

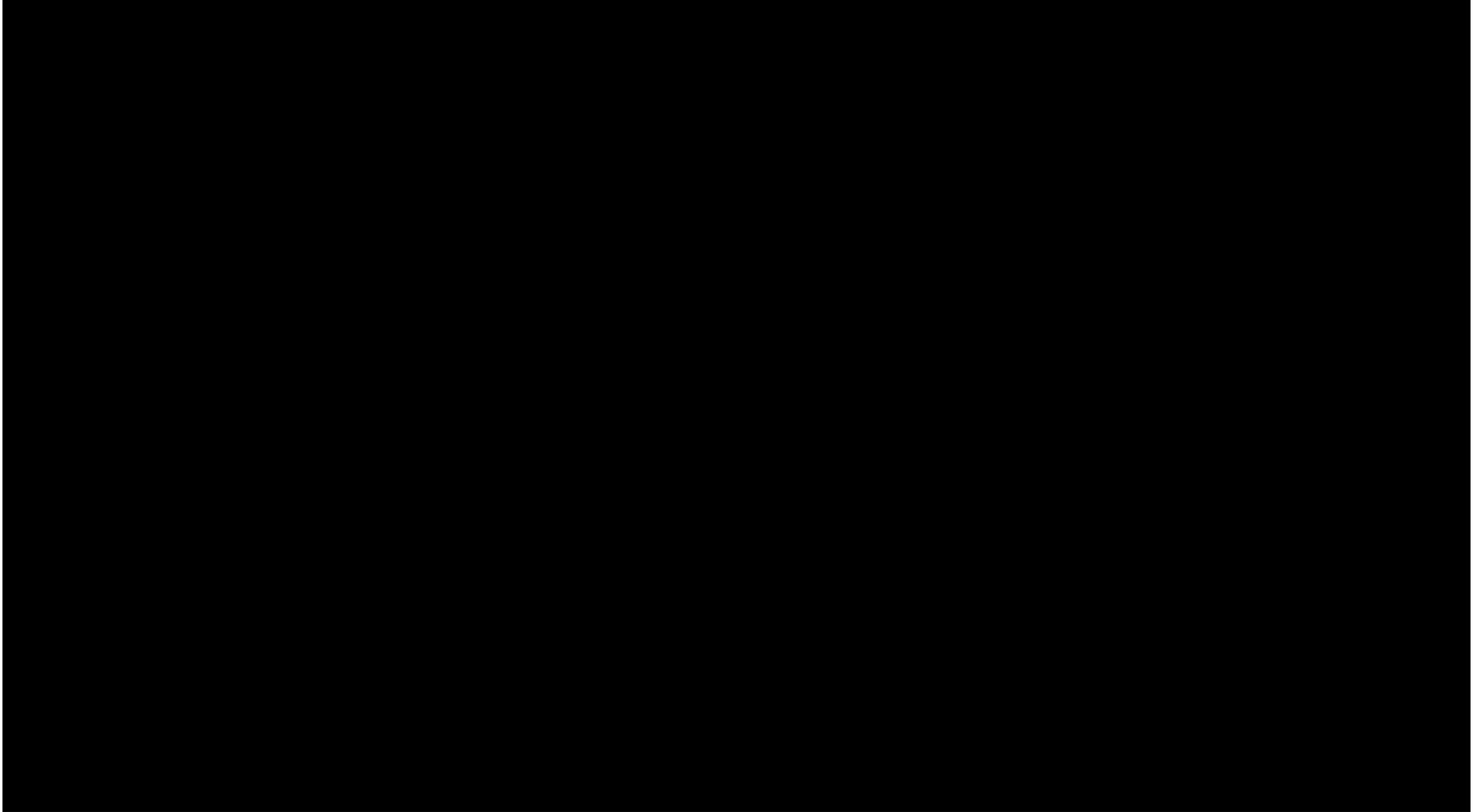


Zodiac from the Beit Alpha Synagogue

# Faith in a *(sometimes)* Hostile World (Beware) Getting What You Want February 3, 2019



# Christianity and Persecution



# “Good” Life under the Ptolemies

Jews enjoyed some political and religious freedoms, gaining acceptance and increased influence in society

Jewish community expands to include Diaspora and Alexandria ascends in importance, becoming the leading center of Jewish scholarship

Tensions arise in the Jewish community around what it means to “be Jewish”



Assimilate – gain citizenship, total loss of Jewish identity



Acculturate – Greek names, language but keep customs



Isolate – hold only to Jewish customs & reject Hellenism

# Last Week's Takeaways

Judaism saw a flowering of its culture in the Hellenistic period

Different strategies arose for living as Jews in the Greek culture

We also face those same choices today – living out our faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context

Are our choices as Christians today more reflective of the larger (American) culture or of Christ?

# Reading from Last Week

## Numbers 25:1 - 9

- What are the circumstances surrounding Phineas' actions?
- How does God describe the motivation for his actions?



***Is violence for religious purposes OK?***

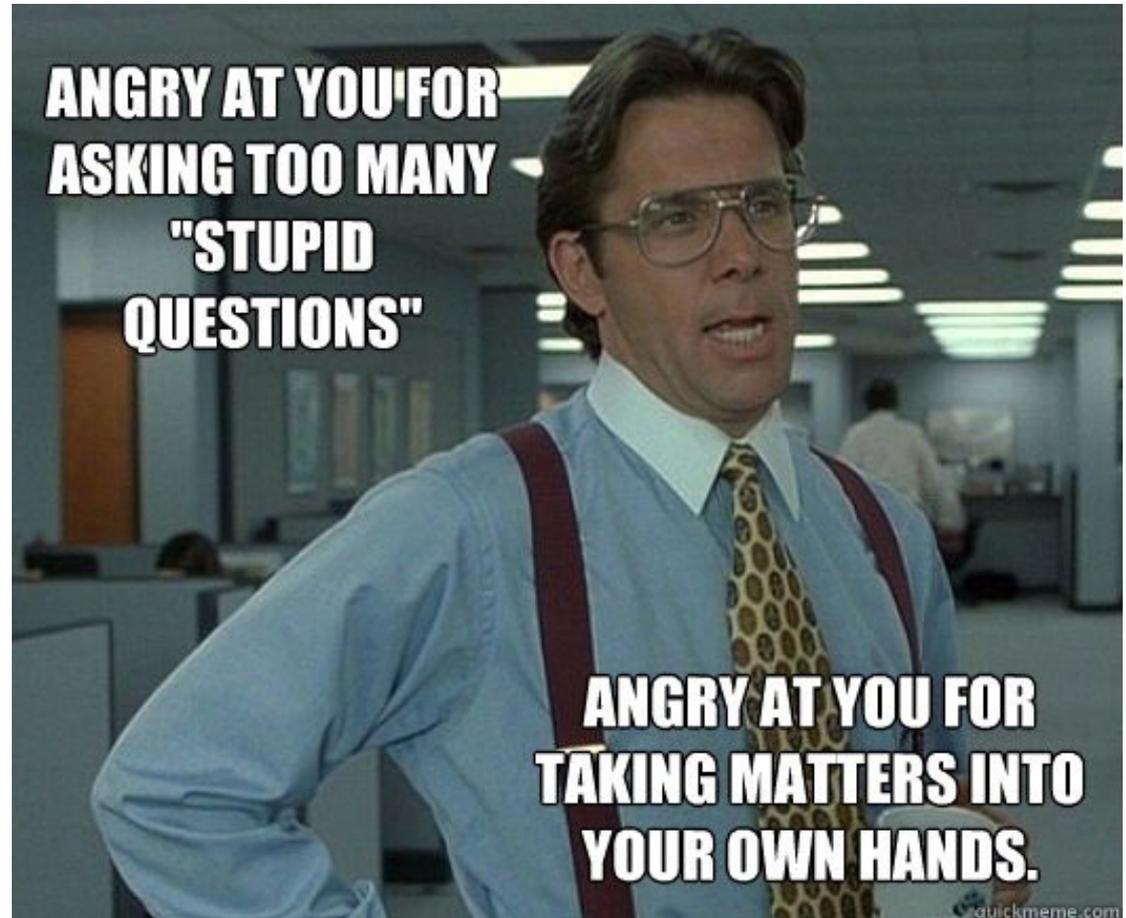
# Introductory Reading

*Psalms of Solomon 17.21 – 25 (1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE) -*

**See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,  
the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel  
in the time known to you, O God.  
Undergird him with the strength to destroy unrighteous rulers,  
to purge Jerusalem from gentiles  
who trample her to destruction;  
in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out  
the sinners from the inheritance;  
To smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar;  
To destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth;  
At his warning the nations will flee from his presence;  
and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts.**

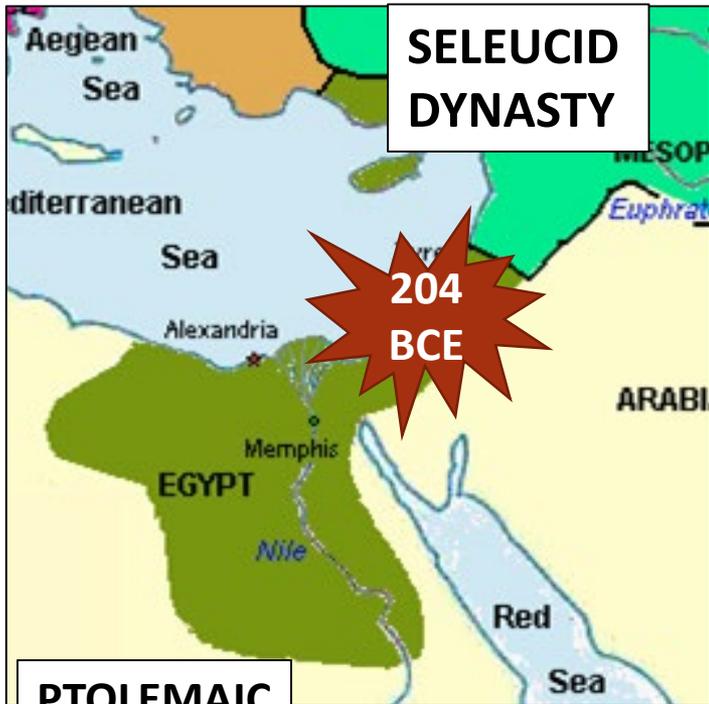
# Group Discussion – 3 Minutes

- What actions, attitudes, or ideas make someone a “good boss”? A “bad boss”?
- Which one are you? Are possibly you both?



# New Seleucid Rulers = New Rules

Seleucid king Antiochus IV (“Epiphanes”) “encourages” the growth of Hellenism to “unify” new subjects in Judaea



**SELEUCID  
DYNASTY**

**204  
BCE**

**PTOLEMAIC  
DYNASTY**



**Coinage of Antiochus IV**

# Judean Debate on Hellenism

## *1 Maccabees*

**1:11 – 15**

“In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we have separated from them **many disasters have come upon us.**’ This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who **authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles.** So they **built a gymnasium** in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and **removed the marks of circumcision,** and **abandoned the holy covenant.** They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.”

# Antiochus Desecrates the Temple

1 Maccabees 1:20 –  
23

“After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the 143<sup>rd</sup> year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He **arrogantly entered the sanctuary** and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; **he stripped it all off**. He took the silver and the gold and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures he found.”

# Antiochus Enforces Hellenism

*1 Maccabees*

1:41 – 50

“Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that **all should be one people**, and that **all should give up their particular customs**...he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to **forbid burnt offerings** and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to **sacrifice swine** and other unclean animals, and to **leave their sons uncircumcised**. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, ‘And **whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.**’”

# The Revolt Begins

*1 Maccabees*

2:19 – 27

“But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: “I and my sons and my brothers **will continue to live by the covenant of my ancestors**. Far be it from us **to desert the law and the ordinances**. We will not obey the king’s words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or the left...When Mattathias saw [a Jew come forward to sacrifice], he **burned with zeal and his heart was stirred**. He gave vent to his righteous anger; **he ran and killed him** on the altar...Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: ‘**Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!**’ Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in town.”

# Group Discussion



Discussion  
Question

-----  
3 minutes

How do Mattathias' actions and Phineas' compare?

# Cleansing the Temple (164 BCE)

***1 Maccabees 4:42-  
43, 54 - 56***

“[Judas] chose blameless priests **devoted to the law**, and they cleansed the sanctuary and **removed the defiled stones** to an unclean place.”

“At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshipped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they **celebrated the dedication of the altar for 8 days**, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a **sacrifice of well-being** and a **thanksgiving offering**.”

# Cleansing the Temple (164 BCE)

Hasmonean Dynasty – 164 to 67 BCE

Judas “Maccabeus” (the Hammer) – 165 to 161 BCE

Jonathan Maccabeus – 161 to 143 BCE

Simon Maccabeus – 143 to 134 BCE

John Hyrcanus – 134 to 104 BCE

Aristobulous I – 104 BCE

Alexander Jannaeus – 104 to 76 BCE

Queen Salome Alexandra – 76 to 67 BCE



Coinage of Alexander Jannaeus

# What About Our World?

Pros?

Cons?

How would you describe the ruling philosophy of the Hasmoneans?

Is our faith about political power or something greater?

# A Biblical Perspective

Our model for living in society is Christ:

Phil. 2:5 – 8: “...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”

Matt. 5:11: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”

Matt. 5:38 – 39: “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”

What does living like Christ in this way look like for us today?

# A Few Implications for Us...

1. Our faith doesn't make us a doorstop – the image of God gives us dignity

2. “Utilitarianism” isn't a Christian philosophy – the ends don't justify the means

3. Our faith is built upon the power hidden in suffering

How would people respond to evangelism if they saw us as servants first?

# Today's Takeaways

The attempt to defend the Jewish faith ended up in a much different place than it started

The use of religion became corrupted by the needs of the political rulers

Our model for engagement is Christ who gave up his power to serve as our sacrifice

Are we engaging people via service or via power?

# Reading for Next Week

**Mark 1:1 - 8**

- Where does John live?
- What does he wear?

***Are you part of the religious in-crowd?***

