

READING JOSEPHUS

Week 3: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.237-326 (Loeb Commentary)
(Online translation, Book 12, chaps. 5-7)

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/flavius-josephus/antiquities-jews/>

175-161 B.C.E. is one of the most documented periods of Jewish history and one of the most difficult to understand. All the sources have some bias or agenda that colors the presentation along partisan lines. No doubt the Jewish people would have regarded these events much differently from Antiochus IV Epiphanes, so you will want to temper the suggested motives for his imposition of Hellenization on the Jews.

What do scholars know about the process of how cities in antiquity became Hellenized? There is no discussion about this process except from Jewish sources (Josephus, 1 and 2 Maccabees) concerning the one city, Jerusalem, where the attempt failed. From these deliberations scholars extrapolate what the process most likely consisted of for other cities.

As you work through the primary source material, I will point out some key ideas to which you should be attentive. It would be best to read Josephus first, before reading 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Book 12, Chap. 5:

1. Josephus suggests trouble with Antiochus originates within a conflict between two priestly brothers in Jerusalem—Jesus (Jason) and Onias (Menelaus). There are several important points Josephus raises:
 - a. Both sons were of a recognized priestly family and thus could rightfully inherit the High Priest's office
 - b. Jesus changed his name to Jason (an important indication of becoming Hellenized)
 - c. Menelaus is granted the High Priest office over Jason by Antiochus as a political move
 - d. The Tobiad family did not favor Menelaus, so they and Jason went to Antiochus and requested that Jerusalem and the elite families be granted the privilege of becoming a Hellenized city
 - e. A Gymnasium is the Greek educational institution where they would have been taught how to read and write in Greek, using Greek literary and philosophic classical texts
 - f. Exercise was part of the educational routine, thus the desire to remove the evidence of circumcision
2. Antiochus waged a campaign against Ptolemaic Egypt in order to extend his territories but after being resisted by the Romans, he turned his attention to Judea. This would have put Antiochus in a rage and in need of money because of the failed campaign.
3. Antiochus plunders Jerusalem.
4. What follows is an account of Antiochus further plundering of Jerusalem and its Temple. Note Josephus' description and how Antiochus performed acts in the Temple that were not according to Jewish custom (which means their constitutional law or Torah). Josephus also notes that Antiochus instituted forced Hellenization and reprisals for non-compliance.

5. Josephus brings the Samaritan's fickleness into view, another example of the tension between Jesus and Samaritans.

Chapter 6 (Josephus and 1 Maccabees share similar traditions)

1. Josephus and 1 Maccabees both describe Mattathias, his sons, and the lament at the state of affairs in Jerusalem. The countryside is more conservative than the city.
2. Mattathias resists the forced policy of Antiochus in Modin by slaying a villager and the king's messenger. A rebellion follows.
3. As Mattathias lies dying, he passes leadership onto his son Judas Maccabeus.
4. Mattathias dies and is lamented by the people.

Chapter 7

1. Judas and his men fight general Apollonius (general of the Samaritan forces) and Seron (general of the Syrian forces) and wins against great odds.
2. Antiochus' funds are depleted so he goes to Persia to collect tax money, leaving a trusted governor in charge, Lysias, and commands him to utterly destroy Jerusalem.
3. Judas and his small force come up against 40,000 foot soldiers and 7,000 horsemen. Pay particular attention to the speech and how Josephus emphasizes particular virtues and values.
4. Judas and his small force thrash part of the army and intimidate the remainder, defeating Gorgias and recovering their "liberty." This newly won freedom is unique among the conquered people. No other nation or people were able to rid themselves of Greek rule.
5. The real strength of the Jews was their "desperate way of fighting" for their way of life.
6. The cleansing of the temple.
7. The festival of Lights is established.