

The Post 70 CE history of the Jews

In order to reach any conclusion the interpreter must be familiar with the Jewish history of this period. Most commentators focus on the imperial cult of Rome and Roman history completely neglecting the Jewish aspect. The Jewish nation did not just disappear into the Diaspora after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Other events occurred that were equally, if not more devastating than the first Roman war and the cataclysmic fall of the temple in 70 CE. Much is known about the first Roman war from the works of Josephus but unfortunately we have no Josephus for this later period.

Evidence must be sought from fragmentary sources which include Roman and Greek historians, comments of the early church fathers, rabbinical writings, and epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological evidence. It is difficult to evaluate the worth of some of the sources as they are often written for propagandistic or apologetic reasons. Certain sources prove to be contradictory and therefore a judgement must be made regarding the weight given to the evidence. It is no surprise then that we cannot speak of scholarly consensus, especially regarding the sequence of events during the bar Kochba revolt. Jesus warned in Matthew 24:7-8 that,

“[...] nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows”.

This is a perfect summary of the period leading up to and including the Kitos War (115–117 CE). The word for “nation” is the Greek *ethnos* meaning peoples rather than nations. This was a period when numerous uprisings and pogroms occurred against Jewish communities living in the Roman Empire (more on this anon). A natural precursor to these wars was the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE which was one of the most catastrophic volcanic eruptions in European history. Interestingly, Mount Vesuvius is again building for another giant eruption. The period is bracketed by a great earthquake at Antioch¹ that nearly killed the Emperor Trajan at the start of his Parthian campaign and was interpreted as a bad omen.

¹ Noah Webster observes, “In the reign of Trajan, the city of Antioch was almost totally demolished by an earthquake. This emperor was in the city at the time, and narrowly escaped with his life. Some authors place this event in the year 114; others in 115; but Baronius has proved by an ancient inscription, that it happened under the consulate of P. Vipstanus Messala and M. Virgilianus Peto; which brings the event to the year 117. A comet was visible the same years. The earthquakes of this period were extremely violent—many cities were overthrown, mountains sunk, rivers were dried up and new fountains appeared”. Noah Webster, *A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases* Vol. 1, (Hudson & Goodwin, 1799),70

After Trajan created new provinces - Armenia, Mesopotamia and Assyria - and believed he had been victorious, several Messianic revolts² broke out simultaneously. The reasons are unclear to us, but the appearance of a comet, a Messianic symbol, may be the explanation; it is referred to in Chinese sources (and perhaps Juvenal, Satires, 6.407). The diasporic Jews of Egypt, Cyrenaica and Cyprus were among the rebels, but the newly conquered region of Mesopotamia was unquiet too.³ In Cyprus (for example) Cypriot Jews massacred 240,000 Greeks. A Roman army was dispatched to the island, soon reconquering the capital. After the revolt had been fully defeated, laws were created forbidding any Jews to live on the island. This certainly fits the prophetic words of Jesus concerning, “peoples (*ethnos*) rising against peoples (*ethnos*)”.

Segall notes that, “In 116 CE, as Trajan was about to extend his campaign against the Persians, an uprising began against the Roman garrisons left behind to hold down territory already conquered. The uprising was led by **Babylonian Jews** and set off a revolt that eventually spread to Judea, Cyprus, Egypt and Libya. While Trajan was occupied attacking the Persian Empire, an army of 20,000 Jews from Alexandria was organized and sent to the land of Israel where they led another 100,000 Galilean Jews in an uprising against the Romans”.⁴

The “Kitos War” (115–117) is summarised as follows “The **Kitos War** (Hebrew: מרד הגלויות: *mered ha'galuyot* or *mered ha'tfutzot* (מֵרֵד הַתְּפוּצוֹת מֵרָד); translation: rebellion of the diaspora. Latin: *Tumultus Iudaicus*) occurred during the period of the Jewish-Roman Wars, 66–136. While the majority of the Roman armies were fighting Trajan’s Parthian War on the eastern border of the Roman Empire, major uprisings by ethnic Judeans in Cyrenaica, Cyprus and Egypt spiralled out of control, resulting in a widespread slaughter of left behind Roman garrisons and Roman citizens by Jewish rebels. Some of the areas with the heaviest massacres were left so utterly annihilated that others were made to settle these areas to prevent the absence of any remaining presence. The rebellions were finally crushed by Roman legionary forces, chiefly by the Roman general Lusius Quietus, whose nomen later gave the conflict its title, as “Kitos” is a later corruption of Quietus.”⁵

² **Matthew 24:5** For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

³ Trajan’s War, Livius, accessed March 2017 @ <http://www.livius.org/articles/concept/roman-jewish-wars/roman-jewish-wars-7/>?

⁴ S. B. Segall, *Understanding the Exodus and Other Mysteries of Jewish History*, (Etz Haim Press, 2003), 169

⁵ Kitos War. (2016, October 24). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 11:07, March 11, 2017, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kitos_War&oldid=746004104

Segall describes the situation as follows: “In spite of the great carnage of the Jewish population in the land of Israel and the rest of the Roman Empire, resistance to Roman rule continued in the land of Israel in the form of guerrilla warfare. The most successful leader of these guerrillas was Shimon bar Kochba, a person famous for his strength and charisma. Bar Kochba’s victories against the Romans enhanced his reputation and brought volunteers to his forces. In 132 CE in a series of battles he reconquered the Galilee, recaptured Jerusalem and declared the establishment of an independent Jewish nation in the land of Israel. Bar Kochba believed he was a messiah, a person anointed by God to lead the people. The small Christian community would not support his revolt because they said they already had a messiah, so he exiled them to Transjordan. This caused a rift between the Jewish Christians and the rest of the Jewish community, but may have saved the Christians’ lives in the battles that followed.

Hadrian sent General Julius Severus, who had helped the Romans conquer Britain, to lead the war against Bar Kochba. The Jews inflicted heavy casualties on the Romans, but Severus pursued a scorched earth policy against the rebels. He burned the crops and uprooted the fruit and olive trees in areas supporting the rebels forcing the population to flee. The entire population of any city that resisted his army was massacred when his forces conquered the city. Bar Kochba was finally defeated and killed defending the fortress of Betar near Jerusalem. About 580,000 Jews were killed in this uprising and many thousands more were sold into slavery. Most of the Jewish population of the Galilee was either killed or fled. Those who fled mostly left for Babylonia. There is evidence that a few refugees from the war travelled as far away as North America. The Jewish population remaining in the Galilee was too small and weak to rebel against the Romans again.

The Roman army lost the better part of six legions as well as hundreds of thousands of Syrian and other support troops in the war against Bar Kochba and his forces. The Emperor Hadrian described the Bar Kochba rebellion to the Roman Senate as the greatest war in the history of the Roman Empire. Had the Jews fought the Romans with the same unity and ferocity as in the Bar Kochba rebellion during the first war against the Romans, when their population and resources were greater, there was a large Jewish population in the diaspora of the Roman Empire, and the Romans themselves were engaged in a civil war, it is most likely that they would have won the war. Between the first war against the Romans that began in 66 CE and the end of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE most of the Jewish population of the Roman Empire had been killed. Most of those who were not killed either fled or were sold into slavery.

Only the Jewish communities in the north-eastern Mediterranean, that existed as minorities among much larger Gentile populations and did not revolt against the Romans, were left relatively unscathed. The only major centre of Jewish civilization left in the world after this series of wars was in Babylon, which remained under Persian rule. As a result of the destruction of the major population centres and institutions of Jewish society, fringe groups emerged that would otherwise have remained at the margin of Jewish society. The two groups that benefited most from this national disaster were the rabbinic Jews and the Christians”.⁶

The Jewish–Roman wars include the following:

- First Jewish–Roman War (66–73 CE) — also called the First Jewish Revolt or the Great Jewish Revolt, spanning from the 66 CE insurrection, through the 67 CE fall of the Galilee, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple and institution of the Fiscus Judaicus in 70 CE, and finally the fall of Masada in 73 CE. **Emperor Vespasian (69-79 CE).**
- Kitos War (115–117 CE) — known as the “Rebellion of the Exile” and sometimes called the Second Jewish–Roman War. **Emperor Trajan (98-117 CE).**
- Bar Kokhba revolt (132–136 CE) — also called the Second Jewish–Roman War (when Kitos War is not counted), or the Third (when the Kitos War is counted). **Emperor Hadrian (117-138 CE)**

The Bar Kochba Revolt

The above post-70 CE Jewish historical summary gives us an impression of a period that encompassed constant wars, revolts and genocides interspersed with natural disasters. It does not however do justice to the complexities of the Bar Kochba revolt. Questions and debates remain among the scholarly community. Did Bar Kochba recapture Jerusalem from the Romans? Did Bar Kochba re-establish a form of temple worship? Was Bar Kochba as benevolent towards Christians as Segall suggests? These and other questions will be examined in the following section.

The Romans had a legion garrisoned at Jerusalem and some scholars suggest that Bar Kochba never captured the city but waged an incredibly hard fought guerrilla war in regional Judea (as he held most of Judea except Jerusalem). The coins that he struck celebrating the freedom of Jerusalem were in anticipation of his victory as he never captured the city.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.,171-172

The revolt in Judea was instigated because Hadrian “ploughed” the city and banned circumcision. Bar Kochba was finally cornered in his fortress in Betar where he was killed after a siege. A second scenario proposed by scholars has Bar Kochba capturing Jerusalem because Hadrian “ploughed” the city in anticipation of erecting new building works. Bar Kochba’s response was to drive out (or besiege the Roman garrison) and he re-established temple worship in that part of the city not under occupation (or he liberated the entire city) and struck coins to celebrate this victory. The Romans forced him out the city and he fled to his fortress at Betar where he made his last stand. It was only after the defeat of the rebels that Hadrian banned the Jews from entering Jerusalem and banned circumcision.

Ploughing the city



Ploughing is a foundation ceremony --- a coin of Aelia (Jerusalem) shows Hadrian performing the age-old rite of *circumductio*, guiding a plough drawn by a cow and a bull round its circuit to mark out the *pomerium*. Usually a single furrow is ploughed around the city to establish the boundary –the city would have a new status, certain laws (regarding taxes etc) and certain protections from Rome. It was also a precursor to new building projects in the city. It is unlikely that Hadrian himself actually “ploughed”⁷ but the coins themselves had a propagandistic value wherever they were used –they demonstrated throughout the empire that Jerusalem was a Roman city. Sacha Stern contends that ploughing was an act of *construction* not *destruction* (this is obviously not to be confused with the ploughing of Carthage with salt). According to Stern the act of ploughing was culturally misunderstood. Stern observes that, “It is tempting to believe that rabbinic sources would have seen the ploughing of Jerusalem as the fulfilment of Micah’s prophecy that ‘Zion will be ploughed like a field’ (Micah 3:12; also cited in Jer. 26: 18). This rather obvious association, indeed, is made by Pseudo-Rashi (ad b. Taan. ib.) (12th century?) and again, quite independently from him, by Maimonides (late twelfth century) in his code (Laws of Fast Days 5. 3). One wonders why it was not made in earlier rabbinic sources”.⁸

⁷ See, BMC, Pal, 82, no. 2; Kadman, Aelia, 80, no. 1. The type is purely symbolic, and need not imply Hadrian’s presence at the ceremony. It recurs under M. Aurelius—Kadman, Aelia, 88, no. 43.

⁸ Sacha Stern, *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, (ed., Martin Goodman, Oxford University Press, 1998), 242-245

Midrash Rabba has a story that explains the act of ploughing as a desire by the Roman Emperor Hadrian to rebuild Jerusalem and **the Jewish temple** from the wreckage. He considered reconstructing Jerusalem (in CE 130) **as a gift** to the Jewish people. However, when he visited Jerusalem the Samaritans told him that rebuilding the Second Temple would encourage sedition.⁹ However, Mor considers this account as polemic, “In my view, this text belongs with a number of Jewish anti-Samaritan sources that try to present the Samaritans as the schemers behind most of the calamities that befell the Jews.”¹⁰ Even so, the fact is that Hadrian (who was hated) is initially shown as offering construction work as a gift to the Jews. Obviously, something changed his mind after this initial “generous” offer. Johnson has a pertinent observation, “According to the Midrash, Emperor Hadrian at first permitted the rebuilding of the Jewish temple but then revoked his decision and the Jews were disappointed. This legend may be dismissed as a fantasy but I would point out that the Jews would not give even a half compliment to Hadrian who they referred to as “the wicked” or “may his bones rot” in their literature. The real reason for the Jewish revolt was that during the early part of Hadrian’s reign, Hadrian released the conquests of Trajan beyond the Euphrates. The political liberation of the Armenians, Parthians, and Assyrians left the Jews in a state of exhilaration at the thought that they too might know freedom from the Romans. When they learned that they were not to be released the Jews once again felt bitterness at Emperor Hadrian. The stories in the Midrash and Haggadah represent the hard feelings of the Jews toward Hadrian. It is more than Hadrian’s failure to build the temple, but his failure to liberate Palestine which earns Hadrian the enmity of the Jewish people”.¹¹

Mor comments, “Therefore, if it was not the prohibition of circumcision or the founding of Aelia Capitolina that caused the revolt, and if the emphasis is laid on the leader of the revolt, the question then arises as to the time of the uprising. Why did Ben Kosiba launch the revolt in the year 132 in particular? In my opinion, the date of the revolt should be linked to Hadrian’s visit to the region, which extended from the autumn of 129 to the summer of 130. In his itinerary, Hadrian visited Phoenicia, the Land of Israel, and Arabia. From Gaza he took the sea route to Alexandria, from where he returned to Syria. After another visit to Provincia Asia he visited Athens in 131-132.

⁹ Midrash Rabba, Genesis Rabba 64

¹⁰ Menahem Mor, *Are there any new factors concerning the Bar-Kokhba revolt?* *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* XVIII, 2012, 161-193, p.163 @ http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/Mor_SAA.pdf

¹¹ J. P. Johnson, *The 2nd Jewish Revolt: Cassius Dio Rerivseted* (HST 499 Senior Seminar), 20-21 @ http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/JP_Johnson.pdf

The urgent visits of Hadrian in the eastern provinces were political attempts to unify the Roman Empire. These visits were accompanied by building and development enterprises, and there is no doubt that these were an economic burden on the inhabitants of the Provinces ¹².....and.... In the past I have rejected any suggestion that the erection of Aelia Capitolina in the years 129-130, CE during Hadrian's visit to the region, was an intentional anti-Jewish measure. The founding of the city was part of the general policy of the Caesar to strengthen the Hellenistic foundations in his empire, and resulted from an examination of the status and function of Provincia Judaea within the system of eastern provinces, and its readiness to become culturally, socially, and religiously integrated into this system".¹³

Did the rebels capture Jerusalem?

Yoram Tsafir, has the following to say, "The foundation of Aelia Capitolina has been discussed in numerous studies and publications. A reconstruction of the order of events is presented by Cassius Dio, as epitomized by Xiphilinus. A contradictory version of the order of events is presented in Eusebius' Historia, Ecclesiastica. In Dio's account the Jewish revolt against Hadrian followed and resulted from the emperor's building of a new city by the name of Aelia Capitolina and the building of a temple to Zeus which replaced the old Jewish Temple. Many scholars understand from Dio's statement (via Xiphitinus): "*καὶ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον τῆς Διῆ τέρον ἀντεγεῖραντος*", that the temple of Zeus (or Jupiter) was located on the site of the ancient temple i.e., on the Temple Mount. Other scholars suggest a different interpretation namely, that the temple was built not "on the site" of the ruined temple but "instead of it" and in some other place in the newly founded colony".¹⁴

Two sources that support the capture of Jerusalem by the rebels are Eusebius and possibly Appian. The former, "But who would not be surprised at the fulfilment of a prophecy which revealed that the Jewish people would undergo these sufferings in the days of the Lord? For as soon as Jesus our Lord and Saviour had come and the Jews had outraged Him, everything that had been predicted was fulfilled against them without exception 500 years after the prediction: from the time of Pontius Pilate to the sieges under Nero, Titus and Vespasian they were never free from all kinds of successive calamities, as you may gather from the history of Flavius Josephus. It is probable that half the city at that time perished in the siege, as the prophecy says.

¹² *Ibid*, p., 187-188

¹³ *Ibid*,p.,171

¹⁴ Yoram Tsafir, *Numismatics and the foundation of Aelia Capitolina - A Critical Review* in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome* (ed. Peter Schäfer: TSAJ 100; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003),31—6:31

And not long after, in the reign of Hadrian, **there was another Jewish revolution, and the remaining half of the city was again besieged and driven out**, so that from that day to this the whole place has not been trodden by them.”¹⁵ And the latter, “In this way the Romans, without fighting, came into possession of Cilicia and both inland Syria and Cœle-Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and all the other countries bearing the Syrian name from the Euphrates to Egypt and the sea. The Jewish nation still resisted, and Pompey conquered them, sent their king, Aristobulus, to Rome, and destroyed their greatest, and to them holiest, city, Jerusalem, as Ptolemy, the first king of Egypt, had formerly done. It was afterward rebuilt and Vespasian destroyed it again, **and Hadrian did the same in our time**. On account of these rebellions the tribute imposed upon all Jews is heavier per capita than upon the generality of taxpayers”.¹⁶

Yehoshua Zlotnik comments that, “There is a Roman tendency for silence with regards to Bar-Kokhba. It pertains throughout the Roman-pagan period, to anything relating to Bar-Kokhba, and may very well likely attest to the reason and necessity to forget his memory and achievements. We see this tendency come into play with Cassius Dio and Appian who are silent in their essays according to this tendency in regards to mentioning the history of Aelia Capitolina as well and the possibility of the conquest of Aelia Capitolina by Bar Kokhba or its re-founding. The silent tendency however, stopped with the beginning of the rise of Christians to rule the empire. Eusebius that was the bishop of Caesarea and lived 100 years after Cassius Dio shows more transparency with regards to the events during the revolt and details in a hostile way the history of Bar Kokhba and the fall of Beitar”.¹⁷

Johnson observes, “The Building of the Aelia Capitolina would be pointless during a revolt as it would cost too much and just enrage the Jews further in their fight. Once the revolt was suppressed, however, the building of the Aelia Capitolina, would serve as punishment for the rebellion. What is likely to happen here that some call the compromising of history is that the Aelia Capitolina was ordered to be built before the war but the outbreak ceased its construction and after the revolt was put down the Romans started to build again”.¹⁸

¹⁵ Book 6, chapter 18 in *Eusebius of Caesarea: Demonstratio Evangelica*, (Tr. W.J. Ferrar, The Macmillan Company: New York, 1920) -- http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_de_08_book6.htm

¹⁶ Chapter 8.50 in Appian, *Syrian Wars* (ed. Horace White, English; Greek, ed. L. Mendelssohn)

¹⁷ Yehoshua Zlotnik, *The Question of the Conquest of Jerusalem by the Bar Kokhba rebels* (2006) @ <http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/Zlot.pdf>

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 20-21

Hanan Eshel notes the Mishnahic sequence, “The Mishnah, the earliest rabbinic classic, redacted in about 200 C.E., seems to support Eusebius. In Ta’anit 4.6, the Mishnah lists five disasters that occurred on the ninth of the Hebrew month of Av, including the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple and the Roman destruction of the Second Temple. The fourth item in the list is the fall of Betar, the last stronghold of Bar-Kokhba’s warriors, which ended the Second Jewish Revolt. The final item in the Mishnah’s list is the plowing of “the city”—that is, Jerusalem”.¹⁹ Of course, the destruction of a “third temple” (built by Bar Kochba) is absent from this list. The question will be examined in the next section. Nevertheless, the sequence that emerges so far is possibly the following:

1. Hadrian “ploughs” issues ceremonial coin —offers to repair Jerusalem as a gift to the Jewish people and possibly considers allowing the erection of a Jewish temple. Of course the caveat is that Jerusalem does not regain her freedom (unlike Trajan’s eastern provinces that he liberated) but Judea remains a Province of Rome.
2. The response is a revolt and Bar Kochba captures Jerusalem
3. The rebels are defeated and flee to Betar where they are crushed on 9 Av
4. Hadrian issues new coinage on 9 Av showing the “ploughing” of Jerusalem and builds pagan temples and forbids circumcision etc.

The question is whether it is likely that all these events happened on the same date (9 Av) or whether it is mythical typology. It would not be beyond the Romans to consider the date as auspicious to launch a final breach on Betar on this very date or issue new coins (a year later?) on the same day. It certainly had propagandistic value.

Did the rebels establish temple worship?

Because written sources are fragmentary and often contradictory this part of the revolt has to be reconstructed from numismatic evidence. The question becomes one of interpretation and also reliability as some coins are not found on site but sourced from antiquities dealers or illegal archaeological sites. Not all coins were minted or cast, many were “struck” --- an impression could be made over an old Roman coin. Eshel, states that, “If an Aelia Capitolina coin had been found overstruck with a Bar-Kokhba impression, this would provide clear evidence that Aelia had been founded before the revolt. However, since no such coin has been found, some scholars have assumed that Aelia was established after the revolt, as punishment”.²⁰

¹⁹ Hanan Eshel. “Aelia Capitolina- Jerusalem No More.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23, 6 (1997).

²⁰ *Ibid*, Eshel

Mor observes that, “The numismatic evidence is double proof that the rebel fighters did not reach Jerusalem. In excavations in Jerusalem only four Bar Kokhba coins have been found thus far, a tiny number in comparison with the 15,000 that were found throughout the region.”²¹ However, Yehoshua Zlotnik counters as follows, “According to sources from the Mishna and Rabbinical sources, the written sources referred to the disqualified Bar Kokhba coins as “false Jerusalem coins”, “a disqualified dinar”, “danger money”. Disqualifying the coins was done by the Roman authority and it was forbidden to hold them as coins. This was done because the Bar Kokhba rule ceased to exist and after the oppression of the revolt the Romans did everything they could to remove his coins from circulation and obliterate his memory. Most of the silver coins were melted and recycled and anyone that continued to hold them as decoration punched holes in them or chopped them to disqualify them”.²² Moreover, he notes that, “The results and examining the findings show that the quantity of Aelia Capitolina coins is almost identical to the quantity of Bar Kokhba coins found in Jerusalem” [p.9]. He also notes two models of Aelia founding coins (before and after the revolt) [p.13] and concludes, “The ‘small’ quantity of Bar Kokhba coins found in regulated excavations in Jerusalem is almost identical to the ‘small’ quantity of Aelia coins found in regulated excavations in Jerusalem and in fact attest that Aelia existed before the beginning of the revolt and its activity as a city stopped at the beginning of the revolt while it was conquered by the rebels who controlled it for two and a half years”[p.17].



The above shows a Bar Kochba silver Shekel with the obverse side displaying the Jewish Temple facade with the rising **star** surrounded by the name “**Shimon**” with the reverse image a lulav with the inscription “to the freedom of Jerusalem”.

Johnson remarks on the similarity between the coins of the revolts against Antiochus and Hadrian, “Hasmonean and Bar Kokhba coins have the symbols of Ethrog and Lulab to recall dedication of the Temple after their victory. Also, a palm branch with clusters of dates to represent the land of Israel is found.

²¹*Ibid*, Mor, SSA,p.177

²²*Ibid*, Zlotnik, p.,12. See his footnotes for sources

The vine which represents the people of Israel, of Jerusalem, Sanhedrin and the Sages of Israel; and finally the jug which represents the Hanukkah miracle are found on coins from both periods. The messages also are similar in each period; freedom and redemption of Israel and Jerusalem are found in both. The first revolt served as an example of the heroics for the second revolt. One of the main driving motives that gave Bar Kokhba the leadership position was the belief that he was the messiah that was destined to lead the Jews to freedom”.²³

Commenting on Yeivin’s observations regarding the inscription **Eleazar the Priest** on some of the coins Mor argues, “According to Yeivin: Without the renewal of the sacrifices it is difficult to understand why the rebels found it necessary to appoint a high priest, and without this appointment one cannot understand the minting of coins with the name of Eleazar the Priest just during the period of this revolt. This remark emphasizes all the difficulties involved in the assumption that the inscription *Eleazar the Priest* on the coins of the revolt testify to the renewal of the sacrificial cult in the Temple built by Bar Kokhba. This assumption is based on a number of suppositions, most of which are hard to accept. The central one among them is the assumption that Eleazar fulfilled the function of high priest in the temple that was erected. On the inscription on the coin of the revolt, only *Eleazar the Priest* is mentioned, not *Eleazar the High Priest*. By comparison with the coins of the Hasmoneans, their inscriptions always include a name plus *High Priest*, and we have no examples among them for the inscription with a name plus *Priest*. Moreover, if Eleazar did serve as high priest in the Bar Kokhba temple, and it was destroyed in the second year of the revolt, why does his name and title appear in inscriptions of coins of the third year of the revolt? Without dealing at this stage with the difficulties in the identification of Eleazar, it is clear from the inscription that Eleazar belonged to a family of priests and fulfilled a central role in the leadership of the revolt. But the inscription does not constitute evidence of any kind for the claim that he served as a high priest in a temple in Jerusalem that had been erected by Bar Kokhba and his lighters”.²⁴

Although his coins display the desire, the evidence does not suggest that Bar Kochba built a temple. The time was too short and building materials were probably not available (even salvaging from the wreckage of Jerusalem), he had a war to fight and a city to defend so it is unlikely. However, it is likely that a temporary altar was erected and sacrifices offered. This could even have occurred while the rebels were still prosecuting the siege against the Roman garrison stationed in the city.

²³ *Ibid*, Johnson, p.,22

²⁴ Menahem Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE*, (Brill, Leden:Boston,2016),281-282

Mor notes the study of Yaron Zvi and his conclusion that Aelia Capitolina did not include the Temple Mount, and that it therefore remained in its state of desolation.²⁵ Is it possible that when the rebellion commenced in the countryside that troops were lured out of the Jerusalem garrison to quell the supposedly limited insurrection? Many of the Bar Kochba guerrillas had underground lairs. This would leave a token number of troops in Jerusalem. Our sequence of events would now look like this:

1. First “ploughing” coins struck (gift –benevolent purpose)
2. Revolt in countryside, Roman troops sent from Jerusalem garrison to quell insurrection
3. Kochba siege of Roman garrison in Jerusalem, sacrifices on temple mount, coins struck
4. Rome reinforces Judean legions who fight their way into the country
5. Defeated rebels in Jerusalem flee to Betar, fortress falls in the fifth month
6. Final pockets of hidden rebels cleared out, second “ploughing” coin struck (punishment)
7. Total period 2.5 years (2 to 5) or 3.5 years (1 to 7)?

The fact that Rome threw so much of her might at this rebellion and is relatively silent about Bar Kochba’s exploits demonstrates the seriousness of the revolt. This was asymmetrical war, guerrilla fighting and terrorism by fanatics.

How did Bar Kochba treat Christians?

A short survey of the literature produces the following:

1. “The Jewish belief that the parting of the ways came not at Stephen's martyrdom but after Bar Kochba’s war against Hadrian [132-135 A.D.] is now gaining ground. Previously there had been no event sufficiently striking to sever the ties. Christians frequented the synagogues: they were still a Jewish sect. But Bar Kochba was hailed by Aqiba as the Messiah. This the Christians could not condone and they stood aside. The Jews regarded the Christians as renegades: the Christians would not fight for Aqiba’s Messiah. The die had fallen and there was no recalling the past.”²⁶

²⁵*Ibid*, Mor, SSA, p.,177

²⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, p. 167, Vol. 13, 14th ed.

2. “(A.D. 132-135). A pseudo-Messiah, Bar-Cochba (son of the stars, Num. 24:17), afterwards called Bar-Cosiba (son of falsehood), put himself at the head of the rebels, and caused all the Christians who would not join him to be most cruelly murdered.”²⁷
3. “It was the generation following the destruction of the Temple which brought about a final rupture between Jews and Christians...In the third rebellion against Rome [132-135 A.D.], when the Christians were unable to accept bar Kochba as their Messiah, they declared that their kingdom was of the other world, and withdrew themselves completely from Judaism and everything Jewish. The alienation process was completed. Judaism and Christianity became strangers to each other... A wall of misunderstanding and hate was erected by the narrow zealotries of the two faiths”.²⁸
4. “Cochba [bar Kochba] ... tortured and killed the Christians who refused to aid him against the Roman army...Another Christian apologist, Justin [Martyr], tells how ... Bar Kochba, the leader of the insurrection, ordered Christians alone to be executed if they would not deny and curse Jesus the Messiah.”²⁹
5. “Not everybody agreed to Aqiba’s [rabbi sage] view that Simon [Bar Kochba] was the Messiah. The Jewish Christians refused to accept this claim; the Christian author Justin Martyr tells that Simon commanded Christians ‘to be lead away to terrible punishment,’ unless they denied Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and cursed the man from Nazareth”³⁰
6. “[The] rift caused by the destruction of Jerusalem [70 C.E.] proved to be a temporary one, and a partial reconciliation did come about despite Hebrew Christian opposition to the new Judaism of the rabbis.”³¹

²⁷ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995 reprint), 37

²⁸Max I. Dimont, *Jews, God and History*, (A Signet Book, 1962),152-153

²⁹ Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, (The Westminster Press, 1988),42

³⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 31.6

³¹ According to Fruchtenbaum 132-135 C.E. was the key period, the 2nd Jewish revolt against Rome under Bar Kochba. When the revolt broke out, the Jewish Believers joined the revolt with their rabbinic brothers. However, Rabbi Akiva made the sad error of declaring Bar Kochba to be the Jewish Messiah. This is where the real rift occurred. If anyone can be accused of turning Christianity into a Gentile religion, it is not Paul, nor the church leaders in Asia Minor, but rather Bar Kochba. Dr., Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History, and Philosophy*, (Canon Press, 1974),41

Of course, some of the older literature is tendentious or polemical but the *Birkat ha-Minim* (The Birkat ha-Minim is often translated “the Heretic Benediction.”) was introduced during this period. Because a precentor had to recite this curse precisely, one who was a heretic or sectarian would not only curse himself, but the “amen” of the gathered community would affirm the curse. The effect was to exclude these minim from serving as precentor and hence from participating in the prayer community. The so-called *Birkat ha-Minim* is the exclusionary benediction or blessing—but more properly understood as malediction or curse—directed against heretics.

Wilson explains, “It is the Twelfth Benediction of the set daily prayer commonly referred to as the Shemoneh Esreh (the Eighteen Benedictions) or Amidah. Along with the Shema, the Shemoneh Esreh is one of the most important rabbinic prayers. Thus the Mishnah refers to the Shemoneh Esreh as simply *ha-tephillah*, “the Prayer.” It is to be recited three times a day by every Jew, including women, slaves, and children (Berakot 3:3; 4:1)...The Twelfth Benediction of the Genizah text (the Palestinian recension) reads: “For apostates [*meshumaddim*] let there be no hope, and the dominion of arrogance do Thou speedily root out in our days; and let Christians (*ve-ha-Notzrim*) and minim perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living and let them not be written with the righteous.”³²

Philip L. Mayo states that, “As many scholars have suggested, it is more likely that notsrim was added to the BH sometime between the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 c.e.) and the fourth century. The Bar Kokhba revolt seems to have marked a significant downturn in Jewish-Christian relations and, therefore, certainly could be a point after which the BH took a more anti-Christian tone”.³³

Isaac W. Oliver presents a balanced view³⁴ of the relations between Jewish-Christians and Bar Kochba, some excerpts are reproduced below:

³² Scholars believe that Notzrim stands for Nazarenes and minim for heretic. Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids Michigan & Center for Judaic-Christian Studies: Ohio, 1990), 65

³³ Mayo adds the following footnote: See Dunn, *Partings*, 222; Horbury, “Benediction,” 47–48; Katz, “Issues in the Separation,” 72; Kimelman, “Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence,” 238–39; Schiffman, “At the Crossroads,” 152; Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70–170 c.e.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 183. Philip L. Mayo, “The Role of the Birkat Haminim in Early Jewish-Christian Relations: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16.2 (2006) 325–344:338 @ <http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/Mayo.pdf>

³⁴ Recommend reading; Available here (with own page numbering added). Jewish Followers of Jesus and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: Re-examining the Christian Sources.” Pages 109–27 in *The Psychological Dynamics of Revolution: Religious Revolts*. Vol. 1 of *Winning Revolutions: The Psychology of Successful Revolts for Freedom, Fairness, and*

[p2.] It is becoming clearer, however, that we should not exaggerate the immediate import and impact of the two Jewish revolts as watershed moments for all Jews and Christians from this period (Schwartz and Weiss 2012). Even Dunn subsequently recognized the complexity of this matter, in the preface to the second edition of his book (2006, xxii–xxiv). The question of the “parting of the ways” has often been analyzed with a disproportionate attention given to doctrinal disputes, to the detriment of appreciating social, political, and economic factors (Tomson 2003, 5).

[p7.] It is impossible to believe that Jewish followers of Jesus living in Palestine would have been the only group singled out by Bar Kokhba for persecution, because of clear evidence indicating otherwise. For example, the Bar Kokhba letters reveal that strong measures were applied against people who refused to participate in the war.

[p9.] In hindsight, of course, few would wish to be associated with a failed campaign, and it is understandable that some would seek ways to distance themselves from such events in the aftermath of failure. Thus, in a late rabbinic text from the Babylonian Talmud (b. Sanh. 93b), Bar Kokhba appears before the rabbinic sages and claims to be the messiah, but the rabbis actually find him to be an imposter and have him killed! Obviously there is no authentic historical recollection regarding Bar Kokhba in this anecdote. Instead, as the Babylonian rabbis looked back at Bar Kokhba, who from their angle was a false messiah and leader of a failed and misguided revolt, they wrestled with the issue of how one of their greatest rabbinic sages (R. Akiva) had offered his support for this “messianic pretender.” As a result, the Babylonian sages polished their heritage by claiming that their rabbinic predecessors actually killed Bar Kokhba, thereby putting an end to the revolt they felt uneasy being associated with (Oppenheimer 1984, 156–57)..... Nevertheless, the evidence from Justin Martyr, despite the theological issues highlighted above, suggests that some Jewish followers of Jesus could not negotiate and embrace a simultaneous allegiance to their Christ, Jesus, and the political messianism ascribed to Bar Kokhba and his movement. Bauckham (1998, 228) rightly claims that “it is unlikely that Justin should have cited this single instance of Jewish persecution of Christians unless he knew it to be true” (similarly Wilson 1995, 6).

[p15.] The Apocalypse of Peter (Apoc. Pet.) is most pertinent for our study because of Richard Bauckham's claim that this work is a "Jewish Christian" book written during the Bar Kokhba Revolt (1998, 288).....Bauckham identifies two themes in chapters 1 and 2 of this apocalypse: 1) the distinction between the true and false messiah and 2) the theme of martyrdom. For Bauckham, the false messiah described in the Apoc. Pet. cannot be a Roman emperor, because Christian apocalyptic texts always make much of the imperial cult when depicting emperors. The false messiah of the Apoc. Pet., by contrast, does not demand worship (this complies with the portrait of Bar Kokhba suggested by Oppenheimer), but merely claims to be the messiah.