



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

3 - Greek Rule & Rebellion

David Anguish

Review

- I. Alexander's Legacy—Lasting into the Roman Period (and Beyond).
 - A. Improved standards of living and administrative efficiency (including transportation).
 - B. Foundation and growth of urban centers (urban-centered empire, not rural centered).
 - C. The spread of Hellenization: Greek culture and influence.
 - D. The spread of the Greek language itself.¹
- II. What Happened When Alexander Died.
 - A. Because Alexander did not clearly designate an heir and those chosen were ineffective, his generals competed for power (a period known as the *Diadochoi*; Greek for "successors").
 - B. Initially, the empire was divided into four parts, but over time, three dynasties/centers of power emerged—Antigonid, Ptolemaic, Seleucid; the latter two are our concern.
 - 1. "Because Israel was precariously perched in the only stretch of fertile ground exactly between these two powers, it was consistently vulnerable to expansionist designs on the part of either."²
 - 2. The land was strategically located and had riches in natural resources and potential taxes.

The Greek Period—Divided Rule

- III. Ptolemaic Rule (301-198 BC).
 - A. In practical terms, from 311 BC onward, Israel was securely controlled by the Ptolemies; this was a time of relative peace and freedom for the Jews.³
 - B. The most powerful ruler was Ptolemy III (246-222 BC) who promoted scientific investigation.
 - 1. A large Jewish colony arose in Alexandria, the city that, by 200 BC, was the greatest metropolis of the Mediterranean world until Rome surpassed it.
 - 2. A famous library and museum helped Alexandria become the intellectual and spiritual center of the Greek world.
 - 3. The Septuagint (LXX) was translated there, from about 285-257 BC (tradition claims there were seventy translators; hence, the abbreviation with the Roman numeral LXX).

- C. The Ptolemies contended with the Seleucids for control of Palestine, eventually losing Israel in 198 BC after a battle at Paneas (NT Caesarea Philippi) to Antiochus III of Syria.
 1. Antiochus III tried to take Palestine as early as 219-217 BC.
 2. He did not achieve success until after seven-year-old Ptolemy V became ruler in 203.⁴
 - a) After an agreement with Philip V of Macedon in 202, Antiochus succeeded.
 - b) When he turned to invade the dominions of pro-Roman king Attalus (Pergamon, 199/98), the Egyptians took advantage of his absence to take back Palestinian regions.
 - c) Antiochus returned, defeated Ptolemy V at Paneas, and took control of Palestine.

IV. Seleucid Rule (198-167 BC).

- A. At first, Antiochus III (the Great; 223-187 BC) continued the Ptolemaic policy of limited freedom and self-government for Israel.⁵
 1. For about three years, the Jews were exempted one-third of their taxes.⁶
 2. But Rome was growing in the West and Antiochus signed a peace treaty in 188 BC in which he promised Rome substantial annual tribute; that in turn necessitated increasingly higher taxes on his subjects.
- B. Transition to Antiochus IV.
 1. In 187 BC, Antiochus III was succeeded by his second son, Seleucus IV Philopater who attempted through his chief minister Heliodorus to rob the temple.⁷
 2. Heliodorus assassinated Seleucus IV in 175, but Antiochus IV Epiphanes, released from Rome where he had been a hostage,⁸ returned to Syria and, with help from Eumenes II, king of Pergamon, made himself king.
 3. To secure the political and economic stability of the kingdom, Antiochus IV increased taxes to keep up with payments to Rome and aggressively promoted Greek ways to the point of proclaiming himself a god in honor/ the form of the Olympian Zeus.
 - a) Because of the treasures it housed, he saw Jerusalem's temple as a revenue source.⁹
 - b) He took the title, "Epiphanes," meaning "the manifest [god]." His enemies substituted a pun, "Epimanes," meaning "madman" or "insane."¹⁰
- C. Antiochus was determined that the Jews would submit to Greek culture as well as Greek rule.
 1. He did not hesitate to use force to repress Israel and its religion; this was *the third great crisis* faced by the Jews in the Second Temple period.
 2. Among his offenses:
 - a) Accepting a bribe from Jason in exchange for the high priesthood (held by Onias III), and then from Menelaus, from the tribe of Benjamin [!], who outbid Jason.
 - b) While on a military campaign to Egypt, a rumor spread that Antiochus had been killed, prompting public celebration in Jerusalem. This angered him and on his way home to Syria, he entered the temple sanctuary and carried off a fortune in sacred objects and treasury monies (1 Macc 1.20-28).
 - c) Two years later, he looted and burned parts of Jerusalem and slaughtered many Jews.
 3. Atrocities committed against the Jews, as recorded in 1 Maccabees 1.54-61 (Chislev 15 [December] 167 BC), included:
 - a) Erecting an altar (to Zeus-2 Maccabees 6.2) on the altar used for burnt offering.
 - b) Building Greek altars (and shrines for idols) in surrounding towns and offering sacrifices (including pigs and other unclean animals; cf. 1 Macc 1.47).
 - c) Offering incense at the door of houses and in the streets.

- d) Burning copies of the law.
 - e) Making it a capital offense to possess the book of the covenant or adhere to the law.
 - f) Executing mothers and their circumcised children, hanging the infants around their necks (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.5.4 [§ 254]).
 - g) On Chislev 25, a sacrifice, a pig (2 Macc 6.18; *Antiquities* 12.5.4 [§ 253]), was offered on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering.
- D. Some Jews were open to Antiochus' Hellenization, a circumstance that helped spark a rebellion (see 1 Macc 1.62-64).

The Maccabean Rebellion (167-142 BC)

V. The Maccabean Rebellion.

- A. Pressure erupted into rebellion (for the Jewish perspective, see 1 Maccabees 2.15-48).
1. An aged priest named Mattathias was ordered to sacrifice on one of the unlawful altars in Modein, a small town about 17 miles northwest of Jerusalem.
 2. He refused, and when a younger priest stepped forward to obey the order, Mattathias killed him and the supervising soldier.¹¹
 3. Mattathias and his five sons fled to the hills and began guerilla warfare against the Syrians.
 - a) Fascinating in the Maccabean account is how, after a massacre of a group (including women and children) in a sabbath day attack in which they refused to defend themselves, Mattathias and company made the decision that they would fight back against anyone who attacked on the sabbath day (1 Macc 2.29-40).
 4. They were joined by the "Hasideans" ("Hasidim" in some surveys) a group dedicated to the Law of Moses in opposition to Hellenization; they sought religious freedom.¹²
 5. Before he died, Mattathias charged his sons to "show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors" (1 Macc 2.50).
- B. Judas—Religious Freedom (ca.166-160 BC).
1. Matthias was succeeded by his third son, Judas, nicknamed "the Hammer" (Maccabeus), an effective military strategist who led the revolutionaries to victory against superior forces.
 - a) Judas was fighting a distracted foe. "The Syrian commander Lysias was unable to devote his whole attention to the Jewish insurgents because of internal divisions among the Seleucids and attacks from the Parthians to the northeast, so the Maccabeans continued to win victories despite being outnumbered by as many as six to one (cf. 1 Macc 4:28-29)."¹³
 2. By December 25, 164 BC, Judas regained control of the temple precincts and purified the sanctuary.
 - a) This liberation from foreign rule is celebrated today by Jews as *Hanukkah*, the Feast of Lights (the Feast of Dedication in John 10.22).
 3. This development, along with the death of Antiochus IV in 164/163 and the willingness of his successor, Antiochus V, to treat the Jews more favorably led to a temporary peace.
 - a) They also received a letter offering friendship from Rome (2 Macc 11.34-38).
- C. Jonathan—Combining the Religious and Secular (ca.160-142 BC).
1. Judas died in battle in 160 and was succeeded by his brother, Jonathan.
 2. Because of his political focus, and compromise of Scripture in accepting the high priesthood from one of the claimants to the Syrian throne, he lost the Hasidean's support.¹⁴

3. Jonathan was captured by Trypho and executed in 143, even though a ransom had been paid (cf. 1 Macc 13.17-18, 23).
- D. Simon—Political Freedom Realized (ca. 142-135 BC)
 1. Simon, the youngest and only surviving brother, continued the resistance and gained political independence.
 2. He used the turmoil in Syria to his advantage, demanding release from tribute from Demetrius II in return for military support against others seeking Syria's throne.
 3. In 142, he finally captured the Syrian citadel in Jerusalem (the Akra [Greek *akran*]; "citadel" in NRSV; see 1 Macc 13.50).
 4. A transitional figure who oversaw the beginning of a relatively peaceful period for Palestine.
 - a) He was the last revolutionary Maccabean and the first of the more settled Hasmoneans.¹⁵
 - b) The Jews gave him the high priesthood, meaning that he was the chief military commander, religious leader, and political executive.

December 4, 2019
www.davidanguish.com

Endnotes

¹ See Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 13-14.

² Ibid., 15.

³ Blomberg, 15, notes two important developments in this period as regards first century Judaism. (1) The development of the institution of tax-farmers, local people co-opted to collect taxes as go-betweens for the Hellenists. Rome retained this practice and the NT provides evidence of the hatred the Jews had for these agents. (2) A rivalry that developed in the second half of the third century BC between the households of Onias and Tobias. The Oniads were high priestly families who objected to the growing Hellenism of Jewish life; the Tobiads were wealthy supporters of the Ptolemies who were more favorably disposed to Greek culture. This tension also continued into the first century.

⁴ See Harold W. Hoehner, "Between the Testaments," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 183.

⁵ Blomberg, 183. Hoehner notes that he released prisoners, granted the Jews freedom of worship, let them complete and maintain the temple, and exempted the council of temple officers from taxes (183).

⁶ Hoehner, 183.

⁷ As recorded in 2 Maccabees 3.7, "When Apollonius met the king, he told him of the money about which he had been informed. The king chose Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, and sent him with commands to effect the removal of the reported wealth" (NRSV).

⁸ Antiochus IV was taken hostage when Antiochus III was defeated by the Romans at Magnesia (plains of Lydia) in 190.

⁹ Temples were often financial centers in the ancient world, and the wealthy stored treasures there in the hope that robbers wouldn't dare invoke the wrath of a deity by stealing from them. (Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009], p. 69, n. 30.)

¹⁰ The Greek historian Polybius (c. 208-125 BC) referred to this in his *Histories* 26.1a (read [here](#)).

¹¹ Here is the account of Mattathias's actions and motivation: "When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu" (1 Macc 2.24-26, NRSV; cf. Num 25.1-12).

¹² Demonstrating their zeal, Mattathias and his friends not only tore down all the altars, but also forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys found within Israel's borders (1 Macc 2.42-48).

¹³ Blomberg, 17.

¹⁴ Many believe it was Jonathan's action that led to the exodus of the group that formed at Qumran (Köstenberger, 71).

¹⁵ "Hasmonean" comes from "Hasmon," an ancestor (some say great-grandfather) of Mattathias (see Köstenberger, 71).