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The Jews Under Greece - Part 2

Last time we started with the Greeks and Alexander the Great. This kingdom and its first king were predicted several centuries in advance to Daniel; these are not historical reflections, they are predictions. Greece was predicted to be the third Gentile kingdom in the bronze waist and thighs of the four metal statue seen in the dream of Dan 2 and as the leopard-like beast with four wings and four heads seen in the dream of Dan 7 and as the buck goat with a single conspicuous horn that defeated the two horned ram and flung it to the ground and trampled it, then having its horn broken off and four horns coming up in its place with another horn growing off of one of the four and becoming great and uttering great boasts in Dan 8 and explained to Daniel as a mighty king arising. But as soon as he had arisen his kingdom would be broken up and parceled out toward the four compass points and ruled by non-family members, the king from the south and the north would clash over the Promised Land, eventually giving rise to a king of the north who would be a despicable king, uttering great boasts. In the explanation of Dan 11 which repeats this general scenario adds the fact that the despicable king that eventually would come would persecute the Jews, invade and defile the temple, set up a garrison in Jerusalem and be resisted by a group of faithful Jews.

When we combine all these predictions the general picture of Dan 2, 7, 8 and 11 is that a great Greek king would conquer Medo-Persia and beyond, then die suddenly, his kingdom being divided up into four power blocks and ruled by four non-family members and out of one of these four divisions called the north would come a terrible king who would persecute the Jews, defile their Temple and be resisted.

Historically these predictions were fulfilled and the great Greek king was Alexander the Great, he conquered Medo-Persia and beyond in just ten years, then he died suddenly at Babylon and his kingdom was broken up into four divisions and ruled by his four generals. Out of the kingdom of the north, called the Seleucid kingdom, came a terrible king named Antiochus Epiphanes IV who persecuted the Jews, spoiled the temple and was resisted by the Maccabees. It's this period of the Greek kingdom that we want to look at today.

To bring us back up to speed we've been looking at the map depicting Alexander's conquest. He became king in 336BC when his father Philip was assassinated just as he was beginning his campaign against the Persians. Two years later, in 334BC, Alexander had solidified his kingdom and set out to fulfill his father's globalist dreams of conquering the world. Having been trained by the famous philosopher Aristotle he was a rationalist and it was this rationalism that led Alexander to think of himself more highly than others. This was the mentality of the Greeks who referred to non-Greeks as barbarians and any non-Greek language as barbarous. So Greek arrogance derives from Greek rationalism the ability to use the human mind to observe and by use of reason build theories. Alexander had this mindset and when he came to the throne and solidified his kingdom he set out to conquer the world at age 22. At the time the Persians were the dominant power, Darius III was the king, he possessed a large kingdom. Nobody thought that Alexander and the Greeks could defeat Darius and the Persians. But when the forces clashed at Issus, Alexander defeated them handily and sent Darius fleeing back to the heart of his kingdom. What makes the rest of Alexander's victories all the more impressive is the fact that, comparatively speaking, he was leading a small force of no more than about 30-35,000 foot soldiers, 5,000 cavalry and a navy. Historians credit Alexander's victories to the phalanx formation and the sarissa spear that had been developed by his father. Last time we traced his conquest from Issus down the Mediterranean coast to Tyre and then to Jerusalem where we recited from the accounts of Josephus how Alexander acted entirely the opposite of his usual posture when he came to a city - saluting the high priest. This strange behavior prompted one of his men to ask why he had done this when he had never done this before and Alexander replied that he had seen a vision and in this vision this very procession and this very high priest and that the God of this high priest had promised him certain victory over the Persians. And so this is why Alexander saluted the

high priest. He then went into Jerusalem and offered sacrifice to this God in the proper way at the direction of the high priest. What I failed to mention last time was that Josephus mentions that a copy of Daniel 8 was shown to him where the buck goat with the large conspicuous horn is mentioned and identified as the kingdom of Greece and its first king defeats the ram with two horns which represented the kings of Media and Persia. Alexander was impressed with this prediction and granted the Jews whatever favors they desired. They requested to be able to practice the laws of their forefathers and pay no taxes on the seventh year. Alexander then granted them these requests, not only in Jerusalem but throughout all the lands he conquered. He then invited Jews to join his army and many did in order to ensure Alexander's conquest and these religious freedoms for as many Jews as possible. From Jerusalem he went to Samaria and we said there was a temple on Mt Gerizim there, the very temple associated with the Samaritans in the NT. So this alternative temple was standing in the 4th century BC and demonstrates that the divide between Jew and Samaritan existed as early as the 4th century BC. Alexander then proceeded south into Egypt and founded one of the greatest and most important cities of the ancient world. He named it Alexandria, after himself. In his further conquests he would found over 20 cities that he named after himself. There's not much originality in that but there is quite a bit of arrogance and that again was stemming from his Greek rationalism. Alexander was the greatest Greek, therefore who else was he going to name these cities after? But the first, and most important one was Alexandria, Egypt. Josephus records that Alexander "gave them [the Jews] equal privileges of citizens with the Macedonians themselves"ⁱ in Alexandria, Egypt. So Alexandria became a safe haven for the Jews. Over time a very large and influential Jewish population developed there. Within 100 years the Jews will make a translation of the OT into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt. This translation is known as the Septuagint (LXX) after the seventy (actually 72) Jewish rabbis who completed this translation. The Septuagint became the most popular version of the Bible among the Jews since the common Jew had lost use of the Hebrew. This Bible was also now accessible by the average Greek-speaking Gentile. By NT times it became the most quoted version of the OT by Jesus and the apostles. Quote after quote after quote you read in the NT are based in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew text that was available in Alexandria. Alexandria also came to house one of the most famous libraries in the ancient world. This made it one of the most important centers of learning in the ancient world. Scholars and bibliophiles from

around the world traveled to study in Alexandria. The Greek philosophers in fact, largely abandoned Athens and re-located in Alexandria since it was the new center of learning. The library was eventually destroyed and with it probably the greatest wealth of cultural knowledge of the ancient world outside the Bible. Now when you combine these factors at Alexandria; Greek culture, Greek rationalism, Greek philosophy, the library of learning and the large Jewish population, what happens is a melding of Greek and Jewish thought among many Jews in Alexandria prior to the time of Christ. This led to the allegorical interpretation of the Bible. This method had already been employed by Greek philosophers to their ancient Greek authors like Homer. Allegorism means you go into a text and de-historicize it. You consider it to be too fanciful, too fantastical and so you argue that it's not historical, it's allegorical. So the Greeks did this at Alexandria and through their influence on the Jews (men like Philo and Aristobulus) applied the same method to portions of the OT that they were embarrassed over. The Jewish allegorism then gave rise after the time of Christ to early Christian allegorists like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, his disciple, in Alexandria, Egypt. So the Christian method of interpreting the Bible allegorically became known as the Alexandrian school over and against the literal school associated with Antioch and known as the Antiochene school. Our point is to realize how pervasive Greek thought has been on methods of interpreting the Bible. Roman Catholicism is a full scale endorsement of interpreting the Bible according to Greek philosophy. That's what it's all about. It's getting these two thought forms together. And it has infiltrated much of Protestantism today. It's a major problem and can all be traced back to Alexandria. It was Alexander who originally founded this city and he was friendly to the Jews so they flooded into the city. He went on and conquered all of Persia and beyond to the Indus River. At the last he returned to Babylon where he began to plan further conquests. But due to being poisoned or drinking excessively and getting a flu-like illness he died suddenly. His death was so shocking that most people didn't believe the initial reports. But during his conquests he did keep his promises to the Jews and he allowed them to practice their religion throughout his kingdom and he did not force them to pay taxes every seventh year even though he did introduce Hellenization.

The concept of Hellenization comes from the Greek word *Helles*, which means Greek, and I've already mentioned one of the effects of Hellenization on how to interpret the Bible. But we want to understand it because increasingly

Hellenization became the order of the day during the Greek kingdom and it is the major cause of the upheaval described in the Books of Maccabees when Antiochus IV comes to rule and the Maccabee family resists. So it is important to understand Hellenism and what the fuss is all about. Hellenism refers to the philosophy and culture of the Greeks. We said that the Greeks sought to unify their kingdom through culture and language, the latter being the medium of transmitting the other. Language is the vehicle of culture because language is composed of words, words combined deliver concepts, etc...And the Greeks were unique in realizing that in order to unify their kingdom it was necessary to spread their culture to all the conquered peoples. The only way to spread the culture was to have a common language. So Alexander's predecessors sought to establish a one-world Greek culture through the one world language of *koine* Greek. This language was common among the Greek soldiers and it became the vehicle for transmitting Greek culture to the conquered. This, of course, is why the Septuagint is written in *koine* Greek. This is why the NT is written in *koine* Greek. It was a modification of Attic Greek and paved the way for modern Greek. In any case, the problem was that Greek culture was in collision with Jewish culture on virtually every front. First, in terms of society, Jewish society was built around the family unit, tribal identity and private land ownership and development whereas Greek society was essentially built around the concept of the city-state and was propagated by city communities. Second, in terms of governmental structure, the Jews installed into official leadership those who met the requirements of tribal descent and these leaders directed public affairs whereas the Greeks elected their officers, discussed public affairs and participated in their government. Third, in terms of the foundation of life, the foundation of Jewish life was the worship of God centering on the Temple whereas the foundation of Greek life was good health centering on the gymnasium. "To the Greek," and see if this doesn't completely blow you away to realize how influenced modern American culture is by Greek culture and not the Bible, "health was the foundation." Good health and exercise were the ultimate shrine in Greek culture. Now I'm not saying that good health is wrong. Good health is an implication of the creation-design. God created our bodies with a design that is fitted to the food that He created. And we have a whole issue with this in the food and supplement industry of the United States. I'm not attacking that. We're right to be antagonistic to food modifications because that involvement is a logical implication of random-chance evolution, not purposeful-designed creation. So what I'm attacking is

the foundation of all of life being health and where pagan thought takes that foundation. Health, according to the Greek physician Hippocrates, is attained as follows, “Even when all is known, the care of a man is not yet complete, because eating alone will not keep a man well; he must also take exercise. For food and exercise, while possessing opposite qualities, yet work together to produce health.” This is fine in and of itself but where paganism takes this is really going to bother a lot of Jews. Think about what happens when a pagan society gets crazy about health? An over-emphasis on the form of the human body and sexuality. Greece was overrun with sexuality in every form; homosexuality, Aristotle was a homosexual, bisexuality, pedophilia and of course fornication. This is where the clash was felt by the Jews. But the problem was more widespread. The entire culture that developed because of it was distasteful to the Jew. Notice this description of Greek culture that derived from health and exercise being ultimate, “The gymnasium was a popular institution where the young men met for physical exercises and social activities. Activities of all kinds—games, contests, sports, dancing, music, poetry—were emphasized. Greek communities had a stadium for athletic contests, a hippodrome for chariot racing, a theater for dramatic presentations. Literature and art occupied a prominent place in their lives. Being intellectually alert, they had their schools, their philosophical discussions, their training centers for students of art and sculpture. Every building must be adorned with sculpture. These adornments were statues of the gods, of prominent citizens, of philosophers and athletes. To the Greeks a city without art was unthinkable. They developed the most beautiful language of any people in history. It was an instrument of such beauty, precision and refinement that any other language seemed barbarous in comparison with it. No wonder that the Greek language conquered the world in a short time after the conquests of Alexander. Manners and customs of living also were vastly different from those of Orientals. Their dress was gay, even gaudy, with mantles and broad brimmed hats. Their emphasis on proper styles and the attention they gave to proper personal appearance would impress the Jews as frivolous, vain, useless and even wicked. Pleasure of all kinds was not only legitimate but desirable. Life should be enjoyed today—tomorrow we may not have. No wonder Epicureanism became the accepted standard of thought and behavior for most of the Greek people. Religion, particularly as it related to future life, had but little place in their thoughts.” Why did religion as it related to the future have little place in their thoughts? Because they were thinking about all these other things, the

now, *carpe diem*, seize the day. And tell me why religion has so little place in the thoughts of Americans today? Because we're obsessed with health, we're obsessed with sexuality, we're obsessed with sports, we're obsessed with classical Greek education, we're obsessed with memorializing ourselves by statues. When people say we're a biblical culture I think that's just nonsense. More so at the time of the founding but today, hardly a vestige. The Greek ideals of culture hold sway. And the Jews were now being confronted with it. As Wood says, "The problem facing the Jews under Greek control was could they accept Hellenism and remain loyal to the faith of their fathers? Some felt that they could, and hence a few openly accepted it. The big majority, however, felt that they could not become Hellenists without betraying their faith. This heathenism must be resisted even unto death." Interestingly this is our struggle in our culture too; we are struggling to focus on God when our culture is focusing on the human body, on sexuality, on health, on eating, on luxury, on education, on sports, on dancing, on music. This was the struggle then and this is the struggle now. And again, I'm not saying these things don't have a place. I'm just saying that biblically if you allow those things a central role in your life then the worship of God will go away. It has to; you can't worship God and the human body. This is what causes cultural divides. People who stand on one side of the fence or the other. What has happened due to the conflict of Hellenism and Jewish culture? Acts 6. What's Acts 6? A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jewish widows against the native Hebrews. That complaint was rooted in the Hellenism that was introduced by Alexander and exploited by later Greek rulers. They are going to press and press and press the Jews to Hellenize and this is going to present a serious danger to Jewish culture that comes all the way down to the NT and even to our modern day.

So Alexander dies in Babylon in 323BC. He was only 33 years of age and his death fulfills prophecy in the Book of Daniel. Who's going to rule the kingdom now? His only offspring, Alexander IV, was born after his death. According to one secular historian when Alexander was dying he was asked to whom the kingdom should go and his reply was, "to the strongest." So what happened? Dissension erupted that went on for forty years. During these forty years his only son Alexander IV and his half-brother Philip Arrhidaeus, the two most obvious candidates for the throne, were both murdered. Eventually the four power blocks described in the Book of Daniel formed; the branch of his generals Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy and Seleucus.

Now the two were interested in forming a sandwich around the province of Judea. The kings of the north are the Seleucids, they stem from Seleucus and their empire includes Syria, Babylon and reaches to the Far East. The kings of the south are the Ptolemies, they stem from Ptolemy and their empire is Egypt. So on the frontier between these two kingdoms is Judea and the Jews that lived in the land with their Temple and the priesthood. So this is the pressure point because that's all Jewish culture and here come the Greeks.

At first the Ptolemies took the upper hand, Ptolemy I Soter (323-285BC), prophesied in Dan 11:5. Josephus reports, "Ptolemy, the son of Lagus, underwent the reverse of that denomination, of Savior, which he then had. (4) He also seized upon Jerusalem, and for that end made use of deceit and treachery; for as he came into the city on a Sabbath day, as if he would offer sacrifice, he, without any trouble, gained the city; while the Jews did not oppose him for they did not suspect him to be their enemy; and he gained it thus, because they were free from suspicion of him, and because on that day they were at rest and quietness; and when he had gained it, he reigned over it in a cruel manner."ⁱⁱ Toward the end of his rule he began to recognize good qualities in the Jews and treated them with more consideration. Then his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246BC) came to the throne. He's prophesied in Dan 11:6. He continued to treat the Jews fairly even setting many Jewish slaves free. Josephus says, "He procured the law to be interpreted, and set free those that were come from Jerusalem into Egypt,"ⁱⁱⁱ He is the one who built the great library of Alexandria which no longer exists. It was during his reign that the Jews produced the Septuagint translation of the Bible in Alexandria.

So let's take an aside on the Septuagint. As we mentioned, the Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew OT which is most commonly quoted by Jesus and the apostles in the NT. It is often symbolized by the Roman numerals LXX which stands for the number '70'. The reason is due to a legend which attached itself to the production of the translation. The historical situation was that in the 3rd century BC the Jews of Alexandria were living among Greek speakers and gradually gave up their Hebrew and spoke Greek only. Parents realized that their children would not be conversant with the Hebrew Scriptures without a Greek translation. Neither would they have access to the traditional prayers and thanksgivings in the

synagogue. Therefore the story goes that ‘70’ Jewish scholars, actually ‘72’ went to Alexandria, Egypt to translate the first five books of Moses into Greek. As time went on the term Septuagint was attached to the whole OT in Greek. In the letter of Aristeas the story is further embellished by the claim that the work was completed in just ‘72’ days and that each scholar worked in a separate cell and that when they came together all ‘72’ translations agreed word for word. This gave rise to the Septuagint being considered a divinely inspired translation. Yet Jeshua ben Sira indicates his familiarity with the Greek version of the OT and says that “what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this work, but even the law itself, the prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little as originally expressed.” So the Greek translation was made but as to it being a divinely inspired translation, that is embellishment only. However, this embellishment was taken even further by Christian writers who expanded the concept of divine inspiration to the Apocrypha. As F. F. Bruce says, “It was Christian writers who extended their work to the rest of the Old Testament and, taking over Philo’s belief in their inspiration, extended that also to cover the whole of the Greek Old Testament, including those books that never formed part of the Hebrew Bible.”^{iv}

At any rate, the Septuagint translation was instrumental in preparing the way for the gospel to go out in the Roman world.^v Think of the situation in the NT. The Lord comes to His own, the Jews, and His own received Him not. Where was the gospel going out to now? To the Gentiles. And what better than to already have a Gentile translation in the common language of the Gentiles already at hand? So in hindsight you see that this translation was waiting in the wings, so to speak, so that when it was time for the gospel to go out there was already a Bible in the common language. The translation work was begun during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246BC).

After Philadelphus we come to a series of kings, each prophesied briefly in Daniel 11 and we won’t go through all of them. If you want the details of these kings you can order the audio on Daniel 11; Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221BC; Dan 11:7-9), Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204BC; Dan 11:11-12, 14-15), Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204-181BC; Dan 11:17), and Ptolemy VI Philometer (181-145BC; Dan 11:25). At the same time the Seleucid kings are interwoven in the prophecies with the Ptolemaic kings; Seleucus I Nicator

(312-281BC; Dan 11:5), Antiochus I Soter (281-262BC; Dan 11:5), Antiochus II Theos (262-246BC; Dan 11:6), Seleucus II Callinicus (246-227BC; Dan 11:7-9), Seleucus III Soter (227-223BC; Dan 11:10), Antiochus III the Great (223-187BC; Dan 11:10-11, 13, 15-19). He's fairly important because he took control of Judea in 198BC at Battle of Baniyas. So he was the king that took Judea away from the Ptolemaic kings. He was a good king, he treated Jews fairly. Then came Seleucus IV Philopater (187-176BC; Dan 11:20) and finally one of the most important figures of all history, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163BC; Dan 11:21-32). This man and the Jews are going to have a major conflict. As we mentioned before, this conflict is due to Hellenism. Antiochus was a rabid proponent of Hellenism and he couldn't get all the Jews to cooperate. He got some of them to cooperate but the majority did not cooperate. Every other nation cooperated so what was wrong with these Jews? Well, frankly what was wrong was they didn't think they could adopt Hellenism and remain faithful to the word of God. So they gave him a hard time. Next time we will look at the Jews who gave him a hard time, the Maccabees and that conflict as it is prophesied in the Book of Daniel and as it is historically fulfilled in the book of 1 Maccabees.

ⁱ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱⁱ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

^{iv} Bruce, p 44.

^v Bruce, p 50.

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