

# **Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, Judaism Before Jesus,**

## **Session 6, The Jews under Greek Rule**

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This is Dr. Anthony Tomasino and his teaching on Judaism before Jesus. This is session 6, The Jews under Greek Rule.

So we've been talking about Alexander the Great and the mess that kind of ensued after his death.

Well, just to recap a little bit about that, what we see happen here is a series of clashes that have come to be known as the Wars of the Diadochi, curved from 321 really to 301 BC, though 301 really isn't the end of the conflict, it simmered down a bit at that point. So, by 301 BC, we had three main powers in the east, and these powers were Lysimachus, who managed to expand from Macedon into Asia Minor. We've got Seleucus, who's got the old Persian Empire over here, and we've got Ptolemy, who's got Egypt and up into the areas of Palestine.

So, in 281, Seleucus over here manages to defeat Lysimachus, and he adds Asia Minor to his realm. Now, at this point, Seleucus is starting to get a little bit overextended himself, and he's going to end up losing some.

So, at this point, Seleucus is finding that it's becoming increasingly difficult for him to hold on to the eastern portions of his empire. There it is. So, he has lost his Indian holdings by 305 BC, and all the Persian holdings were lost by 248.

So, at this point, his empire consisted primarily of Mesopotamia and of the regions of Asia Minor and of Syria. He's going to lose eventually Babylon as well. So, it's going to be chipped away in one chunk at a time.

Now, we've got these two major figures that are going to play a big part in the Jews' lives over the next few centuries. They have very contrasting attitudes toward the people whom they rule. Ptolemy I Soter.

Ptolemy I is the ruler of the Ptolemaic kingdom, which is down in Egypt. What we find is that these early Ptolemaic rulers had a very spiteful attitude toward the people of Egypt, the native Egyptian peoples. In the early rule of the Ptolemies, no native Egyptians were allowed to hold any kind of public office.

Only Macedonians were allowed to hold public offices. The Egyptians were not allowed to serve in the military except in support-type roles. They were not allowed to have major holdings of property.

And yet, remarkably enough, the Egyptians, the native Egyptians, continue to regard these people as the heirs of the pharaohs. Maybe, you know, they had been abused in similar ways by the pharaohs in the days past. And so, they took this as a matter of course.

But it was for quite a while a deep sort of almost kind of animosity. But it seemed like the more grief that the Ptolemies were giving the native Egyptians, the more they were responding with kindness and love and adoration. Eventually, it won over the Ptolemies.

The Ptolemies actually, in the later days, adopted Egyptian culture and became true ancient Egyptian pharaohs. So we've all heard about Cleopatra and the way that she portrayed herself as an Egyptian princess. That was sort of the East casting its spell over the Ptolemies, you might say.

Now, Seleucus and his successors took a different kind of tack here. Seleucus had more of a paternalistic attitude toward the people under his realms. Of all of Alexander's officers who had married these Persian ladies, Seleucus was the only one who hadn't divorced his wife.

Furthermore, he decided that he wanted to try to bless the people of the East with Greek culture. And so he had policies that encouraged the natives to do things like reorder their cities according to more Greek types of models, to do Greek building projects, to install gymnasia, which wasn't a place where you played basketball. It was a place where you learned Greek culture, you know, the excellent mind and the excellent body kind of thing, you know.

Cities could get tax breaks by converting themselves into a Greek-style polis, a city organized according to Greek principles and embodied those principles in its architecture, government dealings, and so on. In this way, the Seleucids were trying to actively encourage the spread of Greek culture, almost working in kind of a partnership with the people they ruled.

So, initially, the Jews ended up under the control of the Ptolemies. And we're talking Judea here, of course. The Ptolemies at this time were pretty much disdainful of the natives, and they were making little effort to improve their lives.

But on the other hand, they didn't interfere much with their lives either. So, this meant that the Jews in Judea were pretty much free to live their lives as they wanted. They had to pay taxes, of course, and the taxes were pretty doggone high because the Ptolemies were pretty doggone greedy.

But for the most part, they could order their lives according to the way they wanted. Their high priest apparently was pretty much running things in Judea. The freedom of religion continued.

The Jews could live their Jewish laws, take their Sabbaths off, continue to eat their kosher meals etc. etc., etc. And the Ptolemies just get kind of weird. But hey, whatever.

You be you, man. So anyway, one of the real kind of sticking points that occurred in this era and would continue to be a problem up until really the time of Augustus, the Roman emperor, was the method of tax farming that was used by the Ptolemies. The way that this would work out is that each, well, the taxation system was kind of a multi-level thing where you would have local people and officials in charge of raising the taxes for their local regions.

They would then give the tax money to the person who was in charge of the regional area. They would pay that to yet another person who was in charge of a larger region. They would take the money up the to the empire and back to the Ptolemies back in Egypt.

Now, the way that this system was rife with abuse is that the higher-ups would say, this is how much money you need to raise to the next level down. So, let's say that the Ptolemies tell some local magistrate, I want your region to produce 500 talents of gold for us this year. Well, the local person goes, and he says to the guy underneath him, okay, we need to raise 600 talents of gold.

He takes the 500, pays it to the Seleucids, and the other 100 he pockets. Well, the guy underneath him tells his underlings, each one of them, he says, okay, each one of you guys is responsible for raising 150 talents of gold. And then, of course, he pockets all the money in addition to what they had been actually assigned to receive.

This worked its way down until the local guys were really shaking down the people for as much as they could possibly get out of them. So that kind of system was tolerated. It seemed to reward the tax collectors and allowed them to gain a certain amount of benefit from their duties.

Of course, it encouraged them to be very sedulous about their duties because they would be able to line their pockets thoroughly. But it caused a great deal of resentment among the people who were at the bottom, in particular. One of the marvelous finds from this era, which has given us a little bit of insight into the Jews under the Ptolemies, is a collection of papyri that we know as now the Zenon papyri.

Now, we don't have a lot of information about the Jews during this period, really. There's precious little information available. But the Zenon papyri give us a little bit of a window into at least the financial administration of this time.

These papyri were discovered in 1914 by two Egyptian men who were digging for fertilizer. And the papyri were found in a place in Egypt. And we have an approximate idea of where it was, but we don't know exactly where it is now.

So, it was a huge cache. About 1,800 papyri were found. And what it was was the personal papers of this fellow by the name of Zenon, or Zeno as he's sometimes called.

He was an officer of Apollonius, who was the chief treasury officer of Ptolemy II, who ruled from 284 to 246 BC. These texts record his travels and his business dealings fairly early in his career. Some of the earlier texts talk about his travels in Palestine and his work there.

Later on, he worked primarily in Egypt. But we have some personal letters. We have one of the texts that has gotten a lot of attention is a bill of sales for a slave girl.

There's also a paper where he was investigating the trafficking of a couple of young women for sex trafficking and a few other things of this sort. So, in some ways, kind of some interesting stuff. But for the most part, compared to say the Dead Sea Scrolls, really boring.

You know, I mean, these are financial records for the most part. But one of the things that strikes us here is very interesting, is that one of the people in Palestine that this guy was having to deal with a lot was a fellow by the name of Tobias. And this is a name that is familiar to us from the book of Nehemiah.

Because this Tobias, who's called the Ammonite slave in the book of Nehemiah, didn't mean in any kind of way that he was literally a slave. It was an insult. He was actually quite a high official, apparently.

This Tobias opposed the building of the wall of Jerusalem, and Nehemiah had nothing good to say about him. Well, we find this guy's name popping up, or one of his descendants, I should say, popping up here again in these texts. And again, see, he is still Ammonite.

The Tobias family apparently has a dynasty, which has grown very, very wealthy by this time. They will continue to play a part in the politics of this area. Here are some pictures of some of these papyri, and you can see some of them are really remarkably well preserved.

But as I say, they are not particularly interesting. They don't tell us a lot about, say, the religious development of the area or anything of that sort. They do tell us things about, you know, what grain was selling for.

They tell us things like what slaves were selling for, what wages were being charged, what the revenue was of the Egyptian empire at this time. All this kind of stuff is very interesting for people who are trying to develop histories of the empire at that period. But not a whole lot, really, about the Jews in these texts.

So, local government, as I already mentioned, was apparently under the control of the high priest. I will say this has been challenged lately by some scholars, but I'm still convinced that the high priest pretty much acted most of the time as a governor. Occasionally, somebody else would be assigned as governor.

But for the most part, it was the high priest. And he was responsible for collecting the tribute. And again, for the Ptolemies, as long as the taxes were paid, that was fine.

That was really all they cared about. And so, the high priest was able to do what he wanted. Now, this arrangement worked pretty well until the days of Onias II, who was actually a fairly famous high priest.

He is praised in some other texts of the period. But Onias II rebelled against the Ptolemies and he withheld his taxes. Part of the reason for this is because the rumors were spreading that the Seleucids were going to be taking over.

And so the Ptolemies were kind of backing off a little bit at this point and were reinforcing themselves. Onias sensed the weakness of the Ptolemies. And so he decided to withhold the tribute as a way of saying, hey, I'm for you Seleucid guys.

Well, the expected change of leadership did not happen. Not yet at this time. And remarkably, the Ptolemies did not execute Onias II.

Rather, they punished him by simply gutting him of his priestly civil authority. He still continued as high priest, still continued with all his religious duties. But now the financial affairs of the country were placed under the hands of the Tobiad family.

Those people we read about in the Zenon Papyri are very likely the same family we read about in the Book of Nehemiah. So now we have a struggle for Palestine. You see, pretty much since the beginning of this whole conflict, the Seleucids had considered Palestine to be unloaded to the Ptolemies.

The Ptolemies said that they needed to be able to have access to that area in order to defend their northern borders. And so, Seleucus had kind of struck this deal with

Ptolemy, allowing him to keep Palestine until things were sort of more settled politically in the region. Well, it's coming to the point now where the Seleucids feel like that deal has run its course.

And so, the Seleucids are now turning their eyes toward the south. And you've got to remember here, the Seleucids are losing eastern territories over and over. They almost immediately lost India.

Then, they lost Persia. Then, they lost Babylon. Then, they moved their capital from Babylon to Syria.

Now, their empire is centered in Syria. And so, it seems to them that Palestine should naturally be part of their realm. And so, persuasion deals aren't working.

The Ptolemies want to keep Palestine. Well, in 274 to 200 BC, we have a series of skirmishes that have come to be known as the Syrian Wars. And these go back and forth, primarily fighting over who's going to control that strip of land between the two countries.

Antiochus II, Ptolemy II, managed to conclude a peace deal in 253 BC by marrying Antiochus to one of Ptolemy's daughters. Now, there's a small problem here. And that problem is that Antiochus already had a wife.

And that wife already had children. So now we've got a problem because we've got the daughter of Ptolemy, who's having sons, and the first wife of Antiochus, who's having sons.

Now we've got the possibility of rival claimants to the throne of the Seleucid Empire. And this is going to cause all kinds of trouble in the years to come. 204 BC, Ptolemy V, a five-year-old child, becomes the king of Egypt.

Well, to Antiochus III, this means that it's time to move. And so he immediately seizes control of Palestine and takes it away from the Ptolemies. So now what happens with the country having switched from the rule of the Ptolemies, which they had to deal with the high taxation, but they had relative freedom to act as they wished to act, to being under the rule of the Seleucids, who had this more paternalistic attitude toward the people they ruled.

Well, one of the first things he did was he deposed the Tobiads as the tax collectors and returned the high priest to his position as leader of the Jews. That's what the Jews wanted. The Seleucids wanted to make them happy.

So, they put the high priest back into control. They also then began to extend the polis system. The system of setting up these Greek-style cities, and they began to do this in Palestine.

This would accord these cities tax breaks. It would accord them other privileges. It also provided the Greeks to have these little outposts of Greek culture.

And there's this kind of a famous group of cities that become known as the Decapolis, which is a group of 10 cities which were primarily Greek, which were founded as Greek cities in the east. They're scattered around here. It's kind of funny.

We call them the Decapolis, which means 10 cities, but there's not always 10 of them. And the list of what cities are actually part of the Decapolis changes from time to time. So it wasn't a real strict definition of the Decapolis.

It's sort of like the Big Ten. How many schools are part of the Big Ten now? Like 14, maybe? I'm not sure. But anyway, that's kind of what they had going with the Decapolis back in these days.

But these are cities which were established to provide an outpost of Greek culture, to provide Greek education, to promote Hellenism in the Seleucid Empire. Well, there is a movement now starting in Jerusalem. It's like people are saying, you know, if Jerusalem were to become a polis, a Greek-style city, we'd get all these cool tax breaks.

We'd get money where we could like build things, like cool things like theaters and cool things like a gymnasium, you know? We could have all kinds of wonderful stuff going on in our city if we chose to become a polis. And so you've got what we call the Hellenizing party, the radicals if you will, which are beginning to assert their position in Jerusalem. Now, some cultural aspects here.

What it meant for the Jews to be under the Seleucids. Well, the Seleucid rule encouraged the spread of Greek culture, as we've already mentioned. Tax breaks, public funds, we don't need to repeat all of that.

I have to say that the adoption of Hellenism, even by the Greeks, was uneven because, of course, we've got the idea that some of the Greeks believed in a pure Greek kind of culture, whereas there were others that still shared Alexander's vision of this union of East and West. And so there were different levels of Hellenization that were taking place, and different levels of Greek culture were finding places in the East. We also have to bear in mind that there's a big difference between Jews in Judea and Jews in the Diaspora.

And when you're living in Judea, you're surrounded by all the artifacts of your culture. You've got your stone you can point to and say, you know, that's where Joshua crossed this river. Or you've got this building you can point to and you can say, that's where my great, great, great, great, great grandfather first settled into the land.

And you can feel these connections to your roots. And so for people who are living in their own native land, the pressure to acculturate, to adopt the culture of the ruling powers, was far less intense than it was for, say, Jews living in Alexandria, for instance. There, they're separated from their native land.

They're surrounded on all sides by pagans. And they don't have those physical markers that can be reminders to them of who they are as a people. They aren't surrounded by an entire society of people who are trying to reinforce their identity.

Rather, they're surrounded by a society of people who are trying to undermine, you might say, their identity. So, the Jews of Judea were far more likely to have maintained their connections to their roots than were the Jews of Egypt or the Jews of Syria, or the Jews in other areas where they are scattered as part of this diaspora of Judaism. Another thing to bear in mind is that there's a big difference between the upper-class Jews and the lower-class Jews.

The upper-class Jews are involved in trade and in government. They're dealing with their overlords, often. They're dealing with people from other lands.

The language of trade throughout the Seleucid Empire and the Ptolemaic Empire, for that matter, is Greek. So, they have to be able to use Greek. They have to be able to be conversant with the culture of the people with whom they're dealing.

And so, the upper classes had more of a tendency to assimilate toward the Greek culture as well. The lower classes, not so much. You know, they didn't have that same kind of pressure.

They didn't have the same kind of desire to adopt the culture of the Greek overlords. You've got to figure that probably the people of the lower classes are looking at their betters, their nobles, out there prancing around in Greek garments and trying to speak Greek to one another and thinking, what a bunch of wannabes, you know? And maybe even thinking of them as a bit buffoonish. Another thing we need to bear in mind is there's a big difference between the cosmetic adoption of the culture of the Greeks versus the substantial adoption of the culture of the Greeks.

Things like clothing styles found in modern times when they've done studies of acculturation; they find that clothing styles are one of those things which are adopted quite easily by people when they come into cultural contact situations.



People would see what their neighbors are wearing and say, hey, that's actually kind of cool, you know? I could be kind of edgy if I wore something like that, you know? In things like architectural styles, we see that those kinds of things could be adopted quite easily. The more substantial changes we're talking about are ways of thinking, patterns of religion, and cultural stories.

Now, there are stories that are passed on from generation to generation which preserve the identity of a people. That's what we are about. And the Greeks had their stories, the Jews had their stories, but I can pretty much guarantee you that the Jews were not sitting around the fire telling each other stories about Hercules or Theseus or Perseus or the Minotaur, except maybe to make fun of them.

No, they had their own stories. They had their biblical stories and other stories that preserved their identification as Jews. So, we could probably see a lot of cosmetic adoption of Hellenistic culture, of Greek culture by the Jews in this period.

And there have been a number of books that have been written on that topic which have said, ah, look, the Jews were becoming Greeks. No, they were not becoming Greeks. It's all cosmetics.

And unfortunately, to some extent, this is the kind of thing that lasts in the archaeological record. So, you can see from archaeology that the style of buildings has changed. You can see from archaeology the style of clothing has changed somewhat.

You can see that more inscriptions were written in Greek rather than Hebrew and Aramaic. From these things, people have concluded in the past that Hellenization, the adoption of Hellenistic culture by the Jews, was very thoroughgoing in this period. But again, that's all cosmetic changes.

It's window dressing. The Jewish soul seemed to have remained Jewish. And with very few exceptions, the Jews continued to persist in their Jewish culture.

Even a fellow like Philo of Alexandria, who was so very conversant with Greek philosophy and who was building his system of thought on people like Plato, he refused to eat pork. And his explanation, interestingly enough, for why he wouldn't eat pork is because he says, I don't know. I've never really actually tasted it.

But what I have been told is that it is the most delectable of all meats. Therefore, it seems to me that partaking in that kind of food would be some kind of an overindulgence. And we Jews are not those kind of people to overindulge in things.

So, yeah. So, the reason why Jews didn't eat pork, according to Philo, was it tastes too good. Yeah.

But anyway, you can see here that even so apparently Hellenized, a man as Philo had bridges he wouldn't cross. And there were at his heart, at his core, he remained a Jew rather than a Greek. Now, let's talk about the Greek language here a little bit.

As I've mentioned already, the use of the Greek language was encouraged by the Seleucids. And Greek was the lingua franca of the empire. And if you're going to do business with the government, you had to be able to speak Greek.

Or if not speak it, have somebody close by who would. Most Jews in Judea, on the other hand, actually knew little Greek. This is quite evident in a lot of the documents that have been left behind.

I've already mentioned how Josephus, even though he was a wealthy upper-class Jew, couldn't write Greek. He had to have a translator when he wrote his first works to do the work for him. Later on, he could do so.

But Josephus makes an interesting observation. He says, among my people, the mastering of many languages is not considered to be a sign of refinement because even the most lowly slave can master several different languages.

Therefore, he says, we rather view those people with respect who have mastered our laws and our traditions. So even Josephus would not regard knowing Greek to be that really virtuous a thing. He picked it up eventually because he had to.

In the Diaspora, of course, we know Greek was widespread, even among the Jews for the most part. Josephus was a Judean Jew and didn't speak Greek. Philo of Alexandria was a Diaspora Jew living in Alexandria, and he was fluent in Greek.

Of course, we know that many of the New Testament letters are written in Greek. Some of them were probably translated into Greek by people who were more skilled with the language than the people who originally wrote them, the apostles. But throughout the Diaspora, if you wanted to communicate with people, you had to have Greek or at least a translator.

So Greek and Judea are definitely restricted. People doing business with the government of those days adopted a Greek name, you know, which was interesting because almost all the major figures and even those figures who were leaders in Jewish government, even in Judea, were known both by a Hebrew name and a Greek name. The Greek name was their public name, their business name.

The Jewish name, the Hebrew name was the one they used at home. There were changes in physical culture at this time, I talked about earlier, these are the cosmetic changes. These are the things that are the easiest to change.

Urban planning, city style changed dramatically in this period. Now, we know in the Old Testament that whenever the elders would get together, or whenever you're going to have judgment, or whenever you are just kind of hanging out to shoot the breeze, the place you gathered was the city gate. Archaeologically, the gate was usually kind of like a massive affair.

Sometimes, they were built in ways that allowed you to store goods there. Sometimes, you could put troops in there. But when we read in, say, the Book of Proverbs about the men gathering together, where do they gather? They gather in the city gate.

And when judgment was being conducted, when we hear the business of the city was being done, again, typically in the city gate, that changed in these days. A city square replaced the city gate as the primary place where business was conducted and where people would gather to talk. And from excavations in this period, we can see that the gates were no longer the affair.

I mean, they still had city walls, of course, but the gates were not the kind of affairs that they had been before. And the square, which was, again, a Greek kind of style of city, became much more prominent in the architecture and the eastern cities in this time. Theaters begin to pop up in cities around the city.

The realm of Palestine. And these were kind of an interesting development as well. The Jews, for the most part, the more conservative Jews, didn't trust theaters.

There was just something about them that bothered them. Well, probably because of the fact that they were so deeply associated with Greek society and Greek culture. And so many of the cities didn't have theaters.

But there was talk in the Talmud. There's a story that one of the rabbis opposed the building of a theater in one of the major Jewish cities. The king invited the rabbi to go to the theater with him, and he took him to the theater.

And after they watched one of the theatrical performances, the king says to the rabbi, have you seen anything here that really is against the laws or traditions of the fathers? And the rabbi had to reluctantly admit, no, I guess not. Okay, well, whatever. But yeah, the Jews well into New Testament times were suspicious of theaters.

But many cities had them. And then, of course, there's the gymnasia, which were the centers of training and the mind and the body. We see some changes in building style.

We begin to see the use of colonnades and Corinthian capitals and these kinds of things. For instance, this is a city in Jordan, Gerasa. And you can see up here these Corinthian capitals at the top of the pillars.

Now, pillars weren't new. There were pillars in the old days as well. But these kinds of stylized capitals at the top, that was a Greek thing.

This is Scythopolis or Beth Shean. And here we see the theater. And those seats look incredibly uncomfortable.

You know, people complain about the pews in church. But those look really, really hard to me. I guess they probably brought their own pillows, right? And here again, we see these rows of columns.

This was a Greek thing as well. And at the top of each of these columns, you can see the capitals. So, some definite changes in architecture came from contact between the peoples of the East and the peoples of Greece.

Clothing styles. Now, this is kind of different here. Traditionally, these are some artist renditions for the most part.

This is actually from an Assyrian wall carving. So, it gives you an idea of these were, these are depicted as being Israelite captives in this wall carving. And you can see the men had these long kind of robes.

The women had these long robes and head coverings. Children are naked for the most part. But this garment here, this is an artist's rendition.

And I think this is probably far too colorful for the average Israelite in the old days. But even so, the headdress, the stick and so on, and usually a couple of layers of clothing here, of robes and so on. That's pretty much accurate.

Now, what about the Greeks? Well, the Greeks had a different sort of clothing style. The women had these dresses that were very flowing and would pin at the shoulders. And the men also used a robe that would often pin at the shoulders.

But the robes were quite a bit shorter than the robes that were typically worn by people in the Middle East. Now, we don't know for the most part what the Jews were dressing like in the days of the Greeks because nobody had any photographs back in those days. And really, nobody bothered to tell us very much about it.

But this is a coin from Vespasian. Vespasian was the general who conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD and burned the temple and all that good stuff, and went on to become emperor. He minted a coin to celebrate his victory over Judea.

It's called the Judea Captive, Judea Captured Coin. Here, you can see the woman in her dress. This is a Jewish woman, and it looks very much like the ancient traditional dress of the Jewish woman.

But the man here, you can see, those are bare legs down there. He's definitely adopted more of a Hellenistic short sort of robe rather than the traditional Near Eastern long robe. So there is a change, at least by 70 AD, somewhat in the style of clothing.

We can also see this in the depiction of some Israelite kings, who are some of the few people we actually do have some pictures of here. This is the picture of King Jehu bowing before the Assyrian king. And he has this kind of what they call the Phrygian cap, you know.

It was kind of this soft cap that would kind of hang down on the side there. It became very popular during the French Revolution. But you can see it came around a long time before the French Revolution.

Here's a depiction of, I believe that this was supposed to be King Solomon. It looks like that's his temple back there. But this is, of course, an artist's rendition from a much later time.

But here, the same conical crown is used. We do see these chronicle crowns in some of the depictions from other realms. This is King Herod, Herod the Great.

And you'll notice what he's wearing on his head. Not the conical crown, not the Phrygian cap. Rather, he is wearing the laurel wreath, which was the way that the Greek and Roman kings would adorn their heads.

So, Herod, having to move a lot in the Greek and Roman circles that he did, adopted this style of headdress, which was commonly used among the Greeks. Household furnishings. Now, this is another interesting sort of change that we see occur.

This is an artist's reconstruction of an Israelite house of the old days. And this is kind of well-known about how they would do these things. You know, the lower level of the house was usually where the animals were kept.

And then there would be an open courtyard out here where they would do their cooking and other things of that sort. Then, upstairs is where the people typically sleep. Where did they sit? Well, you don't see any chairs here, do you? Where do they sit? They sit on the floor.

This is different from the typical Greek household. I believe this is probably from Pompeii, this frieze. But here, you can see a family sitting around a small table.

At this point, they're sitting on some sort of raised seat—not like our modern chairs—but you know, look, a cushion.

That looks more comfortable, doesn't it? This is a Greek depiction of a banquet on a pot. It's one of the few I can actually show you because it's not obscene—most of them are.

But anyway, in this one, we can see the folks here reclining on benches while they're being served by servants. And this was also a common way for the Greeks to dine. A free man would dine reclining on his side, and the servants would come and bring him his food.

Now, let's compare this to a scene from the time of Jesus. Jesus reclined at the table at the Last Supper. And so, we see that that old, traditional style of just sitting on the floor with your legs crossed beneath you has been kind of displaced by a more Greek style of sitting on the benches or reclining on the benches while you dine.

Again, cosmetic. You know, nothing really substantial here. It's not like they're sitting at the benches reading Homer to each other.

Dining on bacon or whatever. Let's talk about family structure a bit here, too, because this is a little bit more substantial. What do we know about the Greek influences on the marriage customs of the East? I've mentioned a couple of times about the fact that, for the most part, the Greeks liked their families small.

Furthermore, the Greeks typically only wedded one wife. They had lots of mistresses and lots of lovers. Sometimes lovers of both sexes, depending upon what kind of social status you had.

But as far as the family itself goes, a Greek family, one child, maybe two, particularly if it's a son. If your first child is a son, you probably don't have a second child. And the ways that they dealt with that was typically by, of course, infanticide.

Because, well, birth control wasn't all that effective back in those days. But the status of women in Greece is kind of remarkable. One of the questions I would often ask my students is, tell me, do you think the status of women was higher in Old Testament times or in New Testament times? And invariably, my students would say, New Testament, of course, because we've got Jesus talking to women and women following him around with his ministries and so on.

I say, not a chance, not a chance. Because look at the Proverbs 31 woman and some of the things she's doing, she's out there considering fields and buying them.

Greek women couldn't do that. In Hellenistic culture, Greek women were not allowed to enter into contracts without their husband's approval. And even with their husband's approval, they rarely entered into contracts.

She's purchasing servants or hiring servants and having them work in her household back in Old Testament times. She is kind of honored by her children. A lot of things that Greek women would have loved to have had happen in their household.

The Jewish women were enjoying those things back in Old Testament times. And some of this was rubbing off. Some of these ideas of real misogyny that were endemic in Greek culture were rubbing off.

There are lots of speculations among anthropologists about where some of this stuff came from. And one of the explanations is that the Greek soil was really very bad. And so, because the Greek soil was so bad that the Greeks felt like they were kind of constantly on the verge of starvation.

And because of that, they had to keep small family sizes. That's also been used as an explanation for the famous Greek penchants for sexual relations with boys. You didn't have to worry about boys getting pregnant.

So, at any rate, this style of family size managed to spread throughout much of the Hellenized world—not so much among the Jews, however. For the Jews, family and having lots of kids continued to be one of their great joys and great signs of blessings: God gave them lots of kids.

So, they continued to have a number of kids. We find by the New Testament that the idea of polygamy was starting to be displaced. Now, one of Paul's requirements for elders is that they had to be the husband of one wife.

We read that, and people say, Paul's saying that you couldn't be divorced. No, he's saying literally that you couldn't have three or four wives. The Talmud allowed a Jewish man to have up to three wives, but very few of them did in that period.

So, the style of the smaller family, not so much catching on, but the style of monogamy and a single wife, that was kind of catching on. Now, very likely, a single wife was always the norm in Israel, even back in the old days. Obviously, you had kings and other people who had multiple wives.

But if you read through the Bible, you see that very typically, when you've got more than one wife, you've got trouble. They're competing against one another. They're plotting against each other.

Typically, somebody ends up hurting in the relationship. A single wife seemed to have always been the ideal, going all the way back to that fun-loving couple, Adam and Eve. And when Jesus, of course, is asked about marriage, he says, God says, created a male and female for one another, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

But certainly, the change of marriage customs was kind of inspired or encouraged by the Greek insistence upon what we might say monogamy. The dowry system shows another way that the status of women had changed. In the Old Testament, you wanted to get a wife, you had to pay daddy, you know if you had any kind of status.

That was one of the big differences between a wife and a concubine, by the way. To acquire a wife, you typically had to pay a dowry. You had a bride price, rather.

You had to pay to acquire your wife. And sometimes those bride prices were pretty remarkable, as in the case of King David when he wanted Michael, the daughter of Saul, for his wife. He had to have a bride price consisting of various body parts of the enemies.

But anyway, the bride price was in a way of honoring, in a sense, the woman who is coming into the marriage. It shows that the woman is regarded as being worthy and something you want to strive for, to have, and something worth giving your money to possess. As I said, concubines usually didn't come with a bride price, and that's one of the reasons why they were considered kind of second-class wives.

The dowry system of the Greeks, that was a little different. In the dowry system, you have to pay the husband to take your daughter off your hands. Yep.

So, this is part of the reason why the Greeks didn't really like having daughters, is because they view the daughters as kind of a financial liability. Because when you get a husband for them, you're going to have to pay somebody to take them. So, that was a custom that we now see being adopted by the Jews.

And we have a number of documents from this era where we see the kind of dowries that women brought into their marriages. So, the status of women is definitely kind of going down, even in Judaism during this period. Another thing we see is a real proliferation of divorce.

We already talked about how divorce was definitely a problem in the Elephantine, Papyri, and Persian periods. It became more of a problem in the Greek era.



And again, we can find many records from, there's a cache of texts called the Babatha archives, which come from about 130 AD. But we see that this lady Babatha was divorced several times. And interestingly enough, she was a very wealthy woman.

And some of the divorces she initiated. Whereas that was different because, you know, typically in Jewish custom, it was only the husband who could divorce his wife. It was unusual to see wives divorcing their husbands.

But it was happening. So, yeah. But divorce was becoming a much more common thing and an expected kind of thing.

You would have it written into your marriage contract about how much money each party would receive in the case of a divorce. And that was just kind of expected to be the way things were going to go. The value of children, in Judaism at least, was not affected by the proliferation of Greek culture.

As I said, the Jews always liked lots of kids. The Jews continued to like lots of kids. And that was one of the things that really annoyed the Greeks and the Romans about the Jews is the fact that they had such big families.

There were so many of them all over the place. Just the sheer numbers of Jews made them a bit of a force, really, in the empires of the Greeks and then later in the Roman Empire. How about religion and philosophy? Now here we're getting into some, again, interesting waters.

We do see some evidence that some Jews, more so certainly in the Diaspora, adopted some Greek ideas. We already talked quite a bit about Philo of Alexandria, this philosopher who basically wanted to reconcile the Bible with Plato and came up with this wonderful, marvelous, clever system of doing so.

But we see the systems of Bible interpretation and so on, which begin to follow some of the Greek styles of literary interpretation as well. So, a number of things that we see beginning to happen, particularly among the Diaspora Jews, show that they are reading the Greeks, listening to them, and trying to adjust, in some ways, to Greek ideas. In Jerusalem, we see this Hellenizing party trying to introduce Greek ideas into the city of Jerusalem itself.

How successful are they? Well, it goes back and forth. Primarily their motivation here is not because they think, oh, Greek culture is so great, man. It's primarily, hey, think of all the things we can get if we become Greeks, you know? If we start working like Greeks and living like Greeks, we're going to get all the benefits, you know? We're going to get our taxes cut.

We're going to get these great buildings going up. So, the Hellenizing party seems to have primarily been driven not by ideological concerns but rather by greed. So how deep their reforms went, that's kind of hard to say.

We know that there were some aspects that we'll talk about a little bit later. But one of the high priests who was of this progressive party broke down, we're told, some of the barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles. Some of these statements are very kind of vague to us.

I'm sure that when they were written in the Book of Maccabees they knew precisely what they were talking about. We, however, reading them now, don't really know what they were talking about. But it appears that during this Hellenizing phase in Jerusalem, Gentiles were able to freely merge with the Jewish worshippers even in the inner courts of the temple.

So, there's a little bit of stuff going on that later Jews and earlier Jews would have looked at and said, this just ain't right. Again, we have little evidence that there was widespread syncretism in Judea itself. We do have inscriptions, Jewish funerals of stones, for instance, which are inscribed in Greek.

And those have been cited by scholars through the ages as evidence that the Jews were becoming more Greek in their understanding. Now, what they are evidence of is that the guys who carved the stones and probably the best stone carvers, were Greek and were fluent in Greek. So, I don't see, can't see, that as real evidence that Greek culture was being adapted to any extent by the Jews of Palestine.

How about philosophy? It's kind of interesting. The earliest reference of any Greek to the Jews comes from this fellow by the name of Hecataeus of Abdera. His work hasn't survived.

There are just some fragments in some of the later works, but Hecataeus of Abdera described the Jews as a race of philosophers. This is the first Greek comment on Jews.

And he apparently was a world traveler. He went to Judea. He saw their temple.

He saw that there were no idols there. He saw the ways that the Jews comported themselves, their laws, their ethics, and so on. And so, he concluded that the Jews were a race of philosophers, which is a remarkable kind of way of thinking about that people.

There were Jewish philosophers in the diaspora. And Philo of Alexandria is only the most well-known of these. Philo also knew of some other philosophers who went even further than he did.

For instance, he knew of Jews who had spiritualized the laws to such extent that they were able to eat pork. But he himself, of course, thought that was going too far. But anyway, so there were people who were living in the diaspora who were basically adopting very Hellenized ways and very Hellenized systems of thinking, really.

But among Palestinian Jews, there is really no evidence of any kind of knowledge of Greek philosophy. One of the things that sometimes scholars will point out is that the Mishnah, the Jewish holy book from 3rd century AD, mentions the writings of Homer. Well, it mentions the writings of Homer, but there's no evidence that they had the slightest idea what was in the writings of Homer.

They knew that Homer existed. They knew that the Greeks loved Homer, but they also knew that Jews didn't read Homer for the most part. So, if Homer was considered the epitome of Greek culture, every Greek boy grew up reading Homer, if Homer's writings were not even recognized or known by the Jews, we can't imagine that Greek learning had gone very far in Palestinian Judaism.

One thing that did get adopted by the Jews was astrology. And this is kind of interesting. Astrology is, of course, a very old practice.

It originated in Babylon. In fact, the Greeks, one of the things that they loved about the Babylonians is they viewed them as being the fathers of astrology. Josephus tried to claim that Abraham was the father of astrology, and he taught it to the Babylonians and the Egyptians, and so on.

But no, we know it originated in Babylon. Babylonian astrology was different from what we know of as astrology today. You know, today we'll get our newspaper, and we'll open it up, and we'll say, oh, let's see what's going to happen to the Aquarius today.

And you're going to look at your horoscope and see today you will meet a tall, dark, handsome stranger or whatever. Babylonian astrology was different. Babylonian astrology was primarily about the observation of signs in the skies.

Part of the reason is because they believed that many of these astral bodies were gods. And so, if something funky happened, like you say, see a star shooting across the sky, then that must be a sign that the gods are up to something. Okay, and so we have texts that talk about the significance of thunder in various realms and regions of the sky or of the movements of various planets and so on.

So essentially what it was, was it was about the observation of omens. The Bible didn't like astrology very much. Yeah, Isaiah and Jeremiah both have passages where they mock the astrologers of the Babylonians.

They do not regard them as being in any way trustworthy. And in fact, astrology was in some ways associated with pagan worship, because part of the ideology behind this is that the heavenly bodies are gods. You know, the morning star is goddess Ishtar and these kinds of things.

So, if you don't believe that the stars are anything but, you know, stars, that God created them as lights in the sky, according to the book of Genesis, then really the foundations of astrology kind of crumble. But then along came the Greeks. The Greeks adopted astrology from the Babylonians, but they put it on a different footing.

See, according to the Greeks, astrology was actually scientific. This is based on their conception of the universe. And this goes really, I mean, kind of Plato was, not Plato, but Aristotle was kind of one who really developed this understanding of the universe.

This idea that you've got the earth at the center of the universe, and then you've got these spheres that go around the earth. So, each one of these spheres has its different characteristics. The first sphere is the atmosphere.

And then the next sphere that comes around the earth is that you've got the heavens, and then you've got the heavenly bodies up here. And as each of these spheres move and rotate, they rotate at different kinds of rates. And you might have heard that phrase, the music of the spheres, you know? Well, the idea was when these spheres were rotating around each other, it would produce this kind of heavenly music that was the underlying tones of the universe.

Kind of a lovely romantic idea, but of course, you know, totally unscientific. Anyway, but the notion is that if you've got two bodies rubbing against one another, and things happen, right? It can get hot, and you can wear off some skin and things of this sort. So, if you've got one sphere rubbing against another sphere like this, well, it's going to affect what happens to the sphere below it.

And so, the Greeks say, well, it's these movements of these bodies up above in these spheres, which are causing things to happen on the earth down below. And so, see, astrology is scientific. Now, they have begun to develop theories about the significance of the various constellations, the way that the constellations interact with one another, and the phenomena that are seen in the different constellations.

They begin to develop these ideas of dividing the calendar into different astrological signs and so on. All this is coming back, going back to the Greeks based upon their ideas of the universe. Now, as a bit of an aside here, if we can see that the basis for these Greek ideas were ridiculous, we can also see just how ridiculous it is that

people continue to use astrology to this day because it is still just as unscientific as it was way back in the days of the Greeks.

Anyway, the Jews reluctantly, it seems, began to embrace Greek astrology. But among the Dead Sea Scrolls, we have several horoscopes that were cast, a little bit different from your typical Greek horoscopes. Basically, what these horoscopes did was predict what type of character people would have based upon when they were born.

That sounds like something that we would get in a store in our day and age. But yes, these go all the way back to the Dead Sea Scrolls and have these kinds of connections to what the Greeks were doing with astrology in their day. This is from the 5th century AD.

This is the floor of a synagogue which has been preserved. And this is remarkable because these are indeed the signs of the zodiac with their names above them in Hebrew. Kind of hard to read these, but these are the same signs of the zodiac.

Lookie there, you know, we got the fish, got Leo up here, we've got Scorpio. So, all these various Gemini, the twins, etc., etc., all these ancient astrological signs here depicted on the floor of a synagogue in Palestine from the 5th century AD. One of the things that's remarkable about this is that in the time of Jesus, well, not quite the time of Jesus, but shortly after the time of Jesus, there were riots in Judea and Jerusalem over the use of animal imagery in the temple and in other public buildings.

Because, at that point, any kind of depiction of animals was considered to be idolatry. Here, by the 5th century AD, it's even inside their synagogues. So, who says they can't change a little bit, right? Anyway, what we see here is that the changes that took place in Greek culture, or rather in Jewish culture, by contact with the Greeks, were mostly cosmetic changes, not really anything deeply substantial, with some possible exceptions of things like the adoption of astrology and a few other Greek accouterments.

But for the most part, the Jews held fast to their ancestral traditions and the things that really mattered to them, the laws of the Lord, and the traditions of the fathers, the Jews in Palestine, at the very least, we can say, held very firmly and very fast to those traditions and that culture.

This is Dr. Anthony Tomasino in his teaching on Judaism before Jesus. This is session 6, The Jews under Greek Rule.