

Test on Hellenism and Hanukkah

Rabbi Moshe Halfon December, 2022

(Adapted from a Jewish Day school class I taught, with short answers included)

I. Study Questions

1. After conquering the Persian Empire and taking control of Judea, what were the early policies of Alexander the Great regarding Hellenism, universalism, and freedom of religion, and what was one thing he reportedly did with his leadership to promote his ideals?

- *He promoted Hellenism, but generally permitted conquered people to continue their unique religious/cultural traditions.*

- *He had many of his lead generals and inner circle marry into Persian families in order to become insiders.*

2. From what we have studied, how did Alexander relate to the Jewish culture and religion, and how did they feel about him in this early period? What do the two Jewish legends about him tell us about the relationship between him and the Judeans at this stage?

- *he seemed to have been intrigued by Judean culture and intellect, and with the peaceful conduct of the Judean leadership*

- *Two legends from the Talmud which hint at this were*

a) *Shimon the High Priest came out from the walls of Jerusalem to greet him, and he dismounted from his horse to greet the old priest as a sign of peace (legend, not substantiated)*

b) *for a year after his conquest, many people named their sons "Alexander" in his honor*

3. What happened to the empire after Alexander died, and how did it affect the Judeans? What was one main difference between the rulers that took over?

- *kingdom split between the Seleucids (Seleucus I) who ruled Syria, and Eastern empire, and Ptolemies (Ptolemy I, etc.) who ruled Egypt*

The two sections fought over Judea, with Seleucids finally winning control

- *Ptolemies continued Alexander's policies of "benign Hellenization" in Egypt, while*

- *Seleucids returned to old policy that the peoples had to adopt the Greek religion*

4. What was a polis, and what did things did it require? What were some of the factors that led many priestly and wealthy families in Jerusalem to become Hellenized within a few generations? (remember to include key words and events in your answer)

- *polis meant "Greek city-state" which featured Greek architecture, institutions and governing styles, and bringing with it privileges such as increased income, commerce and importance.*

- *a polis was usually governed by a "Boule" (council) made up of "demos" (wealthy citizens)*

5. What is "syncretism," and what did some Jewish Hellenists do that was syncretistic? What are some modern-day examples of syncretism, both good and not so good, among Jews today?

- *syncretism refers to blending two religious or cultural traditions, especially a dominant one with a conquered or indigenous one, while claiming that the blend was completely normal.*

Examples: Christmas trees and Halloween adopted from Teutonic and Celt traditions

African traditions blended with Christian in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and elsewhere

Hellenistic Judeans who adopted many Greek traditions

6. List at least 5 similarities and 5 differences between Jewish and Hellenistic culture in the areas listed below:

Arts, Music, Literature; *“advanced” vs. “primitive”*

Athletics and the Body; *Greek culture glorified the body like their gods*

Religion and Ritual; *polytheism with idolatry vs. monotheism without*

Politics, philosophy, law: *highly developed and ritualized vs local and informal*

Ethics, Human purpose, View of World.

Epicureanism: “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die...”

7. In teaching about Hanukkah, why did later Talmudic Rabbis in the Roman period emphasize the miracle of the oil lamps in the Temple instead of the Hasmonean revolt?

- By the time Hanukkah became a popular home celebration, the Rabbis feared that telling the military story might foment revolt against the Romans
- The rabbis came to dislike the Hasmonean rulers for usurping the throne and priesthood
- They generally wanted to emphasize spirituality over violence

Part II. Matching. Match these dates with their events, according to this class:

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|------------|---|--|
| 1. 586 BCE | c | a. After Hasmoneans reach out to them, Romans take over Judea |
| 2. 444 BCE | d | b. Antiochus defiles the Temple and Hasmonean Revolt Begins |
| 3. 333 BCE | f | c. First Temple destroyed by Babylonia |
| 4. 168 BCE | b | d. Second Temple is dedicated after return from Babylonia |
| 5. 165 BCE | e | e. Hasmoneans push back Syrians and rededicate the Temple |
| 6. 63 BCE | a | f. Alexander the Great conquers Persian Empire including Judea |

Match the word with the phrase or concept that BEST defines it or associates with it.

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|----------------|---|---|
| 7. Simon | h | a. “we must not fight on Shabbat...” |
| 8. Judah | m | b. became a Greek <i>polis</i> in 175 BCE |
| 9. Mattathias | j | c. “great fighters...but not the greatest rulers” |
| 10. Mod’in | i | d. Hellenist rulers of Egypt and the Western Empire |
| 11. Jerusalem | b | e. died in a suicide mission under an armored Syrian elephant |
| 12. Hellenists | n | f. “god manifest in human form” |
| 13. Elazar | e | g. Hellenist rulers of Syria and Judea |
| 14. Epiphanes | f | h. Hasmonean brother named as “High Priest-and-King” |
| 15. Hasidim | a | i. the sleepy little town where the rebellion began... |
| 16. Ptolemies | d | j. “who is for the Torah....come with me!” |
| 17. Seleucids | g | k. a motto...a prayer....an athletic event....a beer?!! |
| 18. Hasmoneans | c | l. “eat, drink, and be merry...be cool, don’t go to shul!” |
| 19. Maccabi | k | m. “that guy in the helmet fights like a hammer!” |
| 20. Apikoros | l | n. “Now doesn’t this toga look nicer than that tallit!” |

III. True/False (Remember, if part of the statement is false, it’s all false)

21. Hanukkah is a minor holiday based on entirely fictional events that cannot be proven, like the so-called “miracle” of the oil lamps in the Temple. *F – events are true, only 2nd half is true*

22. The Syrians not only had problems fighting against Judeans who knew their own land and enjoyed popular support; they also were fighting battles elsewhere in the empire. *T*

23. The Hellenized Syrians sometimes ridiculed Jewish young men who wanted to play in the Greek-style Gymnasia because they had big noses and spoke Greek badly.

F (ridiculed because of circumcision, not nose)

24. At least in the beginning of the Hasmonean Revolt, it was far more likely for rural people to support the Maccabees than wealthy folks from Jerusalem and other city-states. *T*

25. Antiochus IV was known as Antiochus Epiphanes, but some people called him “Antiochus Epimanes” - meaning “Antiochus the Fat.” *F – “Antiochus the Madman”*

26. One of the most important issues for the Syrians was the need to develop allies in the conquered countries so they could get their hands on money in the religious institutions. *T*

27. In the Greek model of the city-state, the Boule or “town council” was usually run by the people who were considered to be the most learned, religious and ethical. *F – rich, cultured*

28. Although the custom of giving children Hanukkah coins or “gelt” (not the chocolate ones!) began in the Middle Ages, such a custom may have existed earlier to remind people of the Hasmonean period, when the independent Judean state minted their own coins. *Actually True*

29. The period of Jewish independence under the Hasmonean rulers lasted approximately 70 years, until the Romans took over and destroyed the Temple. *F – lasted 102 years 165-63 BCE*

30. King Herod, the most feared and despised Jewish ruler in the Roman period, was descended from Edomites who were defeated and forced to convert by the Hasmoneans. *T!*