

Worksheet for week one

What do we mean by Hellenism/Hellenization?

Hellenism is the spread of Greek culture and Hellenization is the impact it had on the culture of the time. The impact included diluting the strict Judaic culture whereby some Jews wanted to eradicate any difference between themselves and the Greeks. Primarily started by the conquest of Alexander the Great at the end of the Persian Period 334-333 BCE.

What was the Seleucid Empire

The Seleucid Empire was essentially the overall governing Greek state that held power over Palestine. This took place after the death of Alexander the Great. His (Alexander the Great) Empire was divided up by his Generals and in doing so one of them, Seleucus I Nicator, formed the Seleucid Empire. This empire would continue until the Roman take over approximately 64BCE.

Who were the Hasmonian (Maccabean) Family and what did they do?

The Hasmonian Family, the clan of Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah could be looked at as Religious insurgents who rebelled against the Seleucid empire, when they (Seleucid's) adulterated the temple by erecting a statue of Zeus and commanded all the Jews to break the Torah by worshipping it.

What was the high priest and what was their role?

Jonathan Maccabee was appointed the High Priest. Their role was to maintain political and religious discipline within the Judaic state.

What does pre exilic Israel mean?

Pre-Exilic refers to the period of time when the Jews went to Babylon.

What did you think were the main arguments in the reading?

I think the main arguments in the reading were that Judaic culture came under threat by Hellenism. Instead of combatting this and seeking to remain distinct as God's people, many Jews decided to rid themselves of their culture, religion and identity and too readily were willing to adopt a pagan culture that went against their own. Factions rose to try and navigate the Jews back to their 'true north' (E.G Maccabean Family) but arguably some may say too harshly. Reading this, it is possible to critique and find similarities with the story of Exodus where God called and saved his people from servitude, only for them to turn to idols and drop their culture and belief. Another similarity can be seen

Based on the Shaye Cohen's Chapter 1 reading and any additional research you have done, what could be described as the main historical, religious, and/or political events leading to the Maccabean revolt 167-160 BCE?

168-167 BCE Antiochus Epiphanes profaned the temple and persecuted Judaism. This prompted various groups of Jews to rebel against the King. Prominent amongst these was Mattathias. Some of

the circumstances surrounding this include observing the ways of the Gentiles, removing the evidence of circumcision and abandoning the Holy Covenant (1 Maccabees 11-15). In addition to this, Antiochus had set up a citadel after plundering the city of Jerusalem and stationed there hordes of sinful people. The Maccabeans eventually re-took control over the temple and purified it again. Mattathias felt extremely moved by what was happening with what could be described as a righteous anger (1 Maccabees 2:24) with the sacrifices that were being made to idols. It is possible that these actions assisted the transition of the Maccabean family from being insignificant country priests to High Priests and Kings.

As Cohen stated on p.15 “in 164BC the Maccabees reconquered and purified the temple, the end of the Seleucid rule followed 20 years later” what was the overall significance of these points from an ancient Jewish perspective?

The most striking significance of these points from an ancient Jewish perspective was the Diaspora (The dispersal of Jews throughout the world), the Canonization of scripture which identified which writings were believed to be of God and a class of Scribes who emerged copying the writings which undoubtedly helped the lay people learn the sacred tradition.

How significant is it that the Maccabean family who began as “insignificant country priests” later became high priests and kings (for this you may need to research more into the role of high priests in Judaism during the 2nd Century)

Going from insignificant country priests to the High Priest would be a major step. The High priest would have the privilege of entering the inner sanctum, make amends (ask for forgiveness for their own sins) without going to another or more higher priest - recognized as the head of the nation in a political sense and as such had the responsibility of collecting taxes and maintaining order. It could very well be due to the response from the Maccabean family to the onset of Hellenization that saw them rise to the role of Kings and High Priest (1 Maccabees 2:19) (Britannic Online Encyclopedia)

How different was life during the second temple Judaism compared to life in pre-exilic Israel?

The emergence of Hellenization, the diaspora (scattering of jews), the laying down of customs and accepting those of the Gentiles and making offerings and sacrifices to them. In Pre Exilic times this did happen (Moses and the people he led out of Egypt) the second temple period saw this fruition in a more apparent way. Furthermore, the ability of lay people to read scripture, the emergence of scribes.