

## Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, Judaism Before Jesus, Session 5, Alexander the Great

### Abstract:

These sources provide a historical overview of **Alexander the Great's** rise to power and his transformative impact on the ancient world. Driven by a desire for revenge against **Persia**, Alexander united the Greeks and established a massive empire that shifted the global center of influence from East to West. The text highlights his military genius, his promotion of **Hellenism** through the blending of cultures, and his strategic use of propaganda to bolster his reputation as a divine figure. Key events include his conquest of **Tyre and Egypt**, his eventual defeat of **Darius III**, and his efforts to integrate native leadership into his administration. Following his premature death at age 33, the narrative explains how his vast territories were fractured by the **Diadochi**, his rival generals who fought for control. This transition ultimately led to the rise of the **Ptolemaic and Seleucid** dynasties, which would deeply influence the future of the Jewish people.

### Briefing Document:

The Era of Alexander the Great: Conquest, Hellenism, and the Fragmentation of Empire

Executive Summary

The rise of Alexander the Great marked a pivotal shift in global history, transitioning the center of power from the East (Persia and Babylon) to the West (Greece and eventually Rome). In a brief decade-long campaign, Alexander established the largest empire the world had seen to that date, stretching from Macedonia to India. His reign was defined not only by military brilliance and the introduction of the "phalanx" tactic but also by a visionary—though often controversial—attempt to fuse Greek and Eastern cultures into a new expression known as **Hellenism**.

Following his premature death at age 33 in 323 BC, his empire collapsed into internal strife. His top generals, the **Diadochi**, abandoned his policies of cultural leniency and divided the realm into competing kingdoms. This era set the stage for centuries of conflict, particularly between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties, which would deeply impact the Near East and the Jewish people.

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### Origins and Ideological Foundation

Alexander's trajectory was shaped by his Macedonian roots, his father's military innovations, and a high-level Greek education.

- **Macedonian Roots:** While Greeks viewed Macedonians as "barbarians," King Philip of Macedon united the Greek city-states under his rule after mastering Greek warfare.
- **The Influence of Aristotle:** Philip hired the philosopher Aristotle to tutor Alexander. This education instilled in Alexander a deep-seated belief in the superiority of Greek culture, a conviction that initially fueled his "noble crusade" against Persia.
- **Divine Aspirations:** Rumors encouraged by Alexander's mother, Olympias, suggested he was the son of Zeus. This sense of destiny influenced his later claims of divinity and his identification with the hero Hercules.
- **Ascension to Power:** After Philip's assassination in 336 BC, the 20-year-old Alexander secured his throne through ruthless force, most notably the total destruction of the rebelling city of Thebes.

### Military Conquests and Strategic Innovations

Alexander's success against the numerically superior Persian forces is attributed to a combination of superior technology, tactics, and psychological warfare.

### Battle Tactics and Armor

- **The Phalanx:** A formation where soldiers linked large shields to form an impenetrable wall, extending long spears through gaps. This rendered Persian archers and cavalry largely ineffective.

- **Hardened Soldiers:** Unlike the Persian army, which often consisted of diverse, poorly trained conscripts or mercenaries, Alexander's troops were battle-hardened veterans from Greek city-states.

### Psychological Warfare and Propaganda

Alexander utilized "scare tactics" and ruses to demoralize his enemies:

- **The Giant Horse Bits:** He reportedly forged oversized horse bits and left them on battlefields to spread rumors that his army rode "supersized horses."
- **Cyrus the Great Strategy:** He studied and emulated the tactics of Cyrus the Great, portraying himself as a restorer of order against incompetent Persian administration.
- **The Gordian Knot:** In Phrygia, Alexander "untied" the legendary Gordian knot by cutting it with his sword, a move viewed as a portent of his future rule over the world.

### Key Engagements

#### Battle/Siege Date Key Outcome

<b>Granicus</b>	334 BC	First major victory against Persian forces in Asia Minor.
<b>Issus</b>	333 BC	Direct defeat of King Darius III, who fled, leaving his family behind.
<b>Siege of Tyre</b>	332 BC	A 7-month siege of an island fortress; Alexander built a bridge to reach the city.
<b>Gaza</b>	332 BC	Resistance was crushed after two months, securing the Near East.
<b>Gaugamela</b>	331 BC	Final defeat of Darius III's main army, opening the path to Persia and Babylon.

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### The Near East and Cultural Integration

Alexander's interactions with the peoples of the Near East were characterized by a mix of military pragmatism and religious diplomacy.

#### Relations with the Jews and Samaritans

- **Jerusalem Legend:** According to Josephus and rabbinic tradition, Alexander visited Jerusalem, where he was met by the high priest. The legend claims both men had experienced dreams identifying Alexander as a God-ordained ruler. (Historical evidence for this visit is considered thin).
- **Samaritan Revolt:** When the city of Samaria revolted and killed Alexander's governor, he razed the city and repopulated it with Greeks. He provided funds for Samaritans to rebuild elsewhere (near Mount Gerizim) to mollify them, while the city of Samaria became a Greek center.

#### Egypt and the Pharaohship

Upon arriving in Egypt, Alexander was hailed as a liberator.

- **The Apis Bull:** To show piety, he worshipped the Apis Bull, contrasting himself with the Persian ruler Cambyses, who was said to have killed it.
- **Divine Sonship:** He was declared the "son of Amun-Ra" and assumed the title of Pharaoh.

#### The Vision of Hellenism

As his campaign progressed, Alexander's mission shifted from pure conquest to a "fusion" of East and West:

- **Mass Weddings:** In Susa, Alexander organized a mass wedding where 10,000 of his soldiers and 80 officers married Persian women. He himself married Roxana (a Bactrian noble) and a daughter of Darius III to legitimize his rule.
- **Administrative Leniency:** He often retained native rulers and was "stingy" with allowing his troops to plunder, attempting to win over the conquered populations as their "savior."

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#### Internal Dissension and Decline

Alexander's attempt to adopt Eastern customs and his growing claims of divinity created a rift with his Macedonian officers and troops.

- **Cultural Resentment:** Greek soldiers despised Alexander's adoption of Persian dress, perfumes, and harems, viewing these as "sissy" behaviors unbecoming a warrior king.
- **The Divinity Conflict:** Tensions peaked over Alexander's claim to be the reincarnation of Hercules. During a drunken dispute over his divinity, Alexander killed his close friend, plunging himself into a deep depression.
- **The India Mutiny:** In 327 BC, after reaching the Indus River, his exhausted troops refused to go further, forcing Alexander to abandon his march toward the end of the world and return to Babylon.

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### The Death of Alexander and the Diadochi

Alexander died in Babylon in 323 BC at the age of 33. While rumors of poisoning or the effects of heavy drinking persist, the exact cause of death remains unknown. His body was preserved in honey and eventually entombed in Alexandria.

### Fragmentation of the Empire

Because Alexander's son was unborn at the time of his death, his generals—the **Diadochi** (Successors)—initially appointed Perdikkas as regent. However, unity was short-lived:

1. **Assassination of Heirs:** Alexander's wife, Roxana, and his son were eventually killed by the general Cassander.
2. **The Division of Territory:** After decades of war, the empire was carved into several major segments:
  - **Ptolemy:** Took Egypt and eventually Palestine, ruling with an iron fist and treating the land as a "money-making factory."
  - **Seleucus:** Secured Mesopotamia, Babylon, and Syria.
  - **Antigonus (The One-Eye):** Controlled Asia Minor.
  - **Cassander & Lysimachus:** Divided Macedonia and Greece.

## Historical Significance

The most enduring legacy of Alexander's conquests was the establishment of **Alexandria** in Egypt—which became a global center for culture and philosophy—and the permanent Hellenization of the Near East. The constant friction between the resulting Ptolemaic and Seleucid powers would define the political and religious landscape of the Mediterranean for the next two centuries.

## Study Guide:

### Alexander the Great and the Rise of the Hellenistic World

This document synthesizes the historical analysis of Alexander the Great's reign, his military conquests, the cultural fusion known as Hellenism, and the subsequent division of his empire by the Diadochi.

#### 1. The Rise of Macedonia

The shift in world power from the East to the West began with the decline of the Persian Empire's financial and military strength. While the Greek city-states were often divided by internal conflict, they were eventually united under **Philip of Macedon**.

#### Philip's Legacy

Though the Greeks viewed Macedonians as "barbarians," Philip transformed Macedonia into a powerhouse. Having studied the battle tactics of his conquerors while a prisoner of war, Philip improved upon them to unite the Greek city-states. His primary ambition was to invade Persia, a goal he passed to his son, Alexander, before his assassination in 336 BC.

#### Alexander's Origins and Education

- **Divine Rumors:** Alexander's mother, **Olympias**, encouraged the belief that Alexander was the son of Zeus rather than Philip.

- **Intellectual Foundation:** Alexander was tutored by the philosopher **Aristotle**, through whom he developed a profound love for Greek culture and a belief in its inherent superiority.
- **Ascension:** Alexander became king at the age of 20. He immediately established his authority by ruthlessly suppressing rebellions, most notably in the city of Thebes, which he destroyed as a warning to other city-states.

## 2. The Conquest of the Persian Empire

In 334 BC, Alexander led an army of 40,000 troops across the Dardanelles into Asia. His campaign, which lasted roughly a decade, created the largest empire the world had seen up to that time.

### Key Military Engagements

Battle/Event	Significance
<b>Granicus</b>	The first major victory against Persian forces.
<b>Gordian Knot</b>	Legend held that whoever untied this knot would rule the world; Alexander famously cut it with his sword.
<b>Battle of Issus</b>	The first direct encounter with King Darius III, resulting in a Greek victory and the flight of the Persian king.
<b>Battle of Gaugamela</b>	The 331 BC conflict that opened the path for Alexander to enter the heart of Persia and burn Persepolis.

### Military Innovations and Tactics

The Greek forces possessed several advantages over the larger Persian armies:

- **The Phalanx:** A formation where soldiers linked large shields to create an impenetrable wall, extending spears through gaps to repel attacks.
- **Veteran Status:** Unlike the Persian conscripts or mercenaries, Greek soldiers were battle-hardened veterans trained from youth.
- **Propaganda and Ruses:** Alexander used psychological warfare, such as leaving "supersized" horse bits on battlefields to spread rumors that his army used giant horses.

- **Armor:** The Greeks utilized superior armor that protected them against the light arrows and cavalry tactics favored by the Persians.

### 3. Expansion into the Near East and Egypt

#### Siege of Tyre (332 BC)

Tyre was an island fortress considered impregnable. When the city refused to surrender and killed Alexander's emissaries, he constructed a massive bridge (or mole) from the mainland to the island. After seven months, the city was breached, its men massacred, and its women and children sold into slavery.

#### Relations with Jerusalem and Samaria

- **The Jerusalem Legend:** Though likely ahistorical, legends suggest the High Priest of Jerusalem met Alexander after a divine dream, leading Alexander to honor the God of Israel.
- **The Samaria Revolt:** Following a revolt where the Samaritans killed Alexander's appointed governor, Alexander razed the city of Samaria and repopulated it with Greeks. He later provided funds to the Samaritans to rebuild near Mount Gerizim to mollify them.

#### Egypt and Divine Kingship

In Egypt, Alexander was hailed as a liberator and a new Pharaoh. He demonstrated piety by worshipping the **Apis Bull**, contrasting with previous Persian rulers. He visited the oracle of **Amun-Ra**, who proclaimed him the divine son of the god, a title Alexander integrated into his own identity.

### 4. The Fusion of Cultures: Hellenism

As Alexander moved further east, his mission shifted from simple conquest to a visionary "fusion" of East and West. This new cultural expression is known as **Hellenism**.

#### Integration Policies

- **Marriage Alliances:** Alexander married **Roxana**, the daughter of a northern satrap, and later **Statira**, the daughter of Darius III. In a mass wedding at Persia, he encouraged 10,000 of his soldiers to marry Persian women to symbolize the union of the two worlds.

- **Governance:** He retained native rulers (satraps) in power whenever possible, following the model of Cyrus the Great, much to the chagrin of his own officers who wanted more plunder and direct control.
- **City Building:** Alexander founded approximately 20 cities named after himself, with **Alexandria** in Egypt becoming a primary center for philosophy and culture.

### Internal Friction

Alexander's adoption of Persian customs (perfume, robes, and court rituals) and his claims of divinity (comparing himself to **Hercules**) led to deep resentment among his Macedonian troops. These tensions culminated in India, where the army mutinied at the Indus River, refusing to march further.

### 5. The Death of Alexander and the Diadochi

Alexander died in **Babylon in 323 BC** at the age of 33. His death was preceded by a deep depression following the death of his best friend, **Hephaestion**. Whether he died of illness, alcohol poisoning, or assassination remains a subject of historical speculation.

### The Successors (Diadochi)

Alexander left his wife Roxana pregnant, and **Perdiccas** was appointed regent. However, his generals—the **Diadochi**—quickly began fighting for control.

- **The Fate of the Heirs:** Roxana and Alexander's son were eventually murdered by the general **Cassander**.
- **Division of the Empire:** By 306 BC, the generals abandoned the pretense of preserving the empire for Alexander's heirs and declared themselves kings of their respective regions.

### Key Successor Kingdoms

- **Ptolemy:** Established a dynasty in **Egypt**, ruling it as a "money-making factory" and a breadbasket for the Mediterranean. He also initially controlled Palestine.
- **Seleucus:** Took control of **Mesopotamia and Syria**, ruling much of the old Persian heartland.

- **Antigonus (The One-Eye):** Briefly controlled Asia Minor and Palestine before his defeat and the redistribution of his lands.
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Study Review: Alexander the Great

Short Answer Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2–3 sentences based on the provided history.

1. How did Philip of Macedon prepare the way for Alexander's conquests?
  2. What was the significance of the "Gordian Knot" in the legend of Alexander?
  3. Why was the Greek phalanx so effective against the Persian military?
  4. How did Alexander's approach to the Egyptian religion differ from that of the Persians?
  5. What was the primary cause of the mutiny of Alexander's troops in India?
  6. What was the "Hellenism" that Alexander sought to promote?
  7. How did Alexander attempt to legitimize his rule over the Persian people through marriage?
  8. Describe the conflict between Alexander and the city of Samaria.
  9. Who were the Diadochi, and what was their role after Alexander's death?
  10. Why did Ptolemy view Egypt as a strategically and economically vital territory?
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Answer Key

1. Philip united the Greek city-states under Macedonian rule and improved military tactics he had learned as a prisoner of war. He established the ambition to invade Persia as a "noble crusade," providing Alexander with a trained, veteran army.

2. Legend stated that whoever untied the complex knot at Gordium would rule the world. Alexander chose to cut the knot with his sword, an act viewed as a portent of his future conquest of the Persian Empire.
3. The phalanx utilized a wall of linked shields and long spears that created an impenetrable barrier. This tactic was particularly effective against the Persians, who relied on light arrows and cavalry that could not pierce the Greek formation.
4. Unlike the Persian King Cambyses, who was said to have killed the Apis Bull, Alexander worshipped the bull and showed piety toward Egyptian gods. Consequently, the Egyptians hailed him as Pharaoh and the divine son of Amun-Ra.
5. The troops had reached the end of their patience after years of campaigning and were unimpressed by Alexander's increasingly Eastern habits and claims of divinity. They eventually mutinied at the Indus River, forcing Alexander to abandon his march further into India.
6. Hellenism was the fusion of Greek and Eastern (Persian/Egyptian) ideas and cultures into a new cultural expression. Alexander promoted this by building Greek-style cities and encouraging the blending of populations through marriage and shared governance.
7. Alexander married Roxana, the daughter of a local satrap, and Statira, the daughter of Darius III, to create blood ties to the existing Persian leadership. He also held a mass wedding for 10,000 of his soldiers and Persian women to symbolize the union of the two empires.
8. After the Samaritans revolted and killed his appointed governor, Alexander razed the city and repopulated it with Greeks. To balance this, he gave the surviving Samaritans money to rebuild their community near their holy site on Mount Gerizim.
9. The Diadochi were Alexander's generals who fought for control of his empire after his death in 323 BC. They eventually murdered his heirs and carved the empire into several independent kingdoms, such as the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires.

10. Ptolemy recognized Egypt as a fertile "breadbasket" that could serve as a massive source of wealth. He ruled the land with an iron fist, treating it as a money-making factory to fund his regional ambitions.
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### Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Use the provided historical context to develop comprehensive responses to the following prompts.

1. **The Evolution of Alexander's Leadership:** Analyze how Alexander's leadership style changed from his initial campaigns in Greece to his final years in India and Babylon. Consider his shifting views on culture, divinity, and the treatment of conquered peoples.
  2. **Military Superiority:** Explain the specific military, technological, and psychological factors that allowed a force of 40,000 Greeks to dismantle the massive Persian Empire.
  3. **The Legend vs. The Reality:** Discuss the role of legends and propaganda in Alexander's career, such as the Gordian Knot, the visit to Jerusalem, and his claim as the son of Amun-Ra/Hercules. How did these stories serve his political goals?
  4. **The Impact of Hellenism on the Near East:** Describe how the fusion of Greek and Eastern cultures redefined the social and political landscape of the Middle East, specifically focusing on the establishment of cities like Alexandria and the Greek repopulation of Samaria.
  5. **The Failure of Succession:** Evaluate why Alexander's empire collapsed into warring factions almost immediately after his death. What does the rise of the Diadochi reveal about the stability of Alexander's "unified" world culture?
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### Glossary of Key Terms

- **Amun-Ra:** The chief Egyptian deity; the oracle of Amun-Ra proclaimed Alexander to be the god's divine son.

- **Apis Bull:** A sacred bull worshipped in Egypt; Alexander's worship of the bull was a key act of political and religious piety.
- **Aristotle:** The famous Greek philosopher who served as Alexander's tutor, instilling in him a love for Greek culture.
- **Diadochi:** Meaning "successors"; the generals who divided Alexander's empire among themselves after his death.
- **Gordian Knot:** An intricate knot in Phrygia that Alexander "untied" by cutting it with his sword, symbolizing his path to world rule.
- **Hellenism:** The cultural expression resulting from the fusion of Greek (Hellenic) ideas with Eastern (Persian, Egyptian, Near Eastern) traditions.
- **Hercules:** A Greek hero/god with whom Alexander compared himself, eventually claiming to be his reincarnation.
- **Macedonia:** A region north of Greece; home to Philip and Alexander, viewed by southern Greeks as somewhat uncultured or barbarian.
- **Mount Gerizim:** The site of the Samaritan temple, which they believed to be the only legitimate place of worship, contrasting with the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.
- **Phalanx:** A Greek military formation characterized by a dense block of infantry with overlapping shields and long spears.
- **Satraps:** Local provincial governors in the Persian system; Alexander often retained them to maintain stability in his conquered territories.
- **Tetragrammaton:** The four-letter name of the God of Israel (Yahweh); according to legend, Alexander saw this name on the High Priest's headdress in a dream.