

Alexander the Great and Jerusalem

Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, XI, Chapter 8.

Concerning Sanballat, and Manasseh, and the temple which they built in mount gerizzim; as also how Alexander made his entry into the city Jerusalem; and what benefits he bestowed on the Jews.

1. [An. 336.] About this time it was that Philip, King of Macedon, was treacherously assaulted and slain at Ægeæ, by Pausanias, the son of Cerastes; who was derived from the family of Orestæ, and his son Alexander succeeded him in the Kingdom. Who passing over the Hellespont, overcame the generals of Darius's army in a battel fought at Granicum. So he marched over Lydia, and subdued Ionia, and over-ran Caria, and fell upon the places of Pamphylia: as has been related elsewhere.¹³

2. [About An. 335.] But the elders of Jerusalem, being very uneasy that the brother of Jaddua the High Priest, though married to a foreigner, should be a partner with him in the High Priesthood, quarrelled with him. For they esteemed this man's marriage a step to such as should be desirous of transgressing about the marriage of [strange] wives; and that this would be the beginning of a mutual society with foreigners: although the offence of some about marriages, and their having married wives that were not of their own country, had been an occasion of their former captivity, and of the miseries they then underwent. So they commanded Manasseh to divorce his wife, or not to approach the altar: the High Priest himself joining with the people in their indignation against his brother, and driving him away from the altar. Whereupon Manasseh came to his father-in-law, Sanballat, and told him, that "Although he loved his daughter Nicaso, yet was he not willing to be deprived of his sacerdotal dignity on her account; which was the principal dignity in their nation, and always continued in the same family." And when Sanballat promised him not only to preserve to him the honour of his priesthood, but to procure for him the power and dignity of an High Priest, and would make him governour of all the places he himself now ruled, if he would keep his daughter for his wife. He also told him farther, that he would build him a temple, like to that at Jerusalem, upon mount Gerizzim; which is the highest of all the mountains that are in Samaria: and he promised that he would do this with the approbation of Darius the King. Manasseh was elevated with these promises; and stayed with Sanballat; upon a supposal that he should gain an High Priesthood, as bestowed on him by Darius. For it happened that Sanballat was then in years. But there was now a great disturbance among the people of Jerusalem, because many of those priests and Levites were intangled in such matches. For they all revolted to Manasseh: and Sanballat afforded them money; and divided among them land for tillage, and habitations also; and all this in order every way to gratify his son-in-law.

3. [An. 334.] About this time it was, that Darius heard how Alexander had passed over the Hellespont; and had beaten his lieutenants, in the battel at Granicum; and was proceeding farther. Whereupon he gathered together an army of horse and foot, and determined that he would meet the Macedonians, before they should assault and conquer all Asia. So he passed over the river Euphrates; and came over Taurus, the Cilician

mountain: and at Issus of Cilicia he waited for the enemy, as ready there to give him battel. (28) Upon which Sanballat was glad that Darius was come down; and told Manasseh, that he would suddenly perform his promises to him: and this as soon as ever Darius should come back, after he had beaten his enemies. For not he only, but all those that were in Asia also were persuaded, that the Macedonians would not so much as come to a battle with the Persians; on account of their multitude. But the event proved otherwise than they expected. [An. 333.] For the King joined battel with the Macedonians, and was beaten, and lost a great part of his army. His mother also, and his wife, and children, were taken captives: and he fled into Persia. So Alexander came into Syria, and took Damascus: and when he had obtained Sidon, he besieged Tyre. [An. 332.] When he sent an epistle to the Jewish High Priest, (29) “To send him some auxiliaries; and to supply his army with provisions: and that what presents he formerly sent to Darius, he would now send to him; and chuse the friendship of the Macedonians: and that he should never repent of so doing.” But the High Priest answered the messengers, that “He had given his oath to Darius, not to bear arms against him: and he said that he would not transgress them, while Darius was in the land of the living.” Upon hearing this answer, Alexander was very angry: and though he determined not to leave Tyre, which was just ready to be taken; yet as soon as he had taken it, he threatened that he would make an expedition against the Jewish High Priest, and through him teach all men to whom they must keep their oaths. So when he had, with a good deal of pains, during the siege, taken Tyre, and had settled its affairs, he came to the city of Gaza, and besieged both the city, and him that was governour of the garrison: whose name was Babemeses.

4. [An. 332.] But Sanballat thought he had now gotten a proper opportunity to make his attempt. So he renounced Darius; and, taking with him seven thousand of his own subjects, he came to Alexander. And finding him beginning the siege of Tyre, he said to him, that he delivered up to him these men, who came out of places under his dominion; and did gladly accept of him for his Lord, instead of Darius. So when Alexander had received him kindly, Sanballat thereupon took courage, and spake to him about his present affair. He told him, that “He had a son-in-law, Manasseh, who was brother to the High Priest Jaddua; and that there were many others of his own nation, now with him, that were desirous to have a temple built in the places subject to him: that it would be for the King’s advantage to have the strength of the Jews divided into two parts; lest when the nation is of one mind, and united, upon any attempt for innovation, it prove troublesome to Kings; as it had formerly proved to the Kings of Assyria.” Whereupon Alexander gave Sanballat leave so to do. Who used the utmost diligence, and built the temple, and made Manasseh the priest: and deemed it a great reward that his daughters children should have that dignity. But when the seven months of the siege of Tyre were over, and the two months of the siege of Gaza, Sanballat died.

Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem. And Jaddua the High Priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror; as not knowing how he should meet the Macedonians: since the King was displeased at his foregoing disobedience. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifice to God: whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them.

Whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that

“He should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest should appear in white garments; but that he and the priests should meet the King in the habits proper to their order; without the dread of any ill consequences; which the providence of God would prevent.”

Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God. According to which dream he acted intirely; and so waited for the coming of the King.

5. And when he understood that he was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests, and the multitude of the citizens. The procession was venerable, and the manner of it different from that of other nations. It reached to a place called Sapha: which name translated into Greek signifies a prospect, for you have thence a prospect both of Jerusalem and of the temple: and when the Phenecians, and the Chaldeans¹⁴ (30) that followed him thought they should have liberty to plunder the city, and torment the High Priest to death: which the King’s displeasure fairly promised them: the very reverse of it happened.

For Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the High Priest in purple and scarlet clothing; with his miter on his head; having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the High Priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander; and encompass him about. Whereupon the Kings of Syria, and the rest were surprized at what Alexander had done; and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, Parmenio alone went up to him, and asked him, “How it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the High Priest of the Jews?” To whom he replied,

“I did not adore him, but that God who hath honoured him with his High Priesthood. For I saw this very person, in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia. Who, when I was considering with my self how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay; but boldly to pass over the sea thither: for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians. Whence it is that having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians; and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind.”

And when he had said this to Parmenio, and had given the High Priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him; and he came into the city. (31) And when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the High Priest’s direction: and magnificently treated both the High Priest, and the priests.

And when the book of Daniel was shewed him, (32) wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present: but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favours they pleased of him. Whereupon the High Priest desired, that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers: and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired. And when they intreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired. And when he said to the multitude, that if any of them would list themselves in his army, on this condition that they should continue under the laws of their forefathers, and live according to them, he was willing to take them with him; many were ready to accompany him in his wars.

6. So when Alexander had thus settled matters at Jerusalem, he led his army into the neighbouring cities. And when all the inhabitants, to whom he came, received him with great kindness, the Samaritans, who had then Shechem for their metropolis, (a city situate at mount Gerizzim; and inhabited by apostates of the Jewish nation;) seeing that Alexander had so greatly honoured the Jews, determined to profess themselves Jews. For such is the disposition of the Samaritans, as we have already elsewhere declared,¹⁵ that when the Jews are in adversity, they deny that they are of kin to them; and then they confess the truth. But when they perceive that some good fortune hath befallen them, they immediately pretend to have communion with them, saying, that they belong to them, and derive their genealogy from the posterity of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Accordingly they made their address to the King with splendour; and shewed great alacrity in meeting him, at a little distance from Jerusalem. And when Alexander had commended them, the Shechemites approached to him; taking along with them the troops that Sanballat had sent him: and they desired that he would come to their city, and do honour to their temple also. To whom he promised, that when he returned he would come to them. And when they petitioned that he would remit the tribute of the seventh year to them, because they did not sow thereon; he asked who they were that made such a petition; and when they said, that they were Hebrews; but had the name of Sidonians, living at Shechem; he asked them again whether they were Jews? and when they said they were not Jews, "It was to the Jews, said he, that I granted that privilege: however, when I return, and am thoroughly informed by you of this matter, I will do what I shall think proper." And in this manner he took leave of the Shechemites: but ordered that the troops of Sanballat should follow him into Egypt, because there he designed to give them lands: which he did a little after in Thebais, when he ordered them to guard that country.

7. [An. 323.] Now when Alexander was dead, the government was parted among his successors, but the temple upon mount Gerizzim remained. And if any one were accused by those of Jerusalem, of having eaten things common, (33) or of having broken the sabbath, or of any other crime of the like nature, he fled away to the Shechemites, and said, that he was accused unjustly. About this time it was that Jaddua, the High Priest died; and Onias his son took the High Priesthood. This was the state of the affairs of the people of Jerusalem at this time.