

HELLENISM COMES TO JERUSALEM

The first clear revelation of what Hellenism could mean in practice came to Jerusalem through the challenge of the family of Tobias to the high priests, or rather to their political power. Historians, taking advantage of the fact that there were three high priests in this period called Onias (in Hebrew Choni), refer to the rival parties as Oniads and Tobiads.*

Since like appeals to like, Josephus gives us an enthusiastic account of Joseph, one of the Tobiads, and his son Hyrcanus (*Ant.* XII.iv). He says of Joseph, "There was now one Joseph, young in age, but of great reputation among the people of Jerusalem for gravity, prudence and justice". When we take his behaviour at the court of Ptolemy and his merciless raising of taxes in that part of Palestine and Syria under Egyptian rule into consideration, it seems clear that he was a consummate hypocrite, and there is no evidence that his sons were any better.

Joseph rose to great riches and power at the expense of the high-priest Onias II (c. 245–220 B.C.). Josephus gives us a very unattractive picture of the high-priest, but we have no other evidence by which to check it, and it is highly probable that it is derived from the source that gave him the story of Joseph, and that it was reinforced by his admiration for Joseph.

Whether out of deep personal conviction, or political wisdom, or a combination of the two, Onias' son and successor as high-priest, Simon II (his name is often written Simeon), put himself at the head of the anti-Hellenists who were zealous for the Torah and the old ways. In the light of what the future was to bring, it is well to point out that those who looked to Simon II as leader were far from being a unitary group.

Ben Sira, writing after his death, breaks into a wonderful eulogy on him (50: 1–21). The most remarkable feature of it is that it is the concluding portion of the long section beginning, "Let us now sing the praises of famous men, the heroes of our nation's history" (44: 1), which lists most of the outstanding names from Enoch to Nehemiah, but strangely enough omits Ezra, which suggests a certain independence of his views. Though 49: 14–16 serves as a sort of formal division between the Old Testament worthies and Simon, it is so slight, that it is clear that Ben Sira considered him a worthy successor.

The Synagogue gave him equal honour, when it gave him the exceptional title of *ha-tzaddiq*, "the Just". In *Pirke Abot* (1: 2) we are told, "Simon the Just was of the remnants of the Great Synagogue. He used to say: By three things is

* Further details may be found in F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, Oesterley & Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Vol. II.

the world sustained: by the Law, by the (Temple-) service, and by deeds of loving kindness”.

Though virtually all modern Jewish scholars, except those who feel compelled to handle Talmudic tradition with kid gloves, agree that Simon the Just was Simon II (c. 220–195 B.C.), earlier misunderstandings are still often met. Josephus mentions Simon the Just as high-priest in the early Ptolemaic period and makes him out to be the grandson of the Jaddua who was an older contemporary of Alexander the Great. Unless we maintain that Josephus was drawing entirely on his imagination—not that he knew much of the period—we must exclude the Rabbinic linking of Simon with Alexander as impossible, the more so as it knows that his son (in reality his grandson) built the temple in Leontopolis in Egypt about 163 B.C. The fact is that the rabbis grossly underestimated both the length of the Persian and of the earlier Greek period. They filled the former with the Great Synagogue, the founding of which they attributed to Ezra. Whether or not such a body ever existed, the rabbis did know that the man who had transmitted the traditions that had come down from Ezra’s pupils in the early days of the rise of Hellenistic influence was the high-priest Simon. Thereby he probably saved Judaism as we know it. Hence the honorific title of “the Just” and Ben Sira’s eulogy; hence too the extreme stress of the Qumran sect on the claims of the house of Onias to be the true high priests.

When Onias III took his father’s place, he followed his religious policy. He seems, however, to have been a less efficient political leader. He was constantly slandered by Simon, the captain of the Temple, if not a descendant of Tobias at least a supporter of the Tobiads. He found himself mistrusted by the Jews and so seriously suspected by Seleucus IV (187–175 B.C.) that he finally felt compelled to go to Antioch to clear his name.

The Abomination of Desolation

From this point on we are fortunate in having far more historical details preserved for us. Both 1 and 2 Maccabees come from the second half of the 2nd century B.C., and the former is a document of high value. For the following period Josephus is a most important witness, though his statements have sometimes to be taken with considerable caution.

Before Onias was able to clear himself with Seleucus, the king was assassinated by his chancellor Heliiodorus. The assassin was in turn swept away by the late king’s brother Antiochus IV, commonly known as Epiphanes, for he claimed to be *theos epiphanes*, i.e. god manifest, for he looked on himself as an incarnate manifestation of the Olympian Zeus. True, this claim was made only later in his reign, but it shows the mentality of the man who was to influence the future of the Jews and of Judaism so deeply.

Antiochus was a passionate champion of Hellenism as a way of life, and he was wise enough to see that it was the only force that could hold together a kingdom that had been so severely shaken by the Romans’ victory over his father, Antiochus III, at Magnesia (190 B.C.), and was now threatening to crumble away in his hands. So it is easy to see that a man like Onias, a representative of the old ways and an enemy of the Hellenists, would find little favour

in his eyes. When Jason (Hebrew Joshua), Onias' brother, offered 440 talents of silver for the high-priestly office, and another 150, if he were allowed to introduce Hellenistic institutions into Jerusalem, Antiochus found two of his greatest desires meeting. He was in perpetual need of money and he longed to further Hellenism. So Jason returned to Jerusalem as high priest.

The replacement of the legitimate high priest by a man with very different ideals must have grieved the pious very deeply. The grief turned to shock, when they saw young men of the best families going about in broad-brimmed hats—a worshipper wearing such a hat could not touch the ground with his forehead, when prostrating himself!—and even more when they were seen exercising stark naked in the new gymnasium. Shock changed to frenzy, when it was found that some of these naked athletes were undergoing an operation to hide their circumcision.

“To be naked and unashamed was one of the glories of the cultivated Greek. It astonished (and still shocks) the barbarian. When Agesilaus, the Spartan king, was fighting on Persian soil he caused his Oriental captives to be exhibited naked to his men, that they might have no more terror of the great king's myriads. Alone among civilised peoples of the earth the ancient Greek dared to strip his body to the sun.”* The Asiatic and above all the Semite recoiled from nudity in shame. The Greeks, with their worship of the body beautiful, regarded circumcision as mutilation. That is why it was prohibited by the Roman emperor Hadrian (c. A.D. 130), a prohibition which led to the Bar Kochba revolt.

When the writer to the Hebrews said, “One does not take the honour (of high priest) upon oneself, but is called by God” (4:4), he was writing as a Jew. Normally in Hellenism no such concept existed. Hence Antiochus could not imagine that he was giving offence by replacing Onias by his brother Jason. When Menelaus (Menahem), the brother of the Simon who had made so many difficulties for Onias, sought to outbribe Jason, the king looked on the colour of his money and did not ask about his qualifications. The Greek text of 2 Macc. makes him out to have been a Benjamite, though perhaps related to the high-priestly family by marriage, but in the Old Latin translation he belongs to an inferior priestly family. In either case the head of the Jewish religion was now a man without any claim to the position. He quickly showed that morally too he was a disgrace to the office he had bought. He bribed one of Antiochus' high officials to have Onias murdered, even though he had taken sanctuary in the sacred precincts at Daphne, near Antioch. Then he instigated his brother Lysimachus to steal some of the Temple vessels. This led to a popular riot in which Lysimachus was killed. Menelaus was able by bribery to keep his position (2 Macc. 4: 39–50).

Had all this happened during the Persian period with its relatively peaceful internal conditions, it might very well have led to a schism, which would have divided the pious from the Temple and its hopelessly corrupt rulers. As it was, international tensions and Antiochus' mental instability—his enemies called it madness—led to developments, many of whose repercussions are still with us.

* J. C. Stobart, *The Glory That Was Greece*, p. 91.

In 2 Macc. 3 we read how, as a result of the intrigues by Simon the Tobiad, Seleucus IV ordered his chancellor Heliodorus to raid the treasure of the Jerusalem temple. In spite of the protests by Onias, Heliodorus insisted on entering the Temple with his bodyguard. Because of the prayers of priests and people angelic intervention scattered the bodyguard, threw down Heliodorus and scourged him severely. Whether the story is a popular exaggeration of a man turning back at the last moment because he was gripped by awe, or whether the Jerusalem priests knew more about it than they were prepared to make public, we may be certain that an attempt was made to raid the Temple treasures and that it failed. The people's confidence that God's hand was over His own sanctuary must have been greatly strengthened.

In 169 B.C. Antiochus waged a successful campaign in Egypt, but news of an unexpected reverse at the moment when victory seemed complete was magnified in Judea into a report that he had died. Jason took advantage of this to try and oust Menelaus from Jerusalem. He was only partially successful, for his rival was able to maintain himself in the citadel. Many seem to have perished in the fighting. When Antiochus returned from Egypt, he assumed, reasonably enough, that it had been rebellion against him. He marched on Jerusalem and Jason fled for his life, vanishing ignominiously from the pages of history.

Antiochus entered Jerusalem apparently without opposition, but treated it as though it had been in rebellion against him (1 Macc. 1:24), though the estimate of eighty thousand victims (2 Macc. 5:13, 14) is probably a gross exaggeration. Still worse, guided by Menelaus (2 Macc. 5:15)—but did the wretched man have any choice?—Antiochus entered the sanctuary and stripped it of all its treasures (1 Macc. 1:21–24). The unsuccessful attempt by Heliodorus only a few years earlier made the shock of this outrage the greater for the pious, for it seemed to demonstrate that God had turned His face from them because of their sins. The author of 1 Maccabees may well be quoting a contemporary imitation of Lamentations, when he wrote:

Great was the lamentation throughout Israel;
 rulers and elders groaned in bitter grief.
 Girls and young men languished;
 the beauty of our women was disfigured.
 Every bridegroom took up the lament,
 and every bride sat grieving in her chamber.
 The land trembled for its inhabitants,
 and all the house of Jacob was wrapped in shame (1:25–28 NEB).

Even worse was to come. The following year in Egypt Antiochus met with a rebuff by the Romans which probably turned his mental instability into madness. At any rate, when he arrived back in Antioch and heard that the Jews for the most part refused to recognize Menelaus as high priest, he regarded it as an insult and rebellion. In 167 B.C. he ordered Apollonius, governor of Samaria and Judea, to deal with the turbulent city of Jerusalem once and for all. He seemed to come in peace but captured the city on the Sabbath. Many of the inhabitants were butchered; much of the walls was thrown down, and a new

citadel dominating the Temple was built. This seems to have been manned by Greek soldiers and some of the supporters of Menelaus.

A decree was made prohibiting the practice of the distinctive features of the Jewish religion. 1 Macc. 1 : 41 suggests that it was a command for the universal Hellenization of religion. While this has perhaps been too readily denied by modern scholars, there is no doubt that it was aimed in the first place at Judea; there is no Jewish tradition that any effort was made to enforce it in the Eastern dispersion or Asia Minor. Finally in the December of that year (167 B.C.) the Temple was dedicated to the worship of the Olympian Zeus, the lord of heaven, and his image, "the abomination of desolation", was placed on the altar of burnt offering. The intention was, of course, that the Jews, who had long been accustomed to call Jehovah the God of heaven, should identify Him with Zeus in the manner favoured by Hellenistic syncretism. Shortly afterwards the leading citizens of Jerusalem were forced to join in a festival of Dionysius (Bacchus). Not content with this the Greeks and their Hellenizing sympathizers tried to destroy all the copies of the Torah; families circumcising their children were punished by death, and royal representatives went round the country towns calling on all leading citizens to sacrifice to Zeus.

Many of the rigorous upholders of the Law tried to withdraw into the wilderness until the troubles were past, but the massacre of nearly a thousand who would not defend themselves on the Sabbath, when they were attacked (1 Macc. 2 : 29-38), showed that passive resistance was insufficient. Heb. 11 : 37, 38 is primarily a tribute to the martyrs of this period. When an old priest, Mattathias of the family of Hasmon, opposed the order to sacrifice to the gods of Antiochus, killing both a Jew who had done so and the officer who was superintending conformity to the king's commands in Modin, Judea exploded.

The story of the long struggle that followed lies outside the scope of this book. The main details can be found in the two Books of Maccabees as well as modern histories of the period. It is a story of extreme heroism and base treachery, of deep trust in God and of much worldly wisdom. Though it was probably not fully realized at the time, its successful outcome was due more to the internal weakness and divisions of the Seleucid kingdom than to the bravery and strength of the Jews. While it was possible only by God's aid, too much was read into this, and the resultant religious nationalism was the cause of most of the misery that was to follow.

The Temple was cleansed and rededicated on the third anniversary (164 B.C.) of the day when the abomination of desolation had been set up. After a fluctuating struggle Judea was finally recognized as independent in 142 B.C. Two years later Simon, the last survivor of Mattathias' sons, was recognized by "the Jews and their priests . . . as their leader and high priest in perpetuity until a true prophet should appear. He was to be their general, and to have full charge of the temple . . ." (1 Macc. 14 : 41, 42 NEB). Far more important than the details of the political struggle were the religious developments, some of which are only now becoming clear. The most important can be briefly summarized.

The Hellenists

It is a very great pity that no record of the views and hopes of Jason and his friends, or even of Simon and his brother Menelaus, has come down to us. We know of them only from the hate-filled distortions of their enemies in 1 and 2 Maccabees and to a less extent Josephus. Menelaus, like his brother Simon, seems to have been primarily a political adventurer, for whom religion was only a means to an end, but it may well be that most of the Jewish Hellenists were genuinely fascinated by the new horizons opened up for them by Hellenism, and that they genuinely thought they were enriching their ancestral religion by its insights. We have only to remember the influence of Hellenistic thought for good or ill in the development of Christianity and we shall pause before judging and condemning too hastily. They were, however, caught up in the hurricane of political events they neither created nor controlled, as were the "German Christians"—the term was used of a group within the Protestant Church in Germany—under Hitler, or many Arab Christians in the present day. They were swept from unorthodoxy into apostasy, without their willing it. When they were hated as apostates they reacted with an even deadlier hatred. With the triumph of the orthodox they were either massacred or had to disappear among their heathen neighbours. From then on Jewry was intellectually and spiritually lamed by the creation of a barrier only the exceptional Jew could openly cross until modern times. They may have left some slight legacy to the Sadducees, but if they did, it is not likely to have been important.

The Nationalists

There seems little doubt that when the national hope of the returned exiles was disappointed by the death of Zerubbabel, it became eschatological, i.e. most did not expect the setting up of a political kingdom of Israel until the Day of Jehovah should come, when He would set up His kingdom upon earth. This damping down of national ardour was the more natural because the major part of the nation had remained in the Eastern dispersion. It was easy enough to transfer Isaiah's picture of Cyrus as the Lord's anointed to his successors on the Persian throne.

Antiochus IV changed all that. Foreign rulers were shown to be the beasts they are depicted as being in Dan. 7. Very many Jews felt that even the best of them could never be trusted again. All religious Jews could explain the plundering and desecration of the Temple only by Israel's sin. For some of them it now became axiomatic that the root sin was acquiescing in foreign rule. To bow down to a foreigner and idolater was akin to denying the kingship of Jehovah. One of the outstanding features of the Maccabean struggle is that while some of the most pious were ready to accept Greek overlordship once their religious rights were guaranteed, the sons of Mattathias battled on even when they could have come to honourable terms. Even though we should make some allowance for personal ambition, which was later to degrade a Has-monean priest-king like Alexander Jannai to the level of the pagan rulers around him, it is clear that national independence was seen by them and many others as the accomplishment of God's will.

This attitude lived on and reached its climax in the Zealots and Bar Kochba who between them destroyed both Jerusalem and its temple and the Jewish community in Judea. The rise of political Zionism has shown that, even when it was stripped of its religious motivation, this concept never ceased to find a home in the Jewish subconscious through all the long centuries of dispersion.

We shall see, however, that once the Hasmonean priest-kings had been discredited, morally and politically, then the old eschatological hopes revived, expressing themselves very largely in apocalyptic literature. By the time of Jesus most had accepted that if there was to be national independence once again, it would have to be through direct Divine intervention, in all probability through the coming of the long-promised Messiah.

The Hasidim

Suddenly, without any explanation, we are introduced in 1 Macc. 2:42 to the Hasideans, a name which today is almost universally identified with the Hebrew Hasidim. The term *hasid*, derived from *hesed*, i.e. covenant loyalty and love, is used thirty-two times in the Old Testament; it is sometimes applied to God, but more often to men. It is found only in poetical passages, most of them liturgical, which suggests that it was a word firmly rooted in the Sinaitic covenant. This means that the AV, RV renderings saints, godly, holy, etc., miss its real meaning. RSV follows the old tradition, but in rendering eight times "faithful" or "loyal" it reveals that its translators knew the true meaning. Apart from two exceptions in the historical books, due doubtless to careless final editing, NEB uses only covenant terms in its renderings, its favourites being loyal or faithful servants. There can be no doubt that it is essentially correct, and that loyalty to the Law, and so to Jehovah, was how the Hasidim understood the name they had adopted.

We have already seen how Jerusalem was twice captured when its enemies attacked it on the Sabbath and how nearly a thousand Hasidim allowed themselves to be massacred rather than take up arms and defend themselves on that day (1 Macc. 2:29-38). When Mattathias and his men decided that they would fight in self-defence on the Sabbath, but only in self-defence (1 Macc. 2:41), it was doubtless the beginning of the principle that has played such a role in normative Judaism, that since the Law was given that man should *live* by it (Deut. 4:1, etc.; cf. Gal. 3:21), all commandments, except those prohibiting idolatry, murder and adultery, may be suspended when man is faced by death.

Men such as these could not possibly doubt that the sacking and desecration of the Temple had been due to Israel's sin, which consisted above all in the fact that the Law had not been kept aright. In the face of the fact that they themselves had sought to keep it fully and perfectly it was clear to them that this was not enough. While a righteous remnant might save Jewry from exile and the break-down of society, true blessing could come only when the sinners had been rooted out of Jacob.

The manner in which this was to be accomplished was open to differences in interpretation, and these in turn led to at least one major split within the ranks of the Hasidim. It will be best, however, to consider this in the setting of the

short-lived period of independence under the Hasmonean priest-kings.

The Resurrection Hope

All serious scholarship agrees that while the hope of the resurrection is to be found in the Old Testament, the number of passages that contain it are few. Even in such late works as Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) and Ben Sira it is not mentioned, which can only mean that it had no vital importance for their authors. Yet, when we come to New Testament times, two centuries later, it is virtually taken for granted, cf. Jn. 11 : 23, 24. What the resurrection of Jesus Christ was to do for His followers was to change a strong hope into a certainty. When we examine the Old Testament passages that indubitably speak of resurrection or fully conscious life after death we find that they all spring from the spiritual anguish and need of those to whom the light was given.

So, too, it was in the Maccabean period. Those who suffered most and perished most frequently were from among the best elements of the people. They were too conscious of their own shortcomings to think of themselves as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, as did apparently the men of Qumran at a somewhat later date. To these men and women in their agony the Holy Spirit brought the assurance of a life to come that would redress the wrongs of the present. We have no indication how it came, whether through some men of outstanding spiritual stature, or as a sudden realization of the truth among the pious as a whole, as has happened more often in the history of the Church than many realize.

It is worth mentioning that the Hebrew Scriptures know nothing of "the immortality of the soul", and theologians today have come reluctantly to the recognition that the concept is not to be found in the New Testament either. It could not well be, for the Biblical concept of man is that he is soul, formed by the union of spirit and body (Gen. 2 : 7). Without a body man cannot have true life, but at the best a shadowy existence.

The immortality of the soul is essentially a Greek concept and the only extant Jewish writing from this period in which it is found is the Wisdom of Solomon, written in the essentially Greek city of Alexandria about 100 B.C. Josephus' ascription of a belief in immortality of the soul to Pharisees and Essenes (*Ant.* XVIII. i. 3, 5; *War* II. viii. 11, 14) is best understood as an adaptation of their belief in the resurrection to Greek concepts. Philo of Alexandria (1st cent. A.D.) strongly upheld the immortality of the soul while rejecting the resurrection of the body. Some two hundred years later the rabbis had reached an uneasy compromise between the two views. Today though the resurrection of the body is still the official teaching of orthodox Judaism, most Jews believe rather in the immortality of the soul which needs no body, if they look for an after-life at all.

It is symptomatic that the one group that did not accept this hope, at least publicly, was the one to which the name Sadducee was later to be given. The explanation of them that best fits the evidence is that they were predominantly members of the professional priestly families. Most of the priests were on duty at the pilgrim festivals and for two extra weeks in the year. For the rest of the

time they lived away from Jerusalem and augmented their incomes in any way that was consistent with their standing. On Temple policy they had no influence. There were, however, those groups which lived in Jerusalem, which filled the administrative offices in the Temple and which to a great extent dominated its policy and the council later called the Sanhedrin. Some of them will have been involved in the intrigues of Jason and Menelaus and have been swept away with the Hellenizers. Most, however, will have held aloof. They were conservatives, concerned with preserving the privileges of the priesthood and the traditions which had been handed down to them over many generations. For them Ezra's policy will have been unwelcome, because it gave increased importance to the layman. The dreams of the Hellenist will have been abhorrent, because they ran counter to ancient tradition. Very many of this group will have been able to ride out the storm better than most, and changes in the high-priesthood will have made little difference for them. Both their smaller degree of suffering and their innate conservatism will have closed their minds to what they regarded as a novel doctrine of resurrection. It was not until the Hasidim were able to influence national policy that the Sadducees emerged as a political party as well.