drawn up for the sake of justice, to promote holy contemplation and the perfecting of character.** 145 For of the winged creatures of which we make use all are gentle and distinguished by cleanliness and they feed on grain and pulse, such as pigeons, doves, locusts, partridges, and also geese and all similar fowl. 146 But of the winged creatures which are forbidden you will find that they are wild and carnivorous and with their strength oppress the rest and procure their food with injustice at the expense of the tame fowl mentioned above. And not only these, but they also seize lambs and kids, and they do violence to men too, both the dead and the living. 147 Through these creatures then, by calling them “unclean,” he set up a symbol that those for whom the legislation was drawn up must practice righteousness in spirit and oppress no one, trusting in their own strength, nor rob anyone of anything, but must guide their lives in accordance with justice, just as the gentle creatures among the birds above mentioned consume pulses that grow upon the earth and do not tyrannize to the destruction of their kindred.

148 By such examples, then, the lawgiver has commended to men of understanding a symbol that they must be just and achieve nothing by violence, nor, confiding in their own strength, must they oppress others.

8. Philo, *Special Laws* 4.101–103

Now among the different kinds of land animals **there is none whose flesh is so delicious as the pig's, as all who eat it agree**, and among the aquatic animals the same may be said of such species as are scaleless. In these and other restrictions, **self-control was Moses' ultimate concern**, and he—if anyone—had the philosophical expertise to train those with natural aptitude in the practice of virtue. He accomplishes this inculcation of self-control by training and drilling people to be sparing and easily satisfied, targeting the removal of extravagance.

V. Torah as the source for Greek literature

9. Artapanus (ca. 200 BCE; cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*)

For it is necessary to take the divine “voice” not as a spoken word, but as the establishment of things. Just so has Moses called the whole genesis of the world words of God in our Law. For he continually says in each case, “And God spoke and it came to pass.” **And it seems to me that Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato with great care follow him in all respects. They copy him when they say that they hear the voice of God, when they contemplate the arrangement of the universe, so carefully made and so unceasingly held together by God...**

And the legislation has shown plainly that the seventh day is legally binding for us as a sign of the sevenfold principle ... by which we have knowledge of human and divine matters.

And indeed all the cosmos of all living beings and growing things revolves in series of sevens. Its being called “sabbath” is translated as “rest.” **And both Homer and Hesiod, having taken information from our books, say clearly that the seventh day is holy. Hesiod (speaks) so:**

To begin with, (the) first, (the) fourth and (the) seventh, (each) a holy day.

And again he says:

And on the seventh day (is) again the bright light of the sun.

And Homer speaks so:

And then indeed the seventh day returned, a holy day; [and then was the holy seventh day] and again:

It was the seventh day and on it all things had been completed.

and:

And on the seventh morning we left the stream of Acheron.