

MAGEN DAVID YESHIVAH  
CELIA ESSES HIGH SCHOOL

JEWISH HISTORY  
CLASSICAL PERIOD  
THROUGH  
THE RISE OF ISLAM

**Spring 2012**

**Spring 2013**

## Judea: The Basics

A country's location, geography and climate always play a role in the development of that country.

### Location:

Judea is located in the Middle East, along the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Parthia (Jordan), and Egypt. It lies at the Junction of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa; and is considered part of the Fertile Crescent.

### Geography:

Although small in size, Judea encompasses the varied topographical features of an entire continent, ranging from forested highlands and fertile green valleys to mountainous deserts and from the coastal plain to the semitropical Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth.

### Climate:

Judea's climate is characterized by much sunshine, with a rainy season from November to April. Total annual precipitation ranges from 20-50 inches (50-125 cm.) in the north to less than an inch (2.5 cm) in the far south. Regional climatic conditions vary considerably: hot humid summers and mild, wet winters on the coastal plain; dry, warm summers and moderately cold winters, with rain and occasional light snow, in the hill regions; hot, dry summers and pleasant winters in the Jordan Valley; and semi-arid conditions, with warm to hot days and cool nights, in the south.

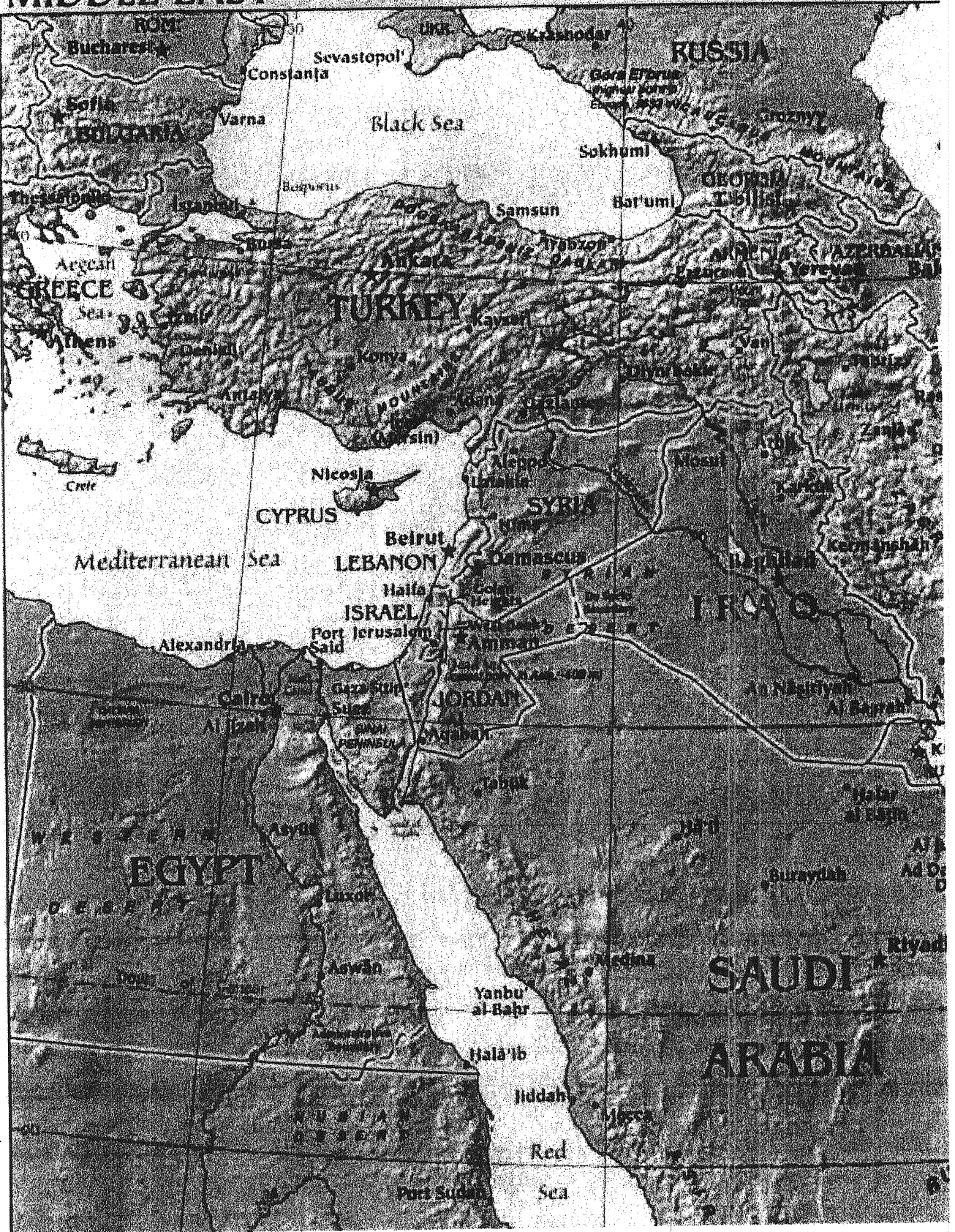
### Deuteronomy 11:10-13

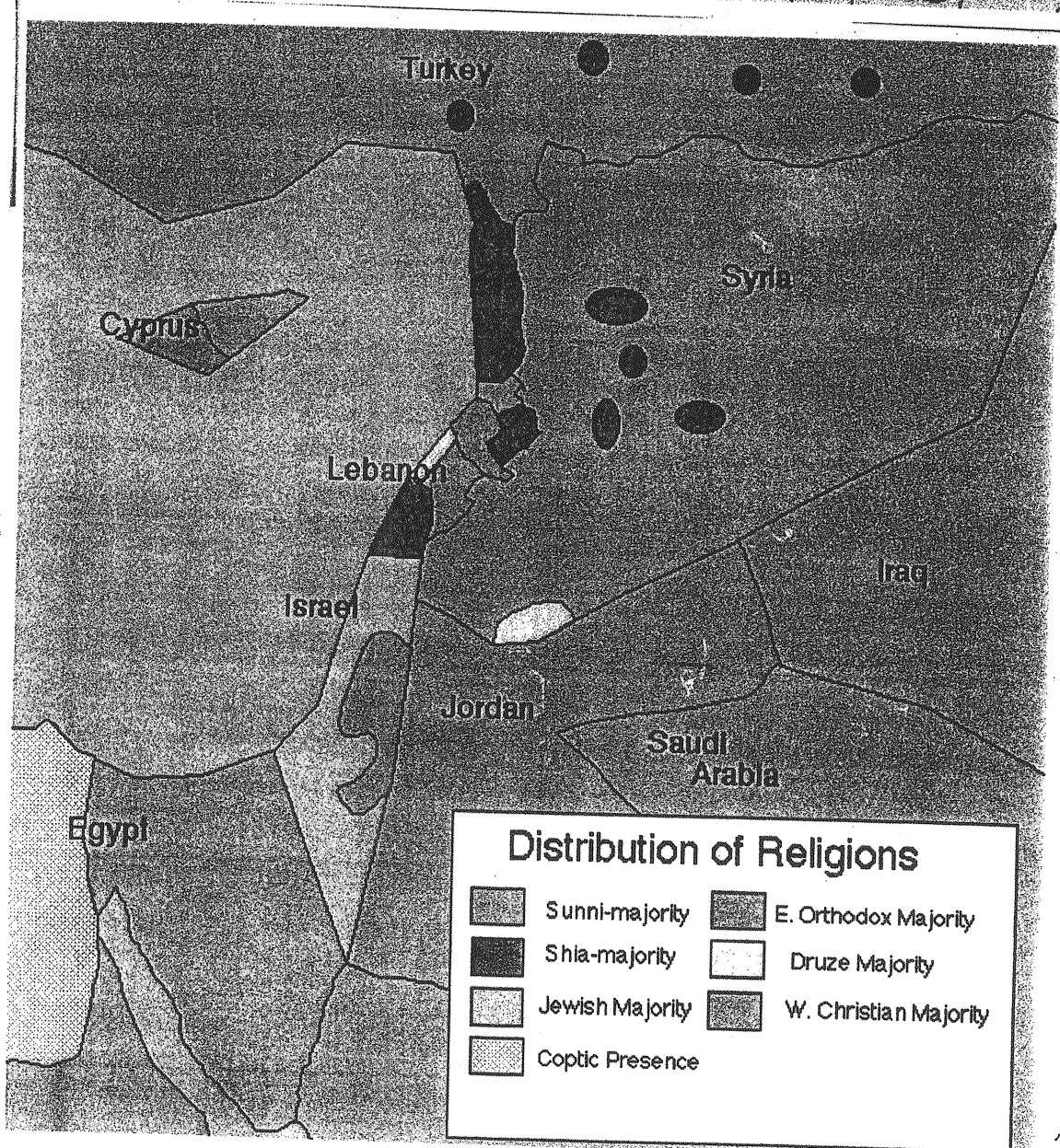
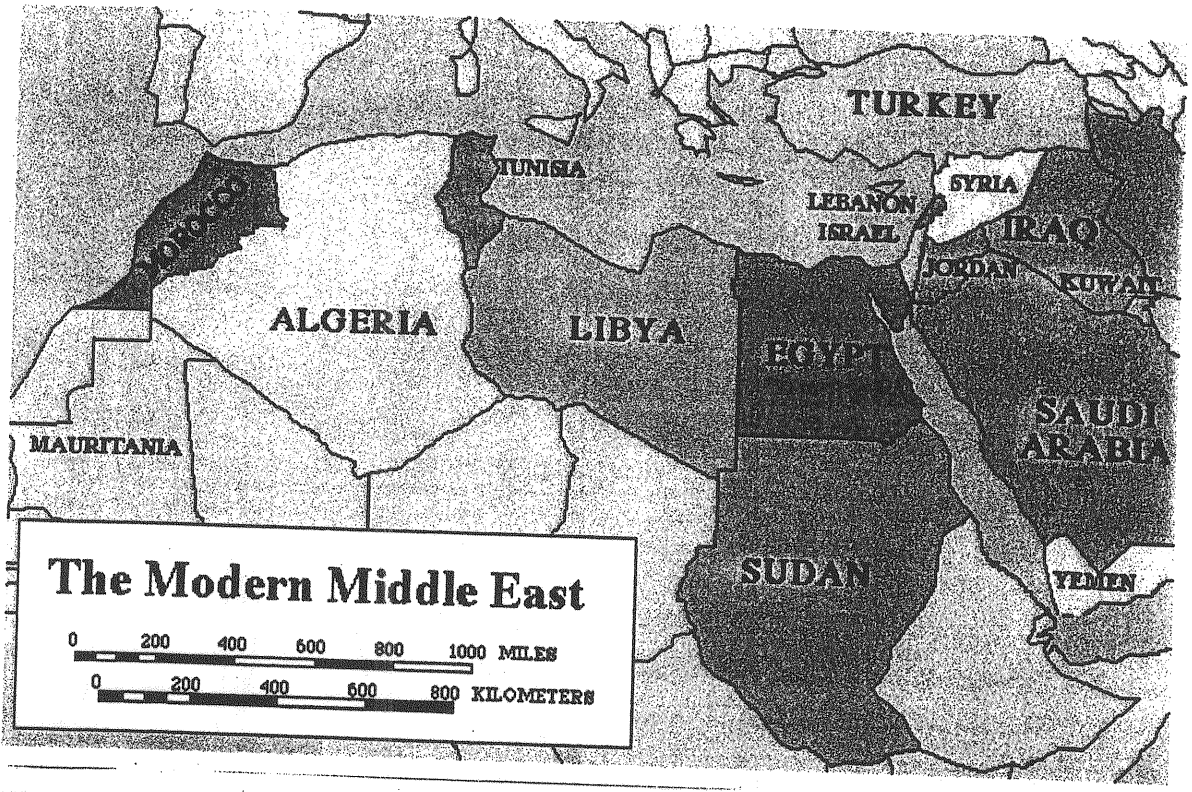
For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain you sowed had to be watered by your own labors, like a vegetable garden; but the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its waters from the rains of heaven. It is a land in which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

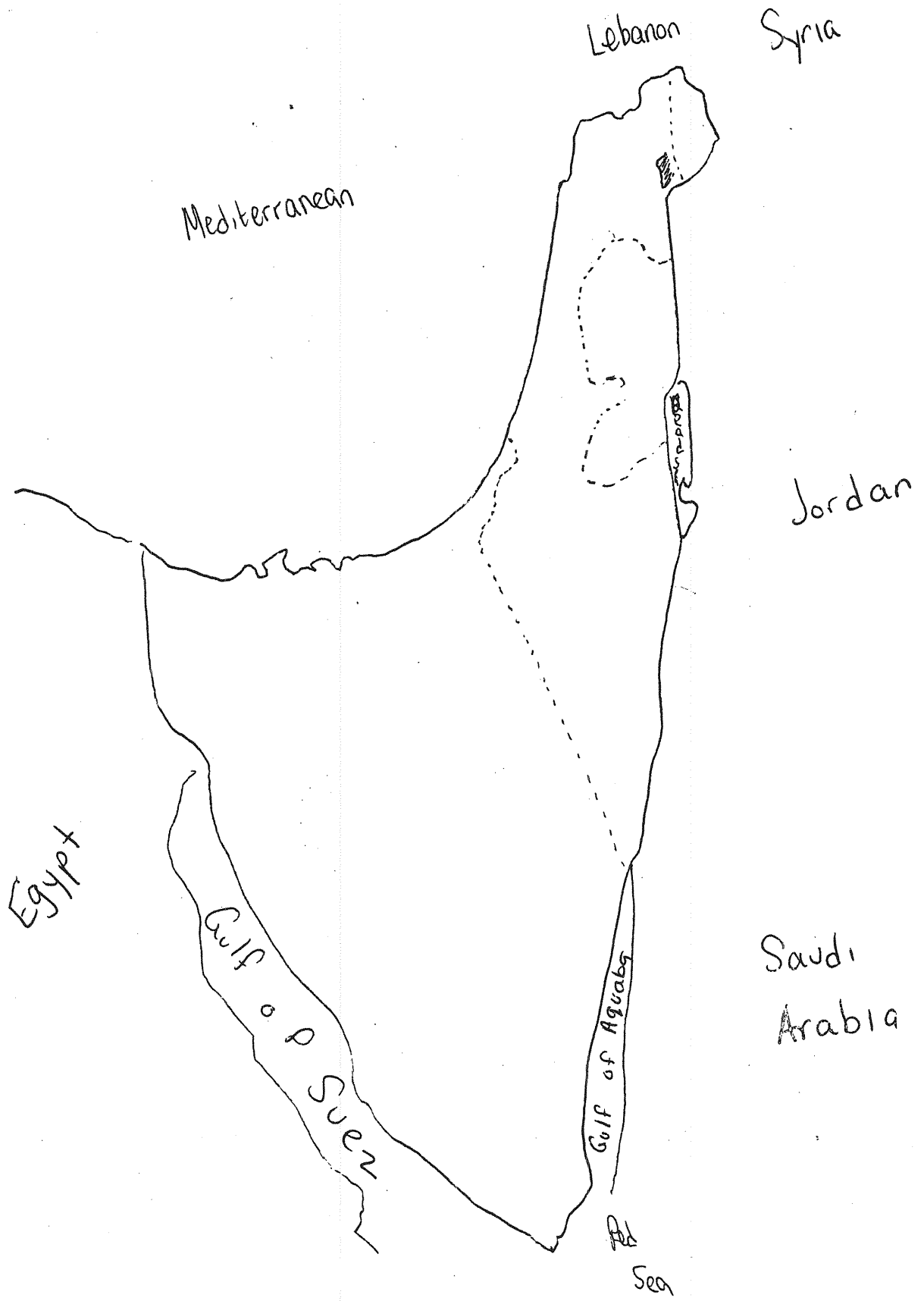
### Questions:

1. Describe the climate of Judea.
2. Why would Judea be significant to Great Empires?
3. The way the Jewish people come to Israel is described twice by two verbs. Discuss the significance.
4. According to Moses in Deuteronomy, how is Judea different from Egypt? Why did he choose that difference when there are many others?

# MIDDLE EAST







## Return to Zion: Cyrus

Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and issued this declaration one year later, in 538 BCE. Once work began, Samaritans, who had been brought to Judea by the Assyrians, wished to assert their presence and political power. They approached Zerubabel ben Shealtiel and asked to participate in the building of the Temple. His response was that it is a Jewish obligation to build the Temple but the Samaritans would be welcome to worship after it is built. The Samaritan leaders then wrote to the Persian kings accusing the Jews of disloyalty and the intention to separate themselves from the Persian Empire once the rebuilding was complete. During the reign of Cambyses II, work on the Temple stopped for nine years. When Darius became king of Persia, he recognized the decree of Cyrus, which granted the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple. [Cyrus-Cambyses II-Darius]

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four ends (of the earth), ... whose rule Bel and Nebo<sup>1</sup> love, whose kingship they require for their satisfaction. ... I pursued peace in Babylon and in all his holy cities. As for the Babylonians, who against the will of their gods were subjected to a yoke not appropriate to their status ... I relieved their weariness. ... The great lord Marduk was well pleased with my deeds and sent generous blessings to myself...

...and the settlements on the other side of the Tigris, where their temples have long lay in ruin, I returned the gods who lived therein to their places and provided them with permanent temples. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned them to their homes. Furthermore, upon the command of the great lord Marduk, the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus had brought to Babylon, so enraging the lord of the gods, I ensconced securely in their abodes, the places which make them happy.

Daily may all the gods whom I have brought back to their holy sites speak on my behalf for long life and plead my favor before Bel and Nebo. To my lord Marduk may they say thus: Cyrus the king who worships you, and Cambyses his son ... all of them I settled in a peaceful place.

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<sup>1</sup> Mesopotamian gods.

## Return to Zion: Ezra

Ezra the Scribe - haSofer - emerged as one of the leaders of the generation of Jews that returned to Judea, during the reign of King Artaxerxes (464-424BCE). Ezra provided leadership and education for the Jewish people who returned to Judea. According to Jewish tradition, Ezra established the Men of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesset HaGedolah), who began the canonization of the Tanakh and the Siddur. The following is his description of the decree of King Cyrus, which allowed the Jews to return to Judea with the purpose of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Second Temple. Taken from Ezra, Chapter 1.

In the first year of the King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> was fulfilled, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows:

Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of you of all His people - may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

So the chiefs of the clans of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, all whose spirit had been roused by God, got ready to go up to build the House of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. All their neighbors supported them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with livestock, and with precious objects, besides what had been given as a freewill offering. King Cyrus of Persia released the vessels of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his god.

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<sup>1</sup> For thus said the Lord: When Babylon's seventy years are over, I will take note of you, and I will fulfill you to My promise of favor - to bring you back to this place. (Jeremiah 29:10)

## Return to Zion, Enrichment: Balfour Declaration

During World War I, the Jews lobbied the British for permission to establish a Jewish State in the land of Israel. The British were fighting the Ottoman Empire who controlled the territory, which was then called Palestine. The following is the text of what has become known as the Balfour Declaration. It took the form of a letter from Lord Balfour, the Foreign Minister of England, to Baron Rothschild, a financier of the Zionist movement at the time. It was dated November 2, 1917.

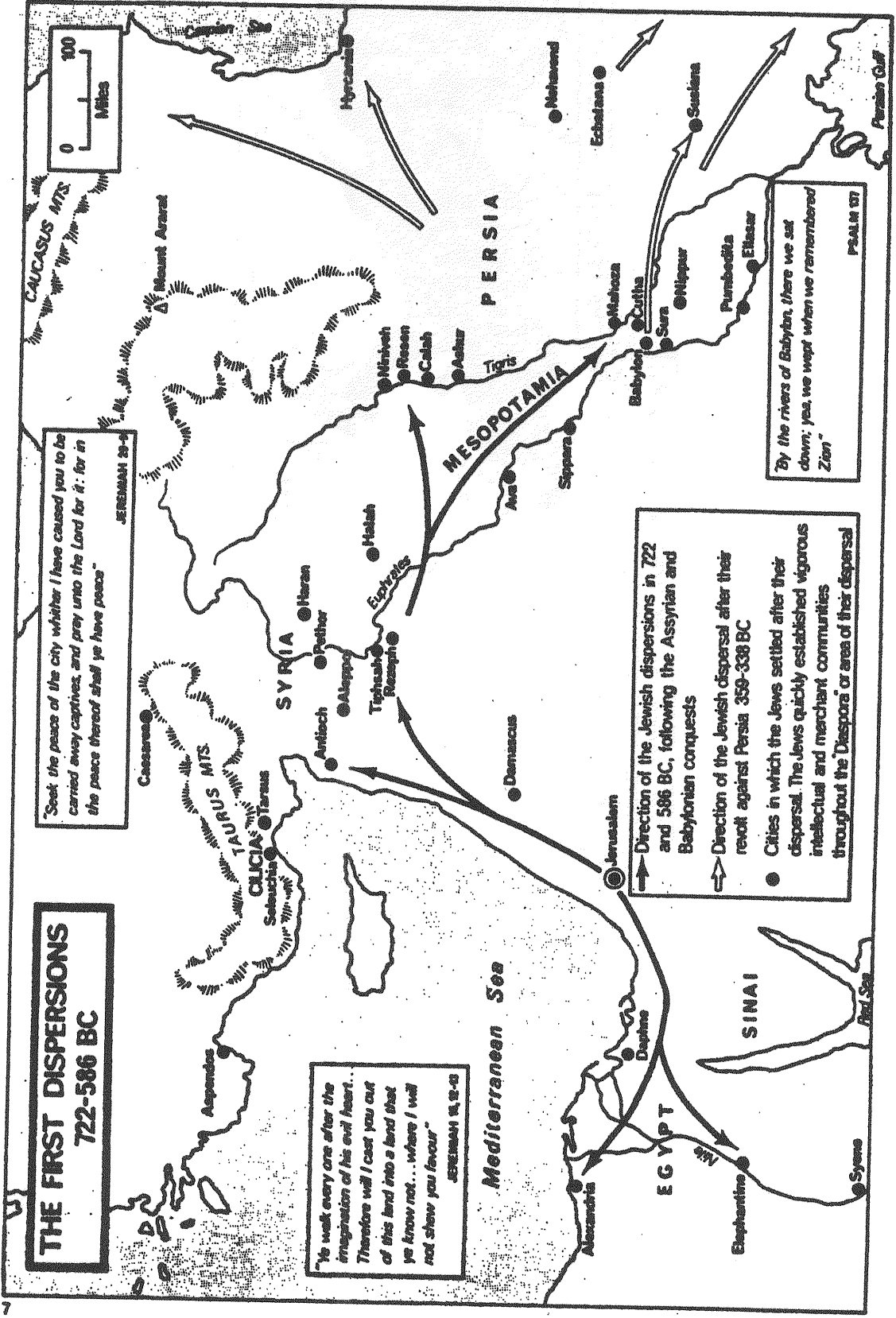
His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use the best of their endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.



## Return to Zion: Exercises

1. Describe the tone of the declaration of Cyrus.
  - a. Persian version:
  - b. Ezra's version:
2. What can you learn about the intended audiences and the times from the versions of the declaration? Why?
3. Why did Zerubabel ben Shealtiel turn down the offer of the Samaritans to help rebuild the Temple? Was it a wise choice?

Enrichment question: How is the Balfour Declaration similar to and different from the declaration of Cyrus?



**THE FIRST DISPERSIONS  
722-586 BC**

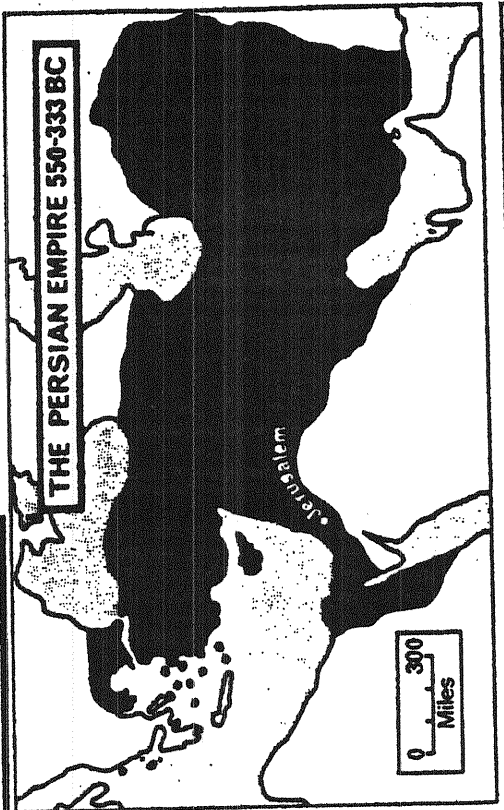
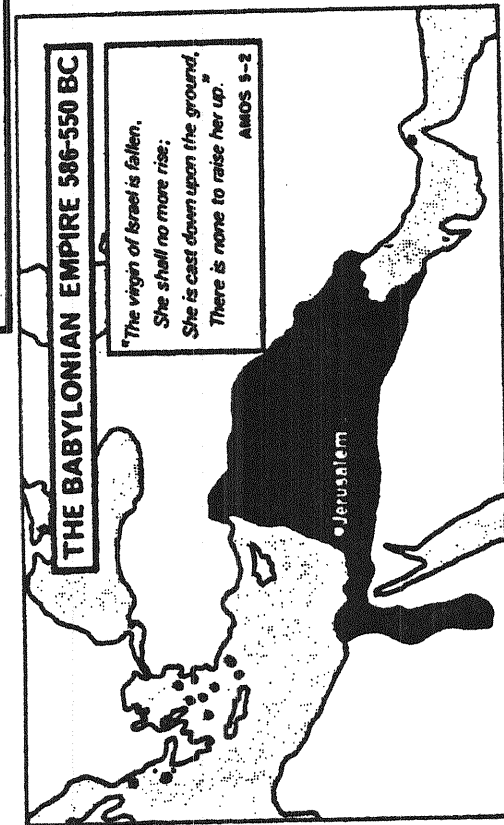
*"Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace"*  
JEREMIAH 29-9

*"Ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart... Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not... where I will not show you favour"*  
JEREMIAH 9, 1-13

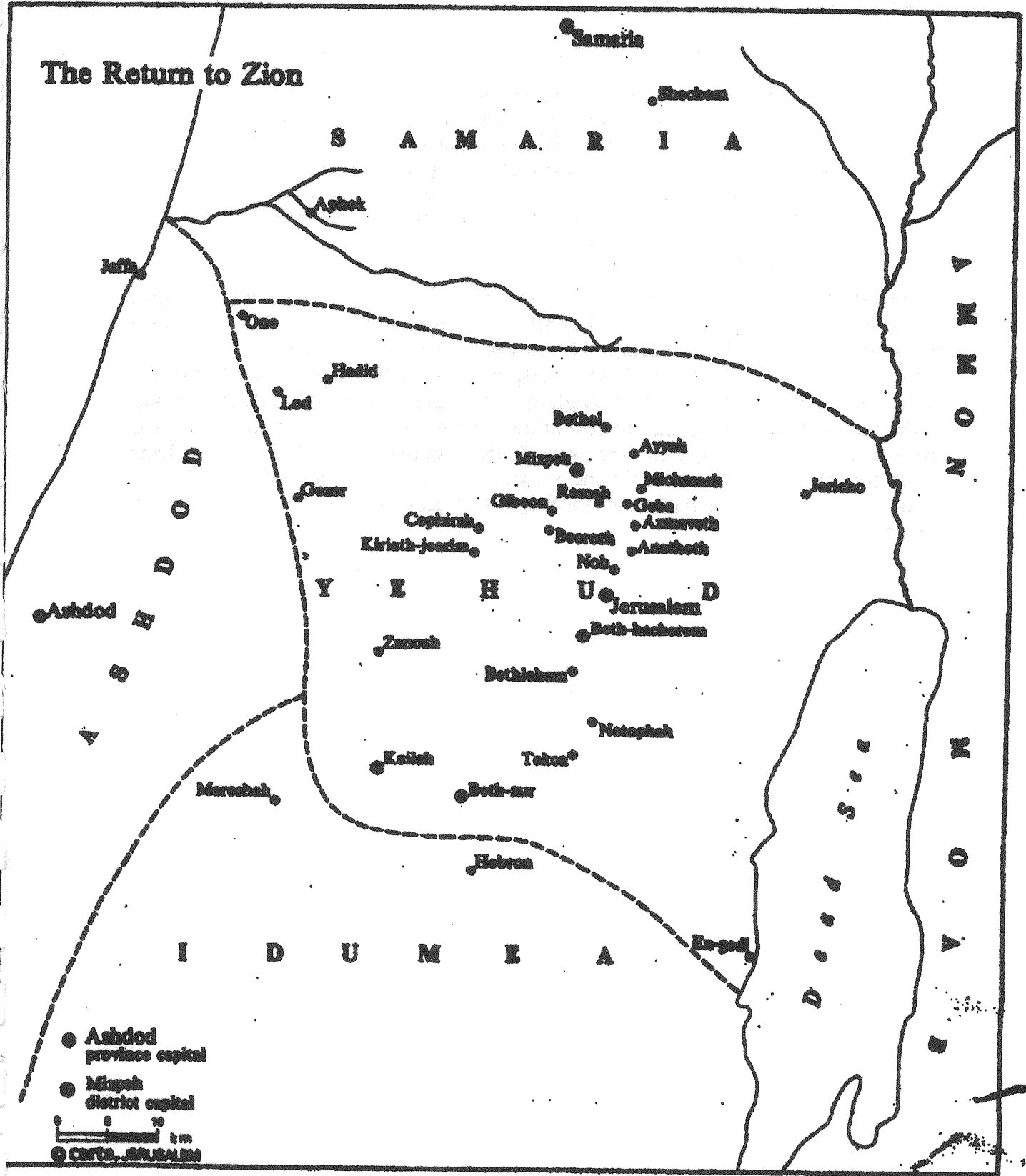
→ Direction of the Jewish dispersions in 722 and 586 BC, following the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests  
 ↑ Direction of the Jewish dispersal after their revolt against Persia 359-338 BC  
 ● Cities in which the Jews settled after their dispersal. The Jews quickly established vigorous intellectual and merchant communities throughout the Diaspora or area of their dispersal

*"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion"*  
PSALM 137

**THE IMPERIAL POWERS 586-165 BC**



# The Return to Zion



## Beginnings I: Nehemiah

Nehemiah was one of King Artaxerxes's advisors. He requested permission to join his brothers in Judea, who were rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem. He took over administrative duties, represented the Jewish people to the king of Persia, and demanded thorough commitment from those who returned to Judea for the rebuilding. The following is a description of the hardships the Jews faced with the surrounding population when they were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and how the Jews sought to resolve their differences with those people. Nehemiah, Chapter 4.

From that day on, half my servants did work and half held lances and shields, bows and armor. And the officers stood behind the whole house of Judah who were rebuilding the wall [of Jerusalem]. The basket carriers were burdened, doing work with one hand while the other held a weapon. As for the builders, each had his sword girded at his side as he was building. The trumpeter stood beside me. I said to the nobles, the prefects, and the rest of the people, "There is much work and it is spread out; we are scattered all over the wall, far from one another. When you hear a trumpet call, gather yourselves to me at that place; our God will fight for us!" And so we worked on, while half were holding lances, from the break of day until the stars appeared.

## Beginnings II: Nehemiah

The following is a pledge that Nehemiah caused the Jewish people to take during his leadership of the people. Nehemiah, Chapter 10.

We will not give our daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land, or take their daughters for our sons.

The peoples of the land who bring their wares and all sorts of foodstuff for sale on the Sabbath day - we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or a holy day.

We will forgo [the produce of] the seventh year, and every outstanding debt.

We have laid upon ourselves obligations:

- To charge ourselves one third of a shekel yearly for the service of the House of our God
  - For the rows of bread
  - For the regular meal offering
  - And for the regular burnt offering
  - For those of the Sabbaths, new moons, festivals
  - For consecrations
  - For sin offerings to atone for Israel
  - And for all the work in the House of our God.

We have cast lots [among] the priests, the Levites, and the people, to bring wood offering to the House of our God by clans annually at set times in order to provide fuel for the altar of the Lord our God, as is written in the Torah.

And we undertake to bring to the House of the Lord annually the first fruits of our soil, and of every fruit of every tree; also, the firstborn of our sons and our beasts, as is written in the Torah; and to bring the firstlings of our cattle and flocks to the House of our God for the priests who minister in the House of our God.

We will bring to the storerooms of the House of our God the first part of our dough, and our gifts [of grain], and of the fruit of every tree...

We will not neglect the House of our God.

## Beginnings I and II: Nehemiah

1. What were Nehemiah's concerns during the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem?
2. Why is a pledge necessary? What can you learn about the concerns of the leaders from what the people were made to pledge?

## Alexander Meets the Jews: The Talmud

Ravina and Rav Ashi redacted the Babylonian Talmud in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century of the Common Era. The Talmud is basically comprised of legal discussions of amoraim who lived from 200- 500CE (approximately). They are known as Amoraim. Even though, the main purpose of the Talmud is to develop Jewish Law and maintain traditions and legal opinions, the Talmud often digresses and discusses its views on important historical events. This sugyah (portion) of the Talmud is taken from Masekhet Yoma, which for the most part discusses the laws of Yom Kippur.

The twenty-fifth day of Tebeth is the day of Mount Gerizim, on which no mourning is permitted. It is the day on which the Cutheans demanded the House of our God from Alexander the Macedonian so as to destroy it, and he had given them permission, whereupon someone informed Simeon the Just. What did the latter do? He put on his priestly garments, robed himself in priestly garments, some of the noblemen of Israel went with him carrying fiery torches in their hands, they walked all night, some walking on one side and others on the other side, until the dawn rose.

When the dawn rose he [Alexander] said to them [the Samaritans]: Who are these?

They answered: The Jews who rebelled against you.

As he reached Antipatris, the sun having shown forth, they met. When he saw Simeon the Just, he descended from his carriage and bowed down before him.

They said to him: A great king like yourself should bow down before this Jew?

He answered: His image it is that wins for me in all my battles.

He said to them [the Jews]: What have you come for?

They [the Jews] said: Is it possible that star-worshippers should mislead you to destroy the House wherein prayers are said for you and your kingdom that it might never be destroyed!

He said to them: Who are these?

They said to him: These are the Cutheans that stand before you.

He said: They are delivered unto your hands.

At once they [the Jews] perforated their heels [the Cutheans], tied them to the heels of their horses and dragged them over thorns and thistles, until they came to Mount Gerizim, which they ploughed and planted with vetch, even as they planned to do with the House of God. And that day they made a festive day.



## Alexander Meets the Jews: Josephus Flavius

Joseph ben Matityahu, later known as Josephus Flavius was a Jewish general during the Great Revolt (66CE-70CE). His troops were surrounded by the Roman Army and joined in a pact to commit suicide. However, Josephus decided not to join them. He surrendered and became the Flavius family's consultant on Jewish affairs. Flavius was later to become the Emperor of Rome. Josephus wrote four books: Antiquities, dealing with Jewish History; The Jewish War, dealing with Jewish military history; Against Apion, defending the Jews against anti-Semitic writings of a Roman, Apion; and My Life, in which he describes his controversial life and decisions. The following excerpt is from Antiquities. (This translation of Josephus is by Peter L. Maier.)

About this time, Alexander, king of the Macedon, was advancing further into Asia. Everyone in Asia thought that Darius would easily defeat the invaders. This included Sanballat<sup>1</sup>, who promised Manasseh<sup>2</sup> that when Darius returned from his victory he would fulfill his promises. But Darius was defeated in a great slaughter, and fled back to Persia. Alexander marched into Syria, taking Damascus and Sidon, and then besieged Tyre. From there he sent a letter to the high priest of the Jews, asking him for supplies, and requesting that he transfer allegiance and tribute from Darius to Alexander. The high priest answered that he had promised Darius not to bear arms against him, and that he would keep his oath as long as Darius lived.

Alexander was very angry, and threatened that as soon as he had taken Tyre he would march against the Jewish high priest. His example would teach all men to whom they must keep their oaths.

When Sanballat heard that Darius had been defeated, he decided to join Alexander with 8,000 Samaritans. The kind of reception that Alexander gave him encouraged Sanballat to ask permission to divide the Jews by building a temple in Samaria, and permission was granted. So the new temple was built, and Manasseh was made high priest. But before it was finished, Sanballat died.

Meanwhile, Alexander had conquered Tyre, following a seven-month siege. After two more months he had taken the city of Gaza also. The he hurried to go up to Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Darius III's official representative in Samaria. He is Cuthean by birth. His daughter was married to Manasseh, brother of the Jewish high priest, Jaddua.

<sup>2</sup> Manasseh was exiled from the Temple in Jerusalem because of his Cuthean wife. Sanballat promises him a temple on Mount Gerizim to rival the Temple in Jerusalem.

When Jaddua, the high priest, heard that Alexander was coming, he was terrified, and ordered the people to join him in a sacrifice and prayer to God. Appearing to him in a dream, God told him to take courage and decorate the city with wreaths. The people were to clothe themselves in white and the priests with the robes of their order. Then they were to march out to the gates to meet the Macedonians, for they would not be harmed.

Jaddua awoke rejoicing, and announced the revelation to all. When he heard that Alexander was not far from the city, he went out in a procession with the priests and the people. Alexander saw the procession coming toward him: the priests were clothed in linen and the high priest in a robe of blue and gold. On his head was a miter (*mignafet*) with the golden plate on which God's name was inscribed. Approaching alone, Alexander prostrated himself before the Name and greeted the high priest. As the Jews welcomed Alexander with one voice and encircled him, his officers wondered if he had suddenly become insane. One of them, Parmenio, went up to Alexander and asked him to explain. He replied, "When I was at Dium in Macedonia, considering how I could become master of Asia, I saw this very person in my sleep, dressed as he is now. He urged me not to delay, but to cross over confidently and take dominion over the Persians."

Alexander was escorted into Jerusalem by the high priest and his attendants. He went up to the Temple, where he sacrificed to God according to the high priest's directions. And when the book of Daniel was shown to him, which predicted that one of the Greeks would destroy the Persian Empire, he thought himself to be the one so designated. When he offered the Jews whatever they desired, the high priest asked that they might observe their own laws and be exempt from the tribute every seventh year. Alexander granted these requests. They further asked the Jews in Babylon and Media be allowed their own laws, and he also agreed. Finally he told the people that if any of them wanted to enlist in his army, he would allow them to continue their own customs, and many joined his army.

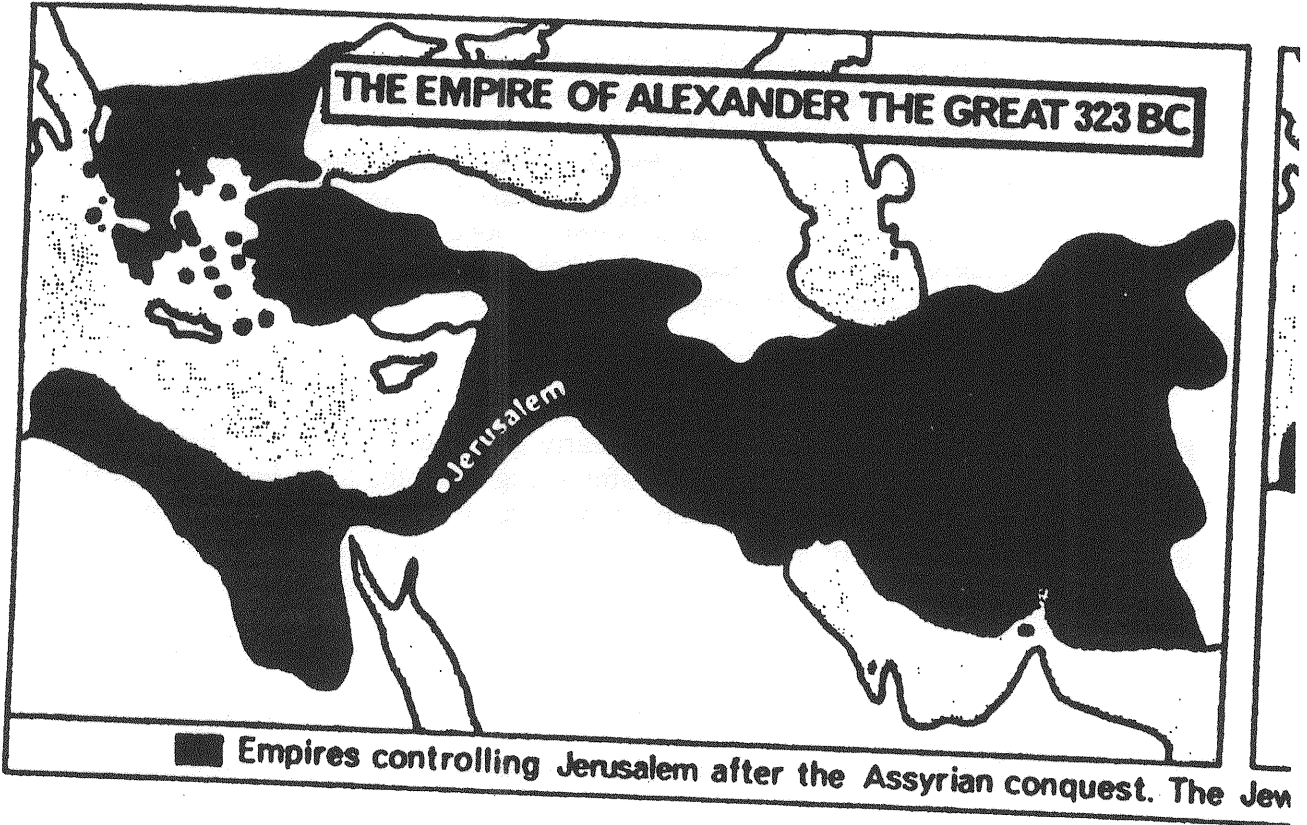
Alexander now left Jerusalem. The Samaritans of Shechem, which was beside Mount Gerizim and was inhabited by Jewish apostates, saw how Alexander honored the Jews and asked Alexander to visit their temple and to grant them the seventh year exemption from tribute. He promised to consider it in the future, and took Samaritan troops with him to Egypt.

## Alexander Meets the Jews: Exercises

1. On the map on the next page, trace the route of Alexander the Great according to Josephus and the Talmud with different color pens.
2. Fill in the following chart:

	<u>Josephus</u>	<u>Talmud</u>
Name of high priest:	_____	_____
Place where meeting took place:	_____	_____
Attitude of Jews before the meeting:	_____ _____	_____ _____
Alexander's desire for meeting:	_____ _____	_____ _____
Promises or Treaties made at the meeting:	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
Role of Samaritans:	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

3. Evaluate the decision of the high priest, in the Josephus version, not to switch loyalties from Darius to Alexander.



## Septuagint: Letter of Aristeas

The Septuagint means the Translation of the Seventy and it refers to the Tanakh. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-246 BCE) had the Tanakh translated for his library in Alexandria, which he hoped would be the most extensive library in the world. Indeed his library was well-known and well-stocked. Many scholars visited the library in Alexandria to learn and were then forced to leave any manuscripts they carried with them for the library. Internal strife in Alexandria led to the destruction of some of the 700,000 manuscripts contained therein, but the library was finally and thoroughly destroyed during the Moslem conquest of Egypt in 641CE by Amru and Omar.

There isn't much available on whom Aristeas was. Based on his letter, which is an ancient document from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, he is assumed to be a prominent Alexandrian Jew. He wrote other works, too, that are lost to modern historians. Aristeas claims to have had a role in the translation, but modern historians have placed him a century after the Tanakh was translated to Greek. What follows is Ptolemy II's written request to the High Priest of Judea and the response, according to Aristeas.

The letter of the King was of the following pattern.

King Ptolemy to Eleazar the high priest, hearty greetings. It is a fact that a large number of the Jews settled in our country after being uprooted from Jerusalem by the Persians during the time of their ascendancy, and also came with our father into Egypt as prisoners. He put many of them into the military forces on generous pay, and in the same way having judged the veterans to be trustworthy, he set up establishments, which he handed over to them, to prevent the Egyptian people from feeling any apprehension on their account. Having now inherited the throne, we adopt a more liberal attitude to all our subjects, and more especially to your citizens.

We have freed more than a hundred thousand prisoners, paying to their captors the price in silver proportionate to their rank. We also make amends for any damage caused by mob violence. We decided to do this as a religious obligation, making of it a thank you offering to the Most High God, who has preserved the kingdom for us in peace and highest renown throughout the whole world. Those at the peak of their youth we have appointed to the army, and those who are able to be at our court, being worthy of confidence in our household, we have put in charge of some ministries. It is our wish to grant favors to them and to all Jews throughout the world, including future generations. We have accordingly decided that your Law shall be translated into Greek letters from what you call the Hebrew letters, I order that they too should take their place in our library with the other royal books. You will therefore act well, and in a manner worthy of our zeal, by selecting elders of exemplary lives, with experience of the Law and ability to translate it, six from each

tribe, so that an agreed version may be found from the large majority in view of the great importance of the matters under consideration. ...

In reply to this letter Eleazar wrote in acceptance as follows:

Eleazar the high priest to King Ptolemy, dear friend, greeting. Good health to you and to Queen Arsinoe, your sister, and to your children; if that is so, it would be well, and as we wish. We too are in good health. On receipt of your letter we rejoiced greatly because of your purpose and noble plan; we therefore collected the whole multitude and read it to them, that they might know your piety to our God. We also showed them the vessels which you sent, twenty of silver and thirty of gold, five cups, and a table for offering, and for the performance of the sacrifices and the furnishing of the Temple requirements one hundred talents of silver, brought by two men highly esteemed by you, Andreas and Aristreas, gentlemen of integrity, outstanding in education, worthy in every respect of your conduct and justice...

The whole multitude made supplication that it should come to pass for you entirely as you desire, and that God the ruler of all should preserve your kingdom in peace and glory, and that the translation of the sacred Law should come to pass in a manner expedient to you and in safety. In the presence of the whole assembly we selected elders, honorable men and true, six from each tribe, whom we have sent with the Law in their possession. It will be a noble deed, O righteous King, if you command that once the translation of the books is complete that these men be restored to us again in safety. Farewell...

## Septuagint: Talmud

The Talmud also discusses the translation of the Tanakh and the difficulties the translation posed for the Jewish people and the scholars who worked on the translation. The following is an excerpt from the account in Masekhet Megillah, 9a-b. In the Talmud there are other examples of careful translations made by the scholars to maintain the integrity of the text of the Torah.

It is taught in a braita:

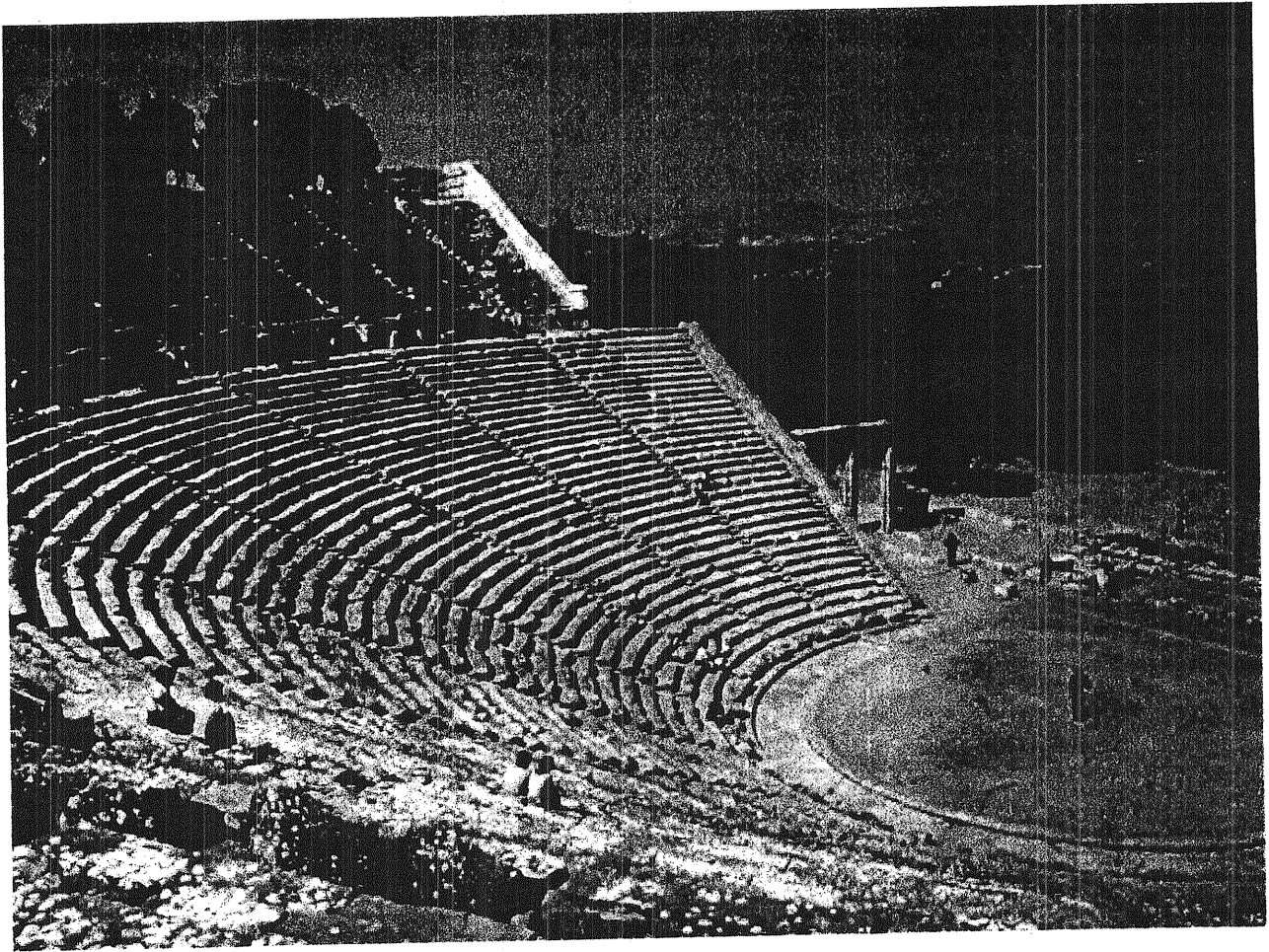
It happened that Ptolemy the king assembled seventy-two Elders and placed them in seventy-two rooms, and did not reveal to them for what purpose he had assembled them. He went into each one and said to them, "Translate the Torah of Moses your teacher." God gave counsel to the heart of each one, and they all agreed as one mind. They all wrote:

- God created in the beginning... (Genesis/Bereishit 1:1)
- I will make a man in an image and a form... (1:26)
- And He completed on the sixth day...and He rested on the seventh day...(2:2)
- Male and female He created him (5:2), and they did not write, He created them.
- Let Me descend and I will confuse their language there (11:7)
- And Sarah laughed among her relatives (18:12)

## Septuagint: Exercises

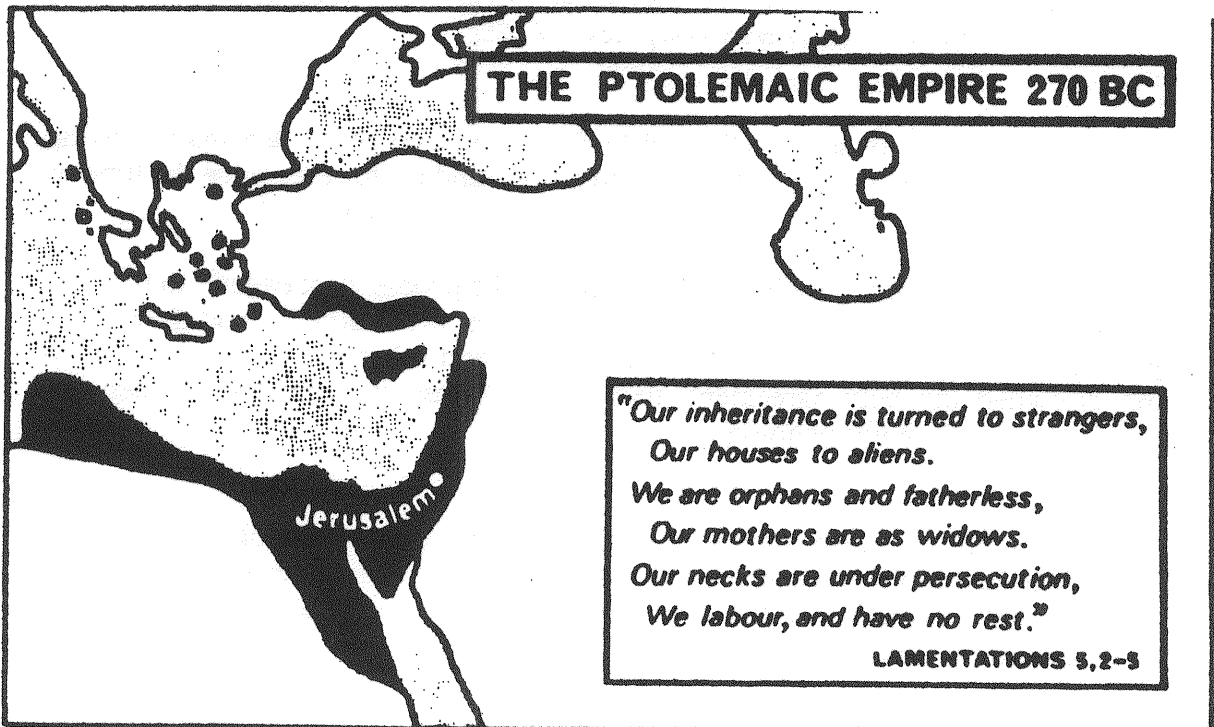
1. Describe the view of the translation of the Torah to Greek in the Letter of Aristeas and the Talmud. Why are they so different in their approaches?
2. What can we learn from the Letter of Aristeas about the position of the Jews under the rule of Ptolemy I?
3. Could the Jews have refused the request of Ptolemy II according to each source? Explain how you came to the conclusion you did.
4. What is the concern of the high priest when responding to Ptolemy II?
5. What is the concern of the author of the braita about the translation of the Torah?





Hellenistic Theatre

8/27/2002



Jews gradually settled throughout the territory of the imperial powers.

## Maccabees I: Changing of the Guard in Jerusalem

The following pages are excerpts from Maccabees I. There were four books, numbered one through four, which describe the Hasmonean Revolt against Antiochus and those who supported his attempts to Hellenize Judea. These books, however, do not represent a series by one author or a committee of authors. Only Maccabees I and II are part of the Apocrypha<sup>1</sup>. They were written at different times with people of different perspectives. Maccabees I was written by an admirer of the Hasmonean family around 100 BCE. It was written in Hebrew and focuses on the leadership of the Hasmonean family of those who sought freedom from the Seleucid Empire but also gives a brief overview from the time of Alexander the Great to John Hyrcanus. The following pages contain excerpts from Maccabees I. The Hasmonean Revolt took place c. 167 BCE.

I

In those days there arose out of Israel lawless men who persuaded many, saying, "Let us go and make a treaty with the heathens around us, for ever since the time we became separated from them, many misfortunes have overtaken us."

The plan seemed good in their eyes, and some of the people went eagerly to the king, and he authorized them to introduce the practices of the heathen. And they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, in the heathen fashion, and submitted to uncircumcision, and disowned the holy agreement; they allied themselves with the heathen and became the slaves of wrongdoing.

Questions:

1. Why did some Jews want to hellenize, according to the author?

Thought question: Why doesn't the author mention the names of the leaders of the Jewish people that advocated hellenization? Why is he so brief about the process of hellenization?

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<sup>1</sup> A body of works canonized in the Greek Bible.

## Maccabees I: Beginning of Revolt

### II

When his rule appeared to Antiochus to be established, he conceived the idea of becoming king of the land of Egypt, so that he might reign over two kingdoms. ...

After subduing Egypt, in the one hundred and forty-third year, Antiochus turned back and came up against Israel and entered Jerusalem with a strong force. And in his arrogance he went into the Sanctuary and took the gold altar and the lampstand for light, and all its furniture and the table for the Presentation Bread and the cups and the bowls and the gold censers and the curtain... He massacred the people and spoke with great arrogance. ...

After two years the king sent an officer to collect tribute, to the towns of Judah, and he entered Jerusalem with a strong force. And he spoke to them craftily in peaceful terms, and they trusted him. Then he suddenly fell upon the city and struck it a great blow and destroyed many of the people in Israel. ... Then they (the Greek Syrians) fortified the City of David with a great strong wall, with strong towers, and it became their citadel. ...

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that they should all become one people, and everyone should give up his particular practices. And all the heathen assented to the command of the king. And many from Israel agreed to his kind of worship and offered to make sacrifice to idols and broke the Sabbath. And the king sent word by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah to follow practices foreign to the country and put a stop to whole burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings at the Sanctuary, and to break the Sabbaths and profane the feasts and pollute the Sanctuary and the sanctified; to build altars and sacred precincts and idol temples and sacrifice hogs and unclean cattle; and to leave their sons uncircumcised and defile themselves with every unclean and profane practice, so that they might forget the Law and change all their religious ordinances; and anyone who did not obey the command of the king should die. He wrote to his whole kingdom, to this effect, and he appointed inspectors over all the people, and he ordered the towns of Judah every one of them to offer sacrifice. And many of the people and everyone who was ready to forsake the Law joined with them and they did wrong in the land, and force Israel to hide in every hiding place they had. ... wherever they found the book of the Law, they tore them up and burned them, and if anyone was found to possess a book of the agreement or respected the Law, the king's decree condemned him to death. ... The women who had circumcised their children they put to death under the decree, hanging their babies around their necks, and destroying their families and the men who had circumcised them. Yet many in Israel stood firm and resolved in their hearts not to eat what was unclean; they preferred death to being polluted with food or profaning the sacred agreement, and so they died. And Israel suffered intensely.

Questions:

1. Why did Antiochus Epiphanes enter Jerusalem with a great force?
2. Why did Antiochus Epiphanes institute decrees to erase Jewish Law?
3. What were the punishments of people who defied the king's decrees? Why were they so severe?
4. What options were available to Jews who wanted to keep the Law?

Enrichment Question: How did Antiochus' policies differ from Alexander the Great and Ptolemy Philadelphus?

## Maccabees I: The Hasmonean Family

### III

In those days Mattathias, the son of John, the son of Simeon, a priest of the descendants of Joarib, removed from Jerusalem, and settled in Modin. He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, Simon called Thassi, Judas, called Maccabeus, Eleazar, called Avaran, and Jonathan, called Apphus. ...

The King's officers who were forcing the people to give up their religion, came to the town of Modin, to make them offer sacrifice. And many Israelites went to them, and Mattathias and his sons gathered together. Then the king's messengers answered and said to Mattathias, "You are a leading man, great and distinguished in this town, surrounded with sons and brothers; now be the first to come forward and carry out the king's command..."

Then Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice, "I and my sons and my brothers will live in accordance with the agreement of our forefathers. God forbid that we should abandon the Law and the ordinances. ..."

As he ceased to utter those words, a Jew went up before the eyes of all of them to offer sacrifice as the king commanded, on the altar in Modin. And Mattathias saw him and his heart was filled with zeal, and his heart was stirred, and he was very properly roused to anger, and ran up and slaughtered him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was trying to compel them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. ... and he said, "Let everyone who is zealous for the Law and stands by the agreement come out after me." And he and his sons fled to the mountains and left all they possessed in the town.

#### Questions:

1. Why did Mattathias wait until this point to decide to rebel?

Thought Question: Why didn't Mattathias and his sons stay in Modin and fortify the town?

## Maccabees I: The Decision to Fight on the Sabbath

The time period of Hanukkah saw many firsts. One of these firsts was the decision to fight on the Sabbath. The following excerpt describes how the decision was made and how the Hasmonean family took the leadership in organizing the Jewish defense and offense against the Seleucid Empire.

### IV

Then many seekers for uprightness and justice went down into the wilderness to settle, with their sons and their wives and their cattle, because their hardships had become so severe. And news reached the king's agents and the forces that were in Jerusalem, in the City of David, that men who disregarded the king's order had gone down to hiding places in the wilderness. And they pursued them in force and overtook them, and pitched their camp against them and prepared to attack them on the Sabbath day.

And the king's officers said to the Jews in hiding, "Enough! Come out and do as the king commands and you will live."

And the Jews answered, "We will not come out nor do as the king commands, and break the Sabbath."

Then the king's officers hastened to attack the Jews. And the Jews made no response to them; they did not throw a stone at them nor block up their hiding places, for they said, "Let us all die guiltless. We call heaven and earth to witness that you destroy us unlawfully."

So they attacked them on the Sabbath, and they died, with their wives and their children and their cattle, to the number of a thousand people.

And Mattathias and his friends learned of it, and they grieved bitterly over them. And said to one another, "If we all do as our brothers have done and refuse to fight against the heathen for our lives and what we believe is right, they will very soon destroy us from the face of the earth."

On that day they reached a decision, "If anyone attacks us on the Sabbath day, let us fight against him and not all die, as our brothers died in their hiding places."

### Questions:

1. "We call heaven and earth to witness that you destroy us unlawfully." Explain what the Jews who were in hiding meant by this statement.
2. How would the king's officers have found out about the Jews that were in hiding?

## Maccabees I: Civil War

v

Then they were joined by a company of Hasideans, warlike Israelites, everyone a volunteer for the Law. And all who fled to escape harsh treatment joined them and reinforced them. And they mustered a force and struck down sinners in their anger, and in their wrath those who disobeyed the Law, and the rest fled to the heathen to save themselves. And Mattathias and his friends went about and tore down the altars, and forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised children that they found within the limits of Israel. And they drove the arrogant before them, and the work prospered in their hands. So they rescued the Law from the hands of the heathen and their kings, and would not let the sinner triumph.

Questions:

1. Why would Mattathias and his followers focus on the Hellenized Jews before the Greek-Syrians?



## Maccabees I: Reconquering the Temple

Mattathias died during the course of the war. Before he died, he instructed the people how to carry on with the struggle. Simon who was wise would be their guide, would advise, and be as a father to them. Judas who was strong and wise in battle would be the general.

### VI

And the Greek-Syrians came to Idumea and encamped at Bethsura, and Judas met them with ten thousand men. And he saw that their camp was strong, and he prayed and said, "Blessed are you, Savior of Israel, who stopped the rush of the champion by the hand of your slave David, and delivered the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan, the son of Saul, and of his armor-bearer. In like manner shut up this camp in the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their army and their horsemen. Make them cowardly and melt the boldness of their strength, and let them tremble at their destruction. Strike them down with the sword of those that love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns."

Then they joined battle, and there fell of the army of Lysias fully five thousand men; they fell right before them. But when Lysias saw that his army had been routed, and that Judas had grown bold, and that they were ready to live or die nobly, he withdrew to Antioch and hired soldiers in the greatest numbers, to come again to Judea.

And Judas and his brothers said, "Now that our enemies are crushed, let us go up to purify the Sanctuary and rededicate it."

And the whole army gathered together, and they went up to Mount Zion. And they found the Sanctuary desolated and the altar polluted and the doors burned up, and weeds growing in the courts as they do in woods or on some mountain, and the priests' quarters torn down. And they tore open their clothes and uttered great lamentation and covered themselves with ashes, and fell on their faces on the ground, and sounded ceremonial trumpets, and cried out to heaven. Then Judas appointed men to fight the garrison in the citadel, until he should purify the Sanctuary. And he appointed priests that were without blemish and adherents of the Law, and they purified the Sanctuary and carried out the stones that had defiled it to an unclean place. And they deliberated as to what they should do about the altar of the burnt offering, which had been polluted. And a good idea occurred to them - to take it down, so that it might never be thrown up to them that the heathen had polluted it; so they took down the altar, and deposited the stones in the Temple mountain, in a suitable place, until a prophet should come and declare what should be done with them. And they took whole stones, as the Law required, and built a new altar like the former one. And they built the Sanctuary and the interior of the Temple and consecrated the courts. And they made new holy dishes and they brought the lampstand and the altar of incense and the table into the Temple. And they burned incense on the altar, and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and they

lighted the Temple. And they put the loaves of bread on the table and hung up the curtains, and completed all the work they had undertaken.

And they arose early on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, that is, the month of Kislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year, and offered sacrifice according to the Law upon the new altar of burnt offering, which they had made. At the time and on the day the heathen had polluted it, it was rededicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. And all the people fell on their faces and blessed heaven, which had prospered them. And they celebrated the rededication of the altar for eight days and offered burnt offerings with joy, and offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise.

Questions:

1. Describe the course of the battle with Lysias.
2. What was Lysias intention when he retreated to Antioch?
3. How did the Jews react to the retreat?
4. What was done with the altar that had been desecrated? Why?

Enrichment question: Identify something from our times where there is an attempt of one religious group to destroy evidence of the existence of another religious group. Compare the two cases.

## Maccabees I: An End?

### VII

It happened when the heathen round about heard that the altar had been rebuilt and the Sanctuary rededicated as before, that it made them very angry, and they resolved to destroy the descendants of Jacob that were among them, and they began to kill and ravage among the people. And Judas fought against the sons of Esau in Idumea, and against Akrabattene, because they beset Israel, and he dealt them a sever blow and crushed them, and plundered them.

#### Questions:

1. Why were the heathen that were around the Jews angered by the rededication of the Temple?
2. How did the Jews react to the continued attacks against them?
3. Was it possible to compromise at this point?
4. If the rededication of the Temple was not the end of the war, why did the Jews celebrate and continue to celebrate Hanukkah at that time?