



# Faith in a (*sometimes*) Hostile World

Leading “Citizens”:  
Egyptian Judaism  
January 27, 2019

Zodiac from the Beit Alpha Synagogue

# 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

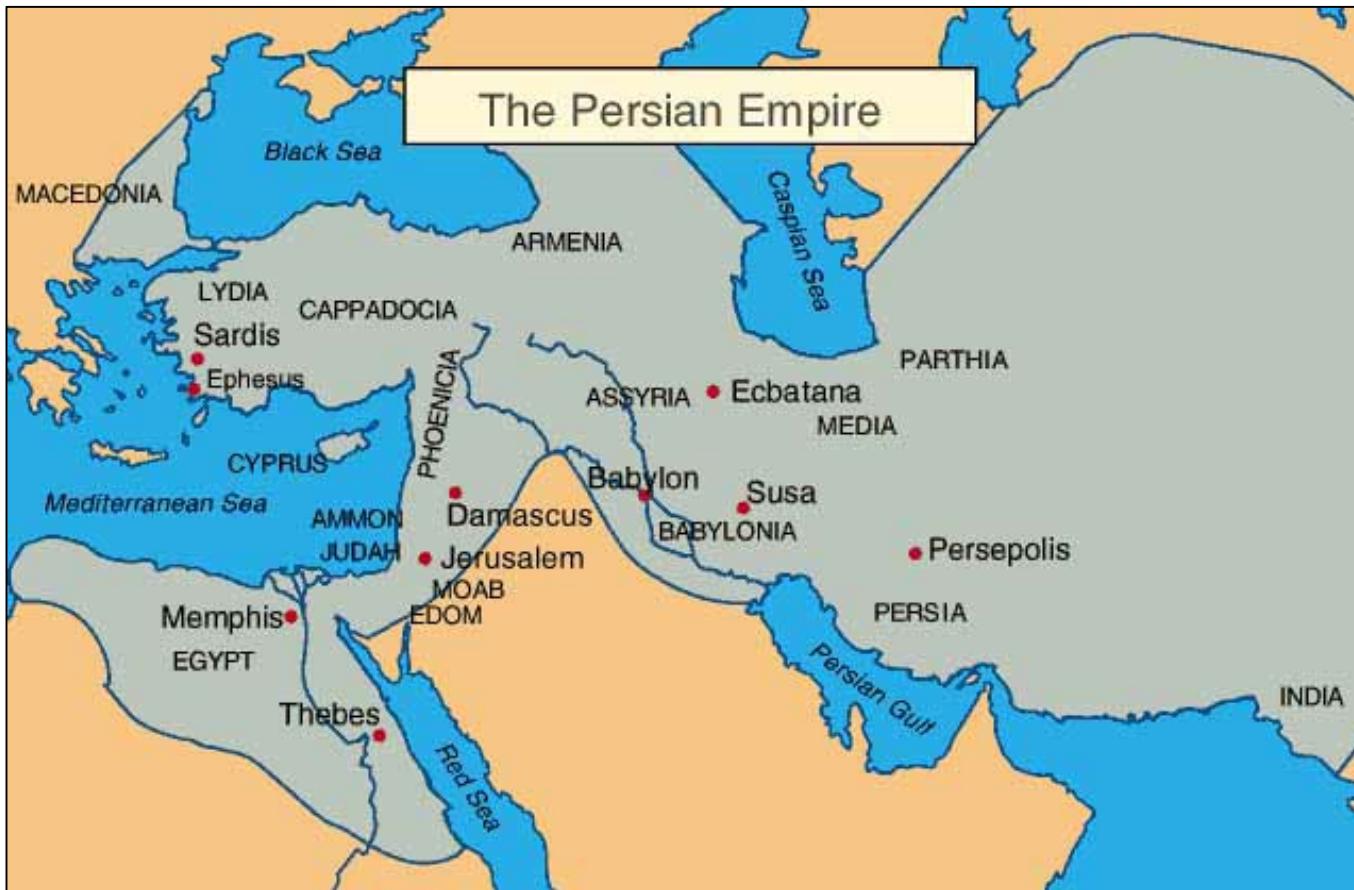
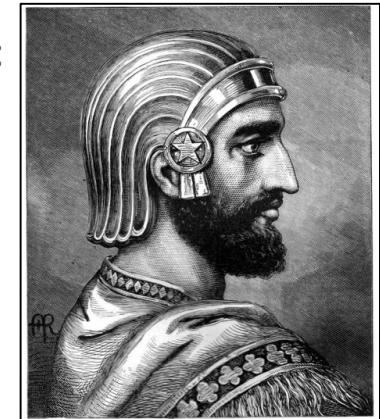
**Our mirror for thinking about this issue is the Intertestamental Period:**

- From late 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 (1<sup>st</sup> 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 -*

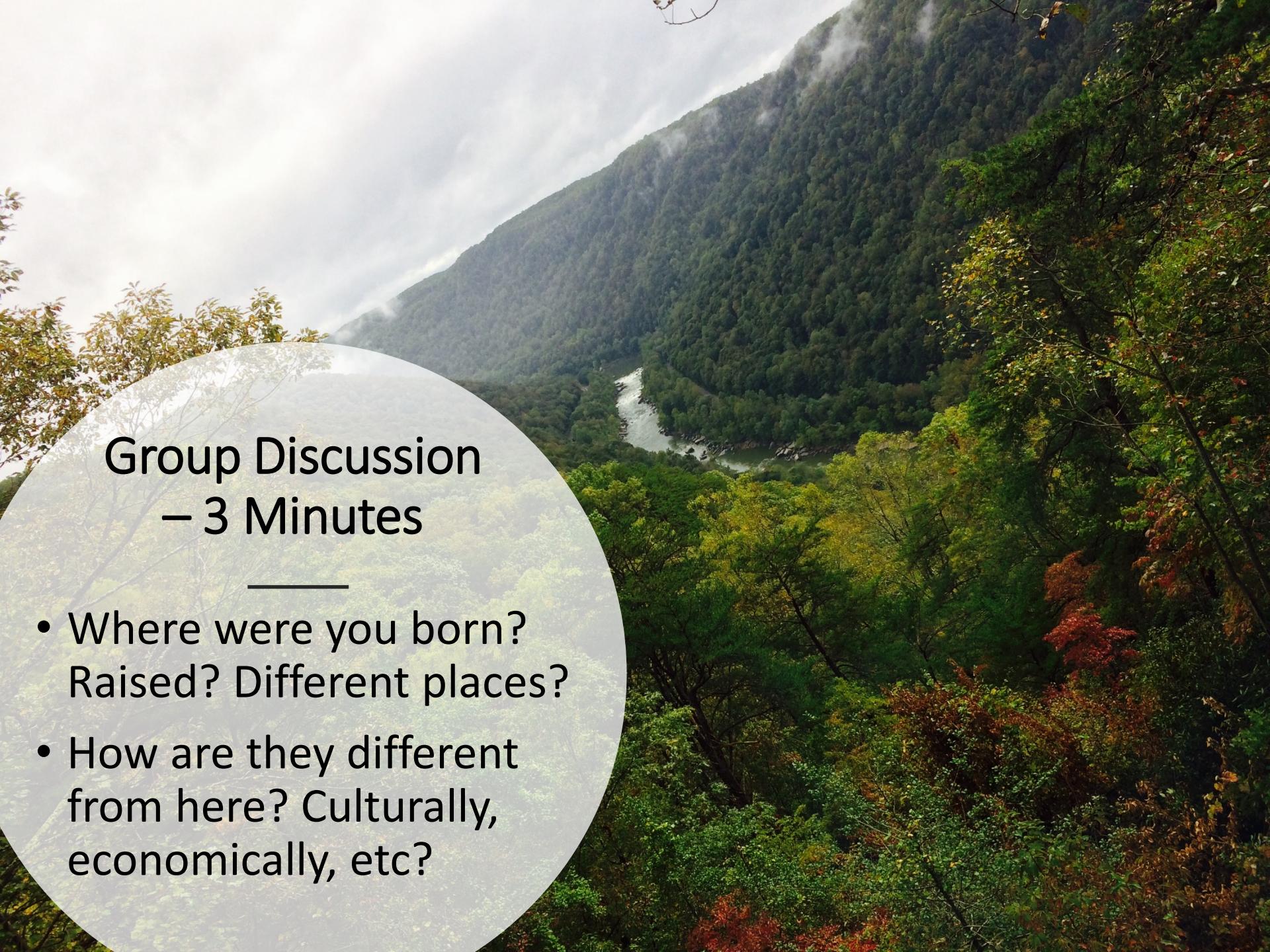
“And Aseneth ... took all her gods that were in her chamber, the ones of gold and silver **who were without number** ... and threw all the idols of the Egyptians through the window facing north... And Aseneth took **her royal dinner** and the fatlings and the fish and the flesh of the heifer and **all 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.**”



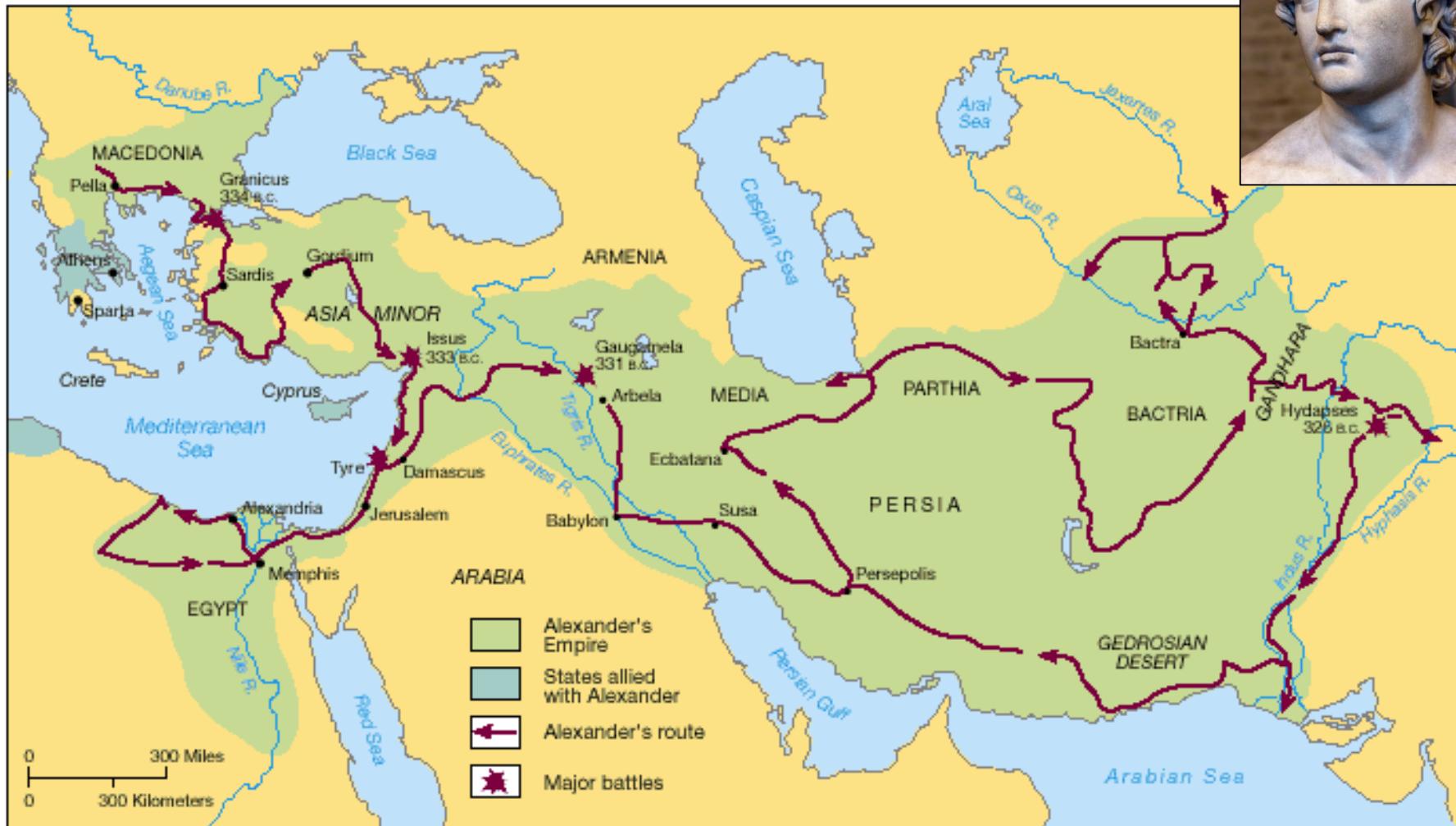
## Group Discussion – 3 Minutes

---

- 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”

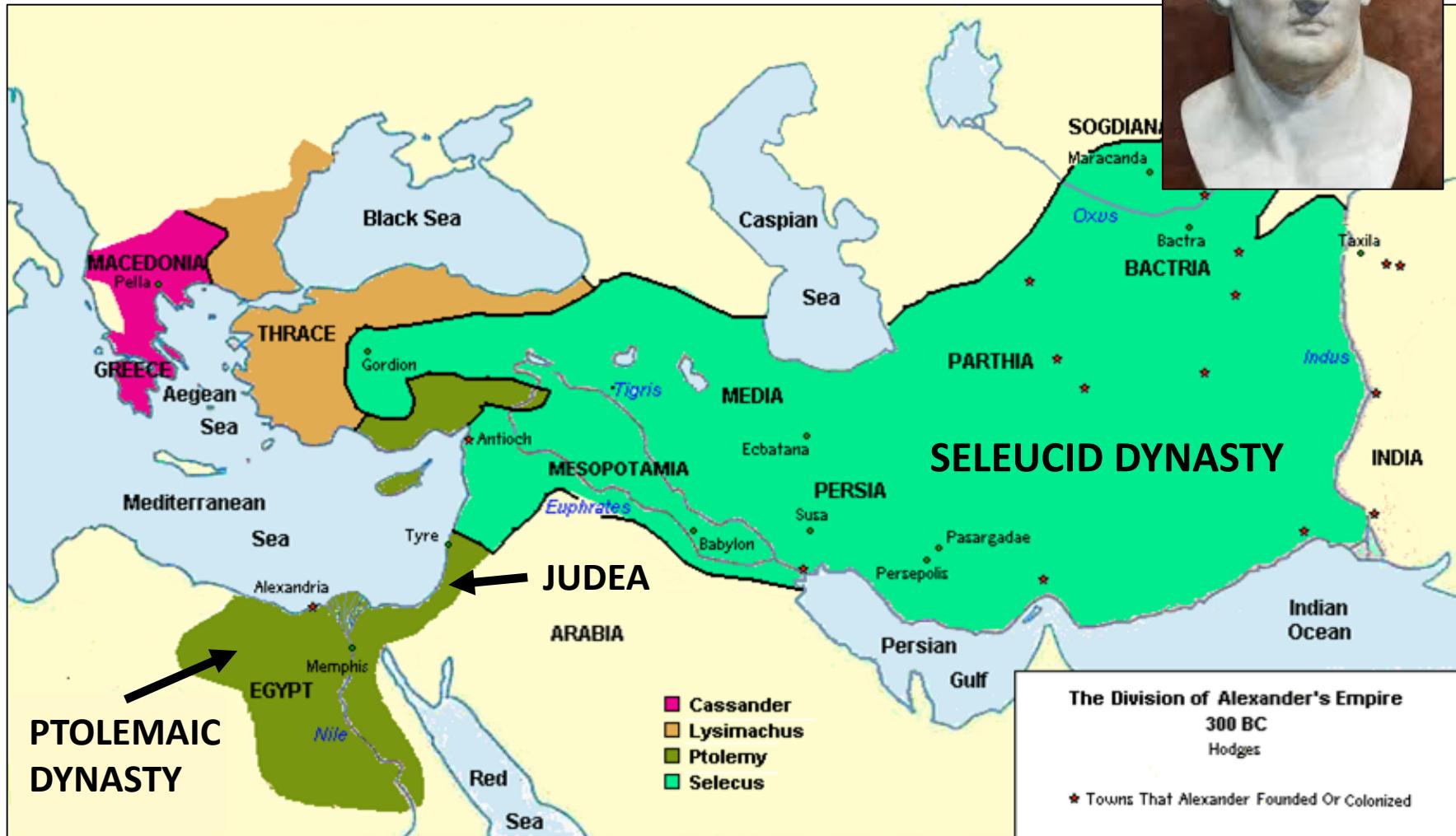


0 300 Miles  
0 300 Kilometers

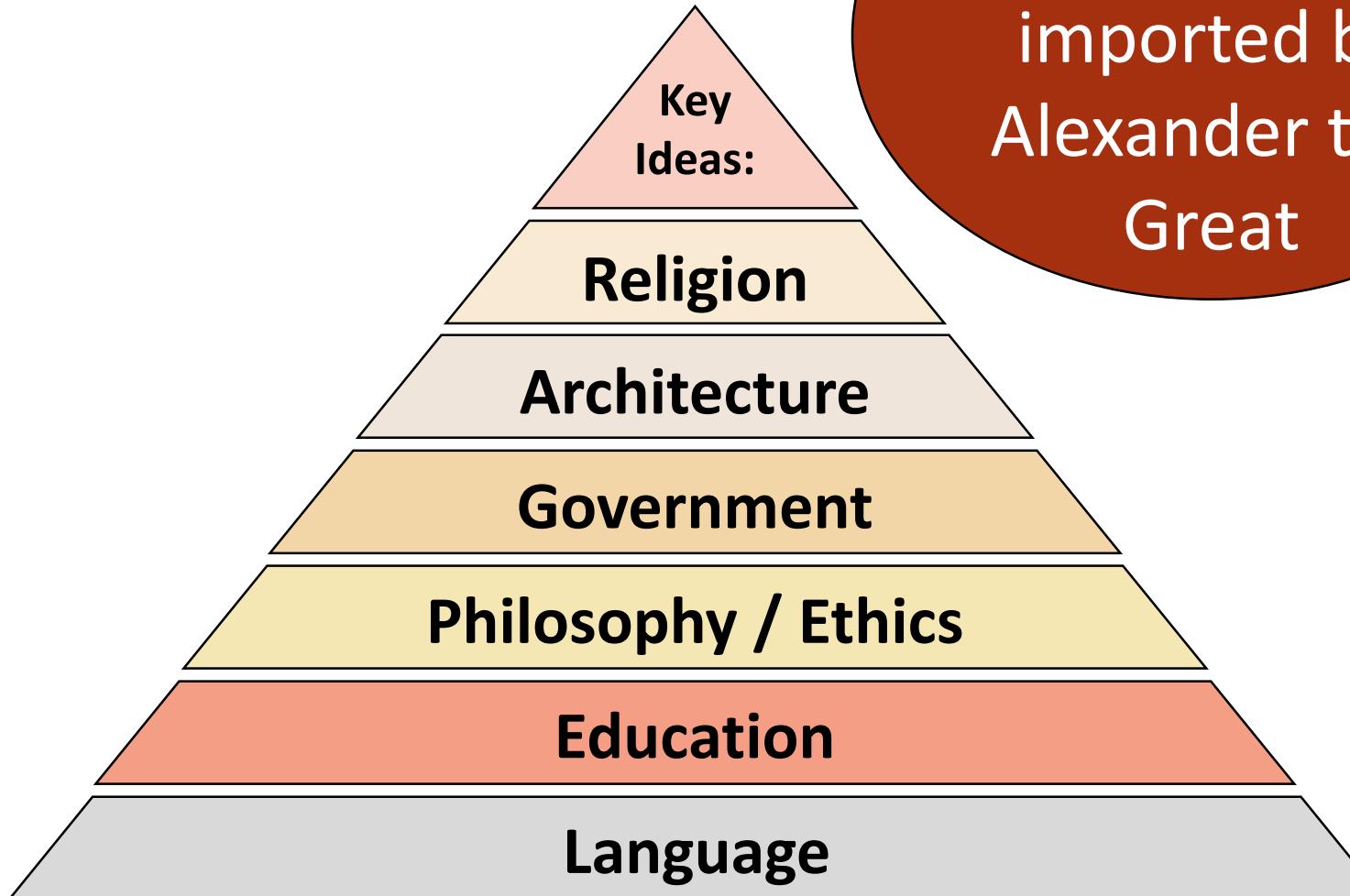
- Alexander's Empire
- States allied with Alexander
- Alexander's route
- Major battles

# Generals Divide the Kingdom

Ptolemy I "Soter" (Savior)



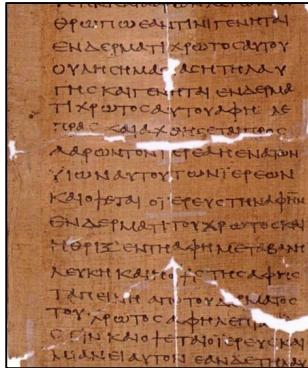
# Rise of Hellenism



Cultural perspective imported by Alexander the Great

# Jewish Innovations

## Explosion of Jewish Literature



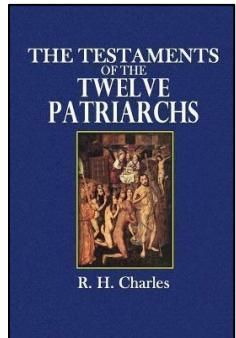
Septuagint (LXX)



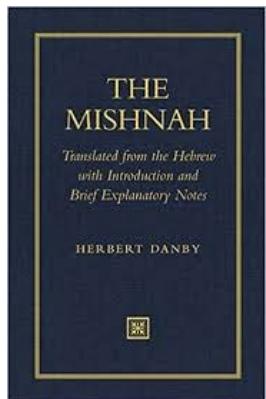
Hebrew Bible



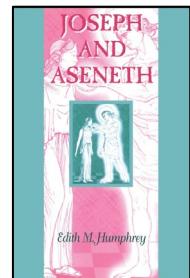
Dead Sea Scrolls



Testaments,  
Oracles

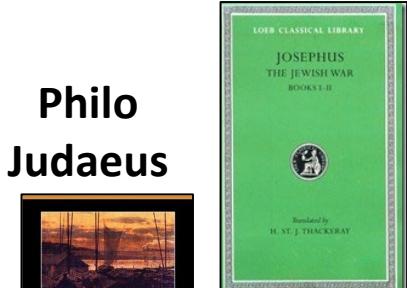
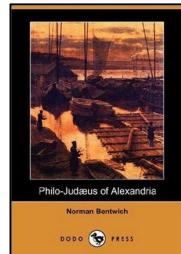


Mishnah  
(Oral Law)



Works of  
“Edification”

Josephus

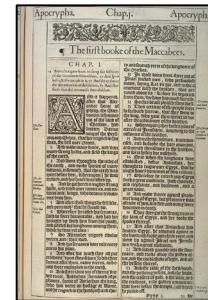


Josephus

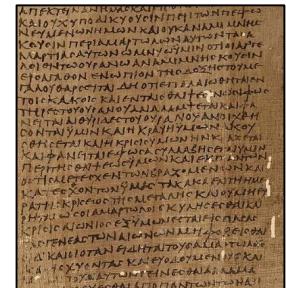
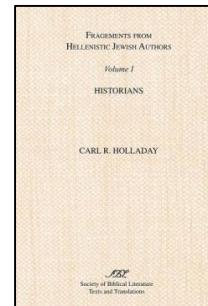
Philo  
Judaeus



Elephantine  
Papyri  
many, many  
fragments...



Apocrypha



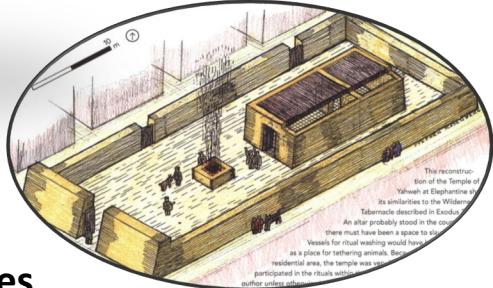
Apocalyptic  
Literature

# Jewish Innovations



New Innovations

Jewish parties



Multiple Temples



Ascetic groups

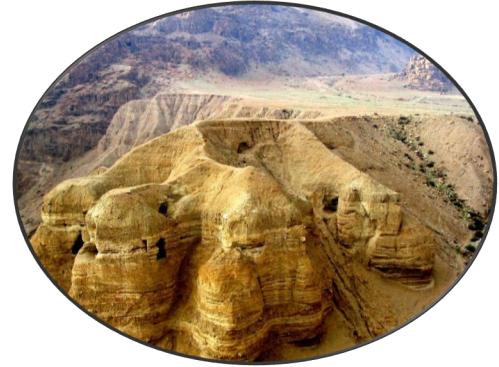
Synagogues

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

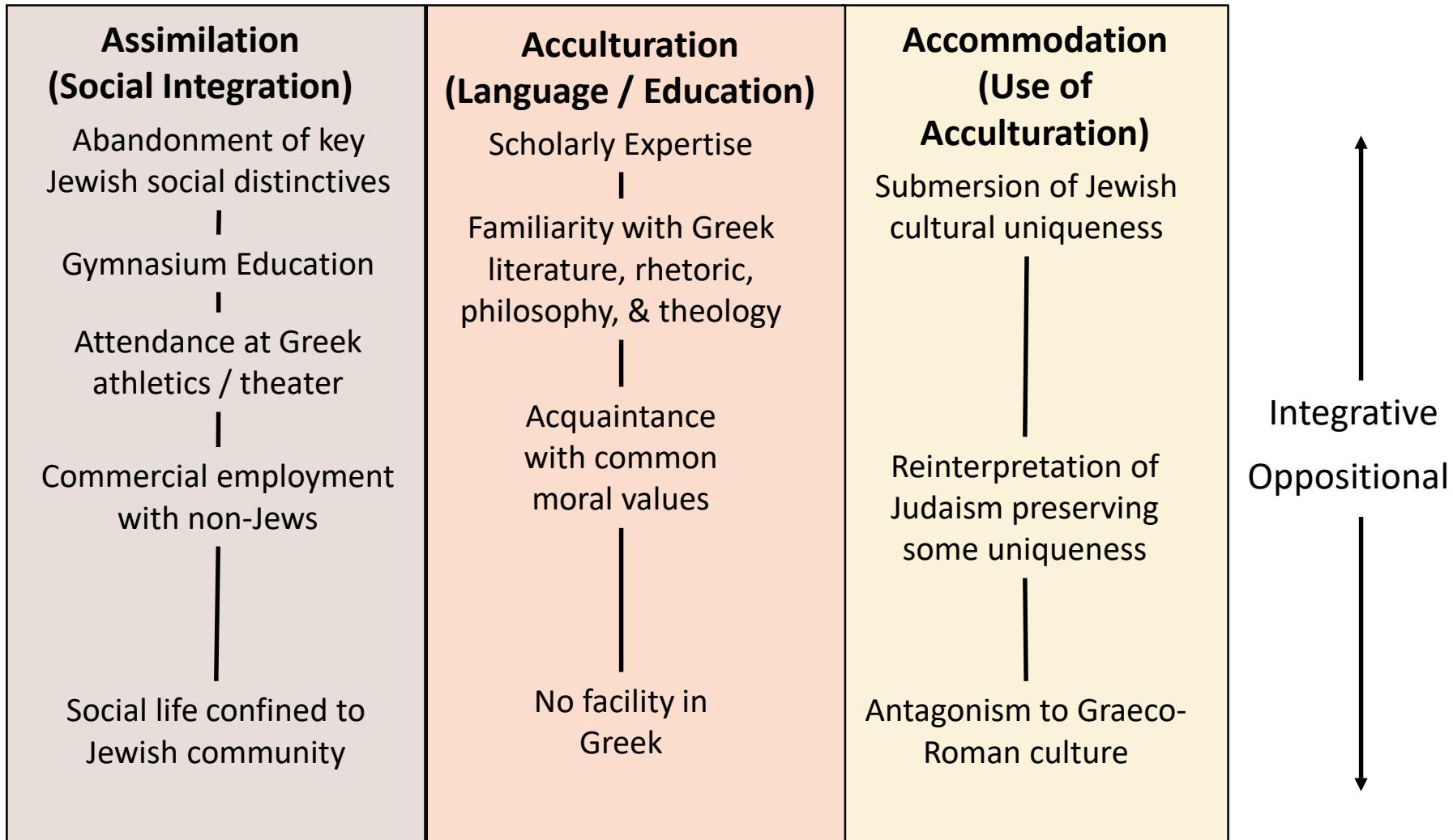


Acculturate – Greek names, language but keep customs



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 21<sup>st</sup> 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?*