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## Two Jewish Writers: Philo and Josephus

**PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA** (20 BCE–50 CE). Philo was a contemporary of Jesus, though he shows no knowledge of having heard of Jesus. He lived in Alexandria (in northern Egypt) and provides us with a fairly extreme example of Hellenistic Judaism. His writings try to reconcile the Hebrew Scriptures with Greek philosophy (especially Platonism and Stoicism). He wants to show Jews that many Hellenistic ideas are actually taught (often allegorically) in their Scriptures, and he wants to show others that the Jewish religion is an intellectually respectable and profound faith. His writings sometimes reveal things about the Jewish and Roman worlds that might otherwise be unknown to us (e.g., a section of one book describes the beliefs and practices of the Essenes).

**JOSEPHUS** (37–100 CE). Josephus was a Jewish aristocrat born into a priestly family just one generation after Jesus. He became an important historian, concentrating most of his writings on matters pertaining to the Jewish people. During the war with Rome, he led the Jewish forces in Galilee, but after he was captured he went over to the Roman side and later became a court historian in Rome. His book *Jewish Antiquities* retells much of Jewish history for a Roman audience. *The Jewish War* picks up that story around the beginning of the second century BCE and continues through the siege in

Masada that ended the recent conflict. The writings of Josephus contain numerous stories about the New Testament era as viewed from a Hellenistic Jewish perspective, including details about Pontius Pilate and the various Herodian rulers, and even a few references to John the Baptist and Jesus.