

Zodiac from the Beit Alpha Synagogue

Faith in a *(sometimes)* Hostile World

Leading “Citizens”:
Egyptian Judaism

January 27, 2019



WoodsEdge
COMMUNITY CHURCH

Living in Our World Today

01

The church exists in the already/not yet stage of fulfillment

02

We live tension – living with the guidance of the Holy Spirit but still see the evil effects of sin

03

Our calling is to spread the message of the Christ and thus announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God

04

The question is: How do we do that?

A Crucial (Unknown) Period

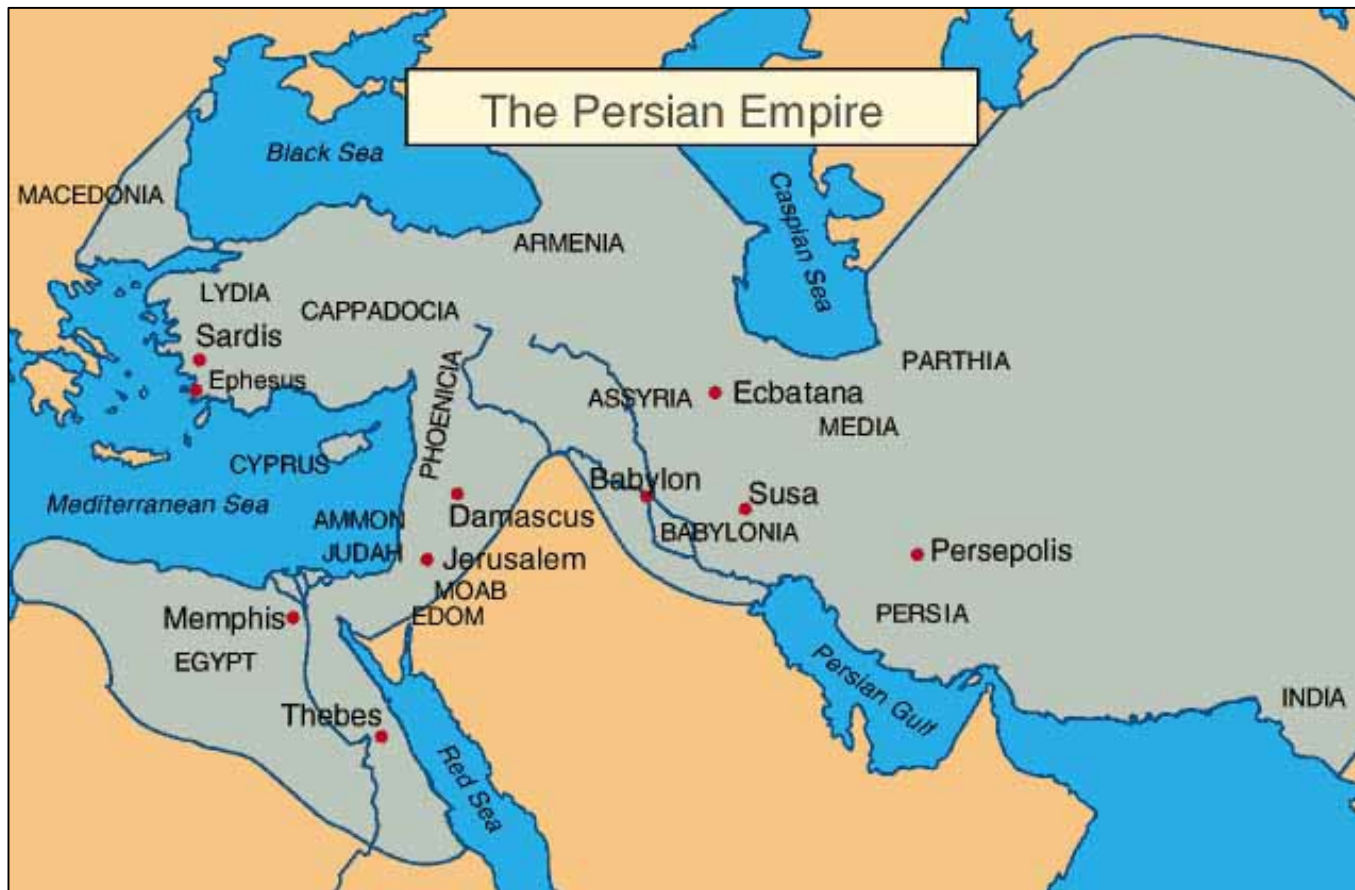
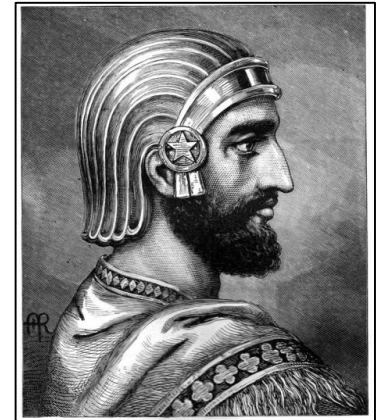
Our mirror for thinking about this issue is the Intertestamental Period:

- From late 5th c. BCE to the 1st c. CE
- Judaism grew from the ashes of the Babylonian Exile
- A single culture, Hellenism, spread throughout the Mediterranean
- The church took root and began to spread the Gospel



The Exile Ends with the Persians in Control

Cyrus the Great



Darius I



Last Week's Takeaways

Judaism focused in the post-Exilic period on questions central to identity and survival

The central strategy was to live as a “faithful remnant”

The church lives in tension between our mission to evangelize and to be a faithful remnant

Each one of us chooses every day which side of the scale we fall on - what am I willing to risk to see others come to Christ?

Reading from Last Week

Read
Esther
Ch. 7 - 9

- Is the plot to kill the Jews a governmental affair, a religious dispute, or an ethnic conflict?
- What is the Jewish response once the political upper hand has been gained?



New Perspectives on Identity

Genesis 42:50 (JPS) –

“Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Aseneth **daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On**, bore to him.”

Genesis 48:5 (JPS) –

“Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, **shall be mine**; Ephraim and Manasseh **shall be mine no less than** Reuben and Simeon.”

How do you explain the marriage of a Patriarch to not just a Gentile but the daughter of a foreign priest? And how are their offspring considered equal?

New Perspectives on Identity

Joseph and Aseneth 8.5 (1st c. BCE) –

“And Joseph said, “It is not fitting for a man who worships God...to **kiss a strange woman** who will **bless** with her mouth **dead and dumb idols** and **eat** from their table **bread of strangulation** and **drink** from their libation **a cup of insidiousness** and **anoint** herself with **ointment of destruction.**”

Joseph and Aseneth 10.12 -

“And Aseneth ... took all her gods that were in her chamber, the ones of gold and silver **who were without number** ... and threw all the idols of the Egyptians through the window facing north... And Aseneth took **her royal dinner** and the fatlings and the fish and the flesh of the heifer and **all the sacrifices** of her gods and **the vessels of their wine of libation** and threw everything through the window looking north, and gave everything to the strange dogs.”

New Perspectives on Identity

Joseph and Aseneth 12.3 – 6, 8 - 9

“With you I take refuge, Lord,
and to you I will shout, Lord,
to you I will pour out my supplication,
to you **I will confess my sins**,
and to you I will reveal my lawless deeds.
Spare me, Lord,
Because I have sinned much before you,
I have committed **lawlessness** and
irreverence,
and have said wicked and unspeakable
things before you.
My mouth is **defiled** from the **sacrifices
of the idols** and from **the tables** of the
Egyptians.

I have sinned, Lord,
before you I have sinned in much
ignorance, and have worshipped dead
and dumb idols....
With you **I take refuge**, Lord,
and to you I bring my supplication,
And to you I will shout.
For just as **a little child** who is afraid flees
to **his father**, and the father, stretching
out his arms, snatches him off the
ground and puts his arms around him...
likewise you too, Lord, **stretch out your
hands** upon me as **a child-loving father**,
and **snatch me off the earth.**”

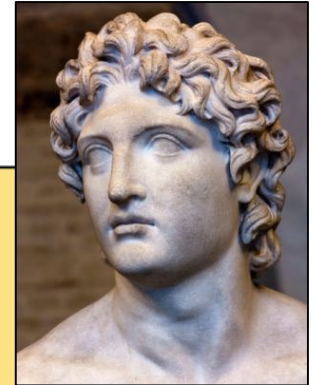


Group Discussion — 3 Minutes

- Where were you born?
Raised? Different places?
- How are they different
from here? Culturally,
economically, etc?

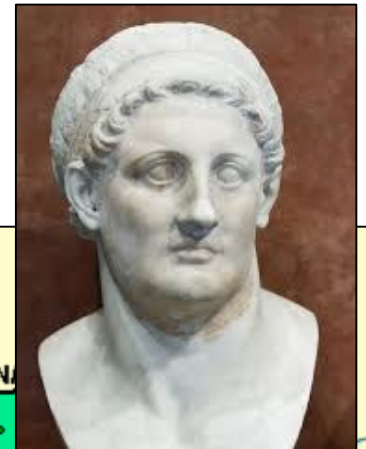
Alexander Conquers the World

Alexander I of Macedonia "The Great"

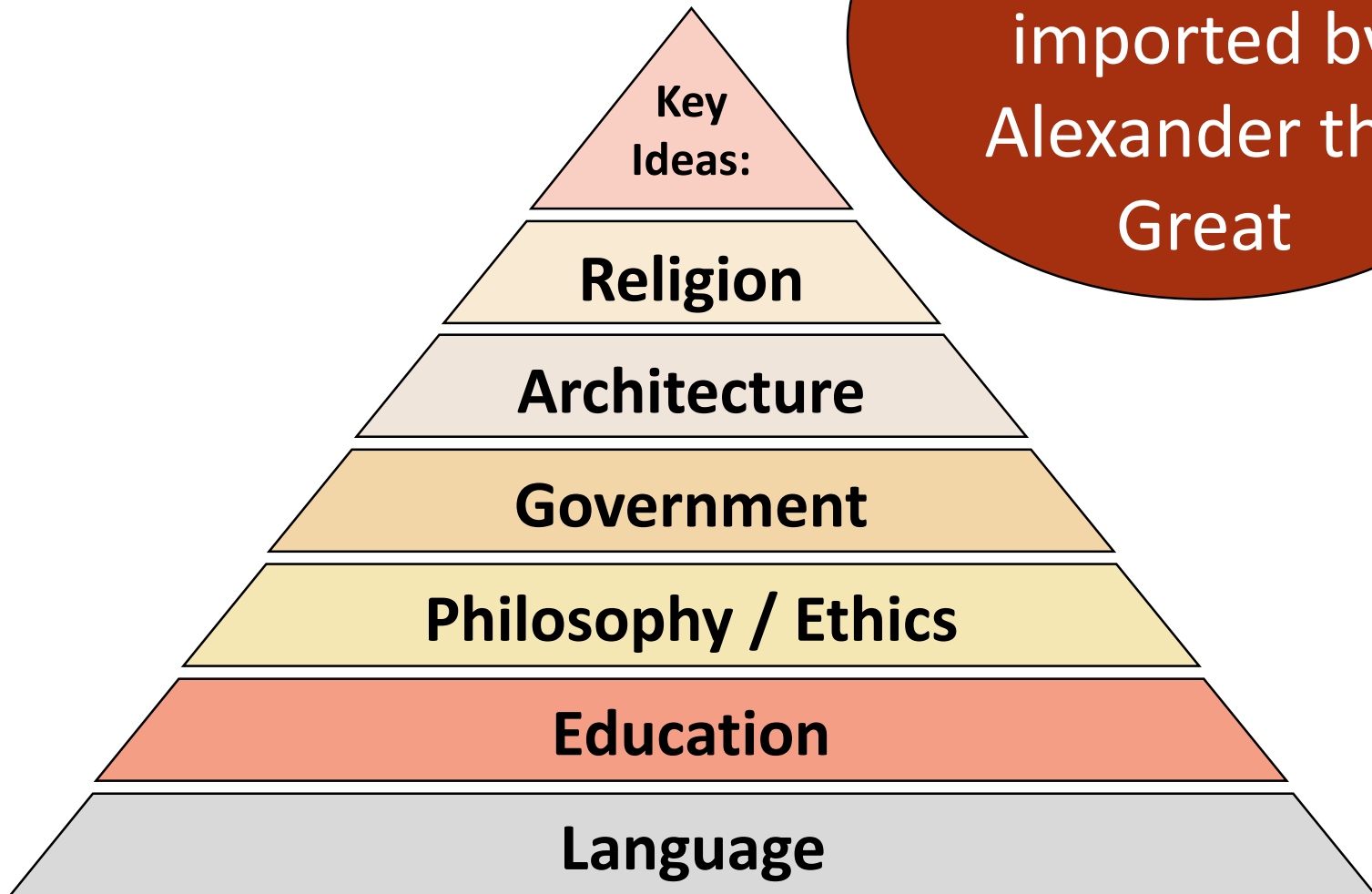


Generals Divide the Kingdom

Ptolemy I "Soter" (Savior)



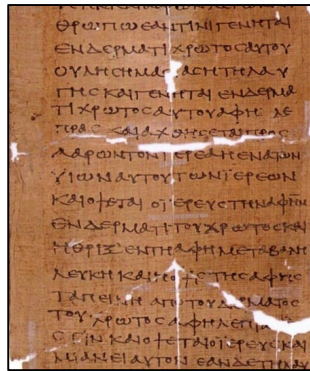
Rise of Hellenism



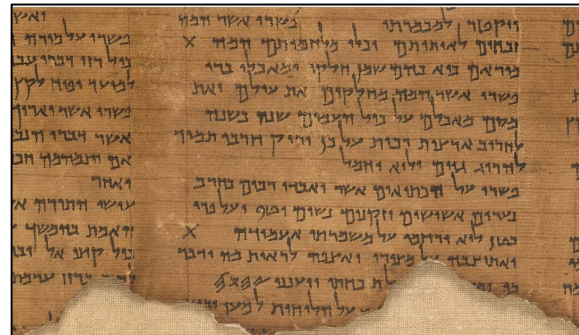
Cultural
perspective
imported by
Alexander the
Great

Jewish Innovations

Explosion of Jewish Literature



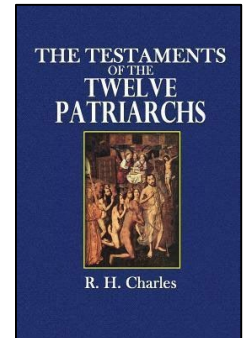
Septuagint (LXX)



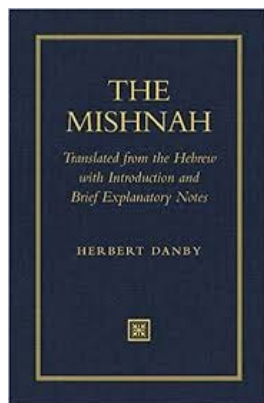
Hebrew Bible



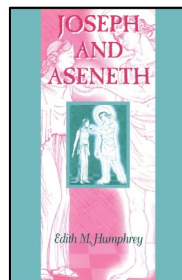
Dead Sea Scrolls



Testaments, Oracles

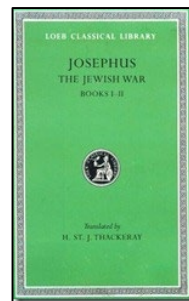


Mishnah
(Oral Law)

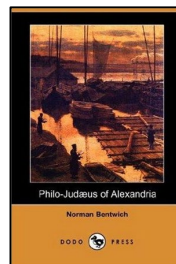


Works of
"Edification"

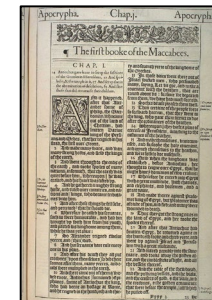
Josephus



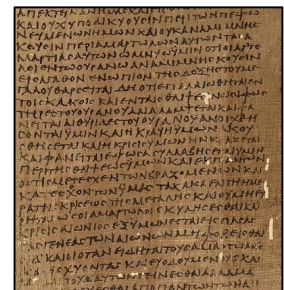
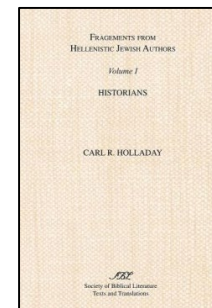
Philo
Judaeus



Elephantine
Papyri
many, many
fragments...



Apocrypha



Apocalyptic
Literature

Jewish Innovations

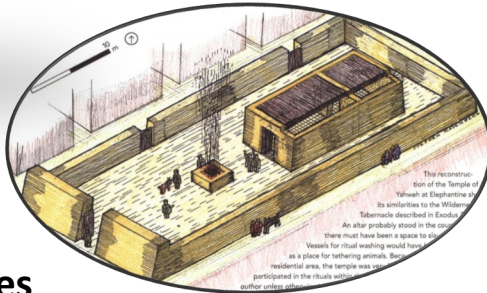


Jewish parties

New Innovations



Ascetic groups



Multiple Temples



Synagogues

Why do you think there was an explosion of innovation during this period?

**Discussion
Question**

3 minutes

“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

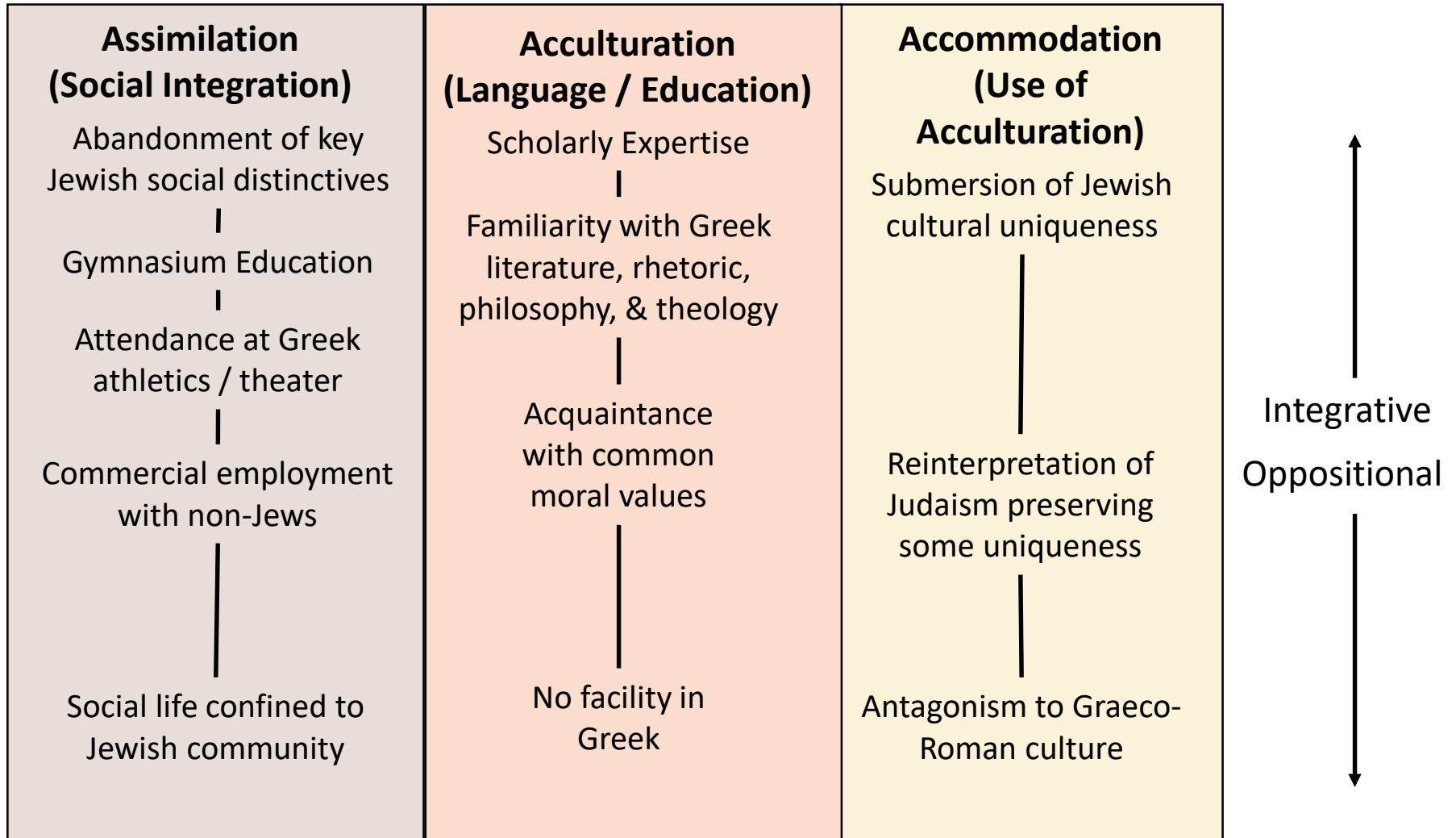


Acculturate – Greek names, language but keep customs



Isolate – hold only to Jewish customs & reject Hellenism

Praxis in Hellenistic Judaism



From JMG Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)*

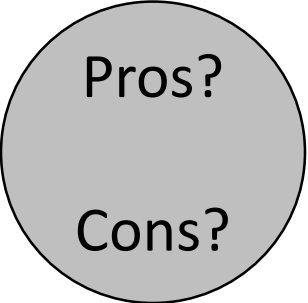
Cultural Convergence in Egypt

The Fragments of Artapanus 27.3 – 6 (approx. 200 BCE) -

“As a grown man he was called Mousaeus by the Greeks. This Mousaeus was **a teacher of Orpheus**. As a grown man he bestowed many useful benefits on mankind, for he **invented boats** and **devices for stone construction** and **the Egyptian arms** and the **implements for drawing water** and for **warfare**, and **philosophy**. Further he...**appointed** for each of the nomes [states] **the god to be worshipped**, and for the priests the sacred letters, and that **they should be cats and dogs and ibises**.


On account of these things then Moses was loved by the masses, and was **deemed worth of godlike honor by the priests and called Hermes**, on account of the interpretation of the sacred letters.”

What About Our World?

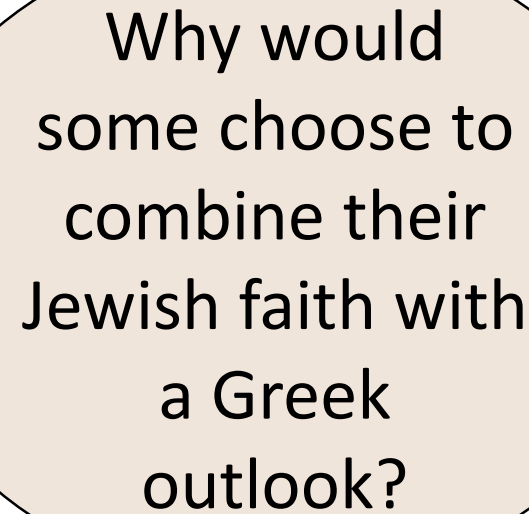


Pros?

Cons?



Do we also
mix faith
with our
culture?



Why would
some choose to
combine their
Jewish faith with
a Greek
outlook?

A Biblical Perspective

There are core teachings to the Christian faith that unify the “catholic” (meaning “universal”) church:

1 Cor. 15:3 – “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”

1 Tim. 1:3 – “...command certain people not to teach false doctrine any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.”

What is cultural and what is not in our church today?
In our beliefs?

A Few Implications for Us...

1. We MUST know what the core of our faith is
2. How much do I talk about “them” instead of “us”?
3. Relationship is fundamental to God – is it to us?

What are we willing to be flexible on to see people come to Christ?

Or is salvation cultural as well as spiritual?

Today'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 21st century context

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

Reading for Next 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?