

Judaism Under the Greeks (332/331 BC to 143 BC)

Lecture

- Government of Judea
 - In 333/332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Persia, Tyre, Gaza, Judea, and Egypt.
 - Alexander believed that Greek culture and language were the means to unify the world. This policy was called Hellenization and it greatly impacted Judaism and everyday Jews.
 - Alexander allowed the Jews to observe their laws. He also exempted them from paying tribute during their Sabbath years (every 7th year).
 - Jews were encouraged to move to Alexander's capital in Alexandria, Egypt. They had some of the same privileges as his Greek subjects.
 - After Alexander the Great's death in 323 BC, his large empire (which stretched from Greece to Turkey to Egypt to India) was divided among his generals, most notably Ptolemy and Seleucus.
 - Alexander's policy of Hellenization was followed by his successors.
 - Judah was first ruled by the Ptolemies and later by the Seleucids. The Ptolemies were tolerant of the Jews, as were the early Seleucid rulers.
 - Antiochus III the Great, a Seleucid, even offered the Jews funds to repair Jerusalem and the 2nd Temple, in exchange for their aid against his Ptolemaic enemies.
 - Under Antiochus III's successor, Seleucus IV Philopater, relations between the Seleucids and the Jews deteriorated.
 - It was under the next ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes ("God Made Manifest"), that things took a dire turn.
 - Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled 175-164 BC and strove to eradicate the Jewish religion.
 - In 168 BC, he attempted to destroy all copies of the Torah (the Pentateuch), and he ordered everyone to make offerings to the Greek god Zeus.
 - The ultimate sacrilege occurred when he had a statute of Zeus erected in the Temple and installed an altar on top of the Temple altar. He then had a pig sacrificed there.

- He ordered that the Sabbath be profaned and banned its observance.
 - He abolished the Jewish practice of circumcision.
 - Anyone caught with a copy of the Torah or with an uncircumcised child was subject to death. He murdered women with uncircumcised children and hung their dead children around their necks.
- Mattathias, an elderly member of a priestly family who lived in Modein, led the revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes.
 - Mattathias had 5 sons: Judas (Maccabeus), Jonathan, Simon, John, and Eleazar.
 - The revolt started when Mattathias destroyed a Greek altar in his village and killed an emissary of Antiochus.
 - This began the Maccabean revolt, a 24-year war which lasted from 166 to 142 BC.
 - Mattathias and his sons fought a guerilla war against Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his Syrian mercenaries.
 - After 3 years, the Maccabees fought their way to Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
 - They took hold of the Temple. They removed the pagan altar, the statue of Zeus, and the 2nd Temple altar. They fully cleansed the Temple and built a new altar.
 - In 165 BC, they rededicated the Temple with a Hanukkah (dedication) ceremony which lasted 8 days. By a miracle, a tiny jar of oil kept the candles burning for the full 8 days. This started the tradition of the annual Hanukkah celebration.
 - At the end of the revolt in 142 BC, Judah was independent again, until the Romans took control in 63 BC.
 - Judas Maccabeus led the revolt from 166-160 BC.
 - From 160 to 143 BC, Jonathan, his brother, served as High Priest.

- From 143-134 BC, Simon, Mattathias' last son, served as the High Priest. He established the Hasmonean dynasty.
- Upon Simon's death, the Hasmonean dynasty reverted to an aristocratic, Hellenistic regime of Jewish Hellenizers.
- The Office of High Priest
 - During the Greek period, the office of High Priest began to be sold to the highest bidder.
 - There were frequent shifts in who served as High Priest as the political winds changed. Two examples are:
 - When Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to the throne in 176 BC, Jason, the brother to Onias III, who was the High Priest at the time, bribed Antiochus and got himself appointed to be the High Priest.
 - 3 years later, Menelaus offered Antiochus a bribe which was 300 hundred talents larger than Jason had offered (so more than 22,500 pounds of silver!), and Menelaus then became High priest.
- Important Religious Developments
 - The books which became the Hebrew canon were formalized during the Greek period.
 - The Septuagint
 - Starting around 275 BC, the Hebrew books of the Old Testament were translated from Hebrew into Greek.
 - This is known as the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.
 - The Septuagint is also called "The Translation of the Seventy". You will often see it referred to in literature as the LXX translation.
 - *The Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates*, a Pseudepigraphic work, states that Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BC) ordered that the Hebrew Law be translated into Greek, and work was done by 72 Jews, 6 from each of the 12 tribes.

- Work started with the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible. The work was completed in the 2nd century BC.
- Other Writings
 - Dead Sea Scrolls
 - The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of 981 ancient Jewish manuscripts which date from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD.
 - Most scholars attribute this collection to an Essene community located at Qumran. Qumran is currently located in the West Bank of Israel (controlled by the Palestinian Authority), about 6 miles south of Jericho.
 - Most of the texts are written in Hebrew, with a few extra-biblical books written in Aramaic.
 - 40% of the manuscripts are copies of Hebrew scriptures.
 - 30% of the texts are non-canonical books such as *1 Enoch*.
 - 30% are secular books outlining the rules and practices of the various Jewish groups or sects. Examples are *The Community Rule* and the *Rule of Blessing*.
- Apocrypha
 - The term Apocrypha has been given to books of doubtful authenticity and with questionable value to the rest of scripture.
 - The Apocrypha are books excluded from the Hebrew canon and the Protestant canon. The Catholic church and Orthodox churches include some of the Apocryphal books in their canons.
 - There are both Jewish and New Testament Apocrypha. Examples of Jewish Apocrypha from the Greek period are *Tobit*, *The Wisdom of Solomon* and *Ecclesiasticus*.
- Pseudepigrapha
 - Pseudepigrapha means “books under false names.” The claimed author may not be the true author, or the work is attributed to someone who lived in the past. For example, *The Book of Daniel* claims to be the work of the prophet Daniel, but it was written hundreds of years after his death, possibly during the Greek period.

- Other examples of Jewish Pseudepigrapha are *The Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates*, *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Testaments of the Twelve Prophets*, and *The Assumption of Moses*.
 - Jude, Jesus' brother, quotes from *1 Enoch* in his New Testament letter.
- Synagogues
 - During the time of Ezra, the priests and the Levites were responsible for teaching the law to the people.
 - As the synagogues continued to develop, lay scribes or elders of the Pharisaic school now assumed this duty.
- The Sanhedrin
 - There is no evidence to suggest that there was a supreme Jewish council which exercised authority over the whole Jewish nation prior to the Greek period.
 - Rabbinical exegesis ties the Sanhedrin back to Numbers 11: 16-17, where God instructs Moses to gather 70 elders who will assist him in his burden of managing the Israelites.
 - In the Greek period, the Sanhedrin was an aristocratic body headed by a hereditary High Priest. There were 70 members.
- The Jewish Sects: Pharisees; Sadducees; Essenes
 - In Ezra's time, the priests and scribes were essentially the same.
 - From the start of the Greek period, we see more separation between the priests and scribes. By the time of the Maccabean period, the 2 groups were distinct.
 - The Sadducees developed from the priests and the Pharisees from the scribes.
 - The Sadducees date back to the 2nd century BC.
 - The Sadducees were an aristocratic class that concerned themselves with everything happening in the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - Their religious focus was exclusively on the Torah (the 1st 5 books of Moses).

- Over time, the Sadducees became very wealthy and political, often holding the role of High Priest and chief priest, as well as the majority of the Sanhedrin.
- The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead nor in an afterlife. They also denied the existence of angels and demons.
- The Pharisees were rigidly legalistic.
 - The Pharisees were very exacting in their interpretation and observance of Jewish law.
 - They followed the written Torah as well as a body of oral law which was used to further interpret the written law.
 - The 4th commandment states that you should do no work on the Sabbath.
 - The Pharisees outlined oral laws which defined work.
 - For example, one can do no work which leads to the preparation and production of bread. Therefore, sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, and baking are prohibited on the Sabbath.
 - The Pharisees taught that every soul is imperishable, and that resurrection of the dead is possible. However, this was only for the righteous. The wicked were condemned to eternal torment.
 - The Pharisees believed in the existence of angels and spirits.
- The Essenes
 - The Essenes were a mystic Jewish sect dating from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.

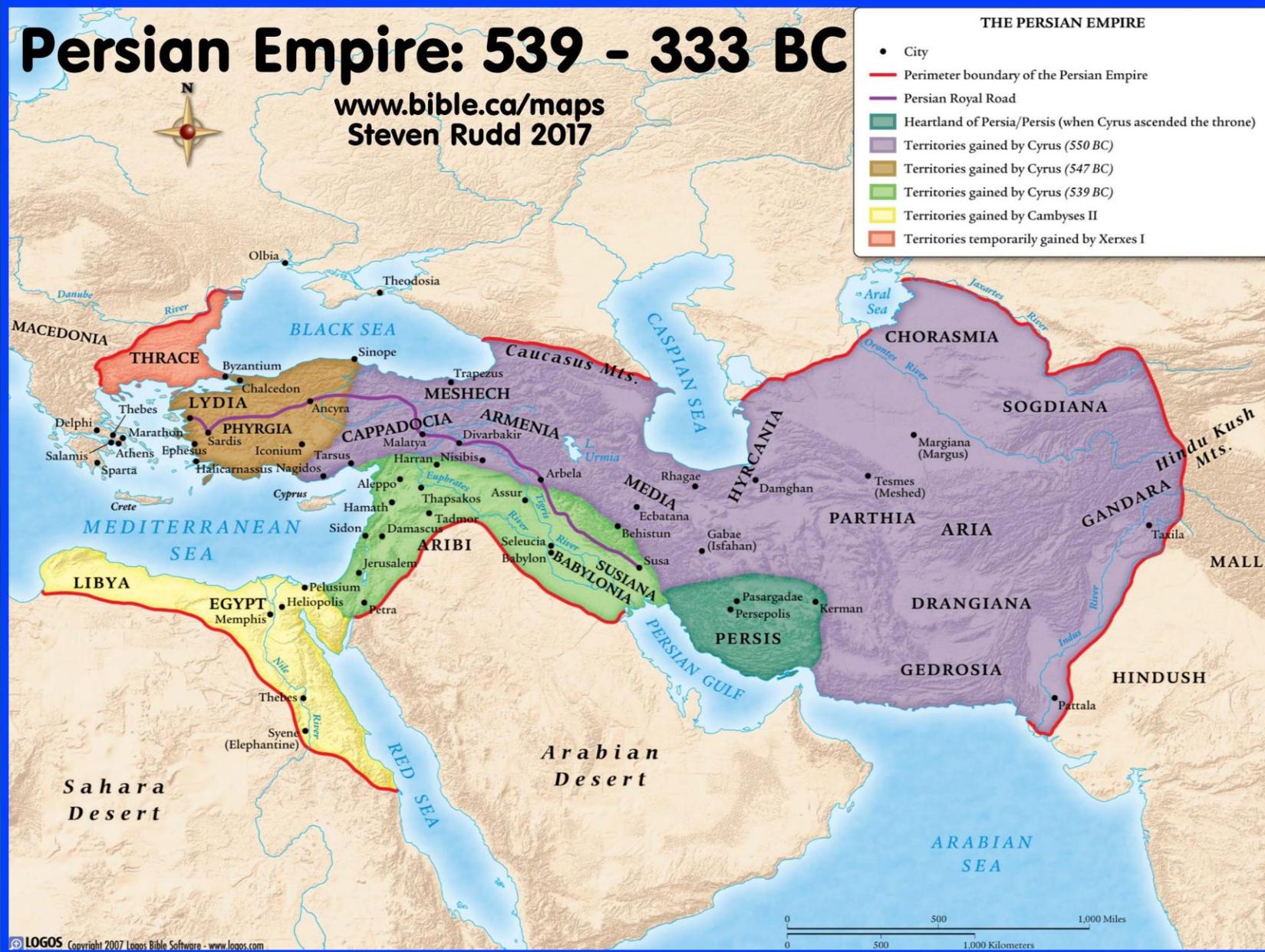
- They practiced ritual purity and a strict observance of the Sabbath. This was so important to them that they refrained from defecating on the Sabbath.
 - The Essenes did not believe in animal sacrifices, so this separated them from worship in the Jerusalem Temple.
 - They believed that souls were immortal, but they denied the resurrection of the body, which to them was corrupt.
 - Their communal rules including celibacy and owning no money or property.
 - The Essenes had their own interpretation of the Torah.
- Diaspora
 - During the Greek period, Jews moved out of the Levant. There were thriving Jewish communities in Greece; Alexandria, Egypt; Galilee; and Antioch.
 - Separation
 - Separation between Jews and non-Jews became more pronounced during the Greek period as the Jews fought to separate themselves from the practices of the Greeks which they viewed as defiling.
 - The Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes went to great lengths to avoid contact with Gentiles in a way which would defile themselves. Thus, a Jew would not enter a Gentile home or eat from a Gentile pot.

Judaism Under the Greeks

332/331 BC to 143 BC

Persian Empire: 539 - 333 BC

www.bible.ca/maps
Steven Rudd 2017



The Persian Empire 539-333 BC
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Steven Rudd, 2017

Alexander's Greek Empire (323 BC)



Map of the Greek Empire at its Height (Alexander the Great)

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Government of Judea

- In 333/332 BC, Alexander the Great Conquered Persia, Tyre, Gaza, Judea, and Egypt
- Alexander Believed that Greek Culture and Language Were the Means to Unify the World; Hellenization
- Alexander Allowed the Jews to Observe Their Laws; Exempted Them from Paying Tribute During Their Sabbath Years (Every 7th Year)
- Jews Were Encouraged to Move to Alexandria, Egypt

Government of Judea

- After Alexander the Great Died in 323 BC, His Large Empire Was Divided Among His Generals, Most Notably Ptolemy and Seleucus
- Alexander's Policy of Hellenization Was Followed by His Successors
- Judah Was First Ruled by the Ptolemies and Later by the Seleucids
- The Ptolemies Were Tolerant of the Jews, as Were the Early Seleucid Rulers
- Antiochus III the Great, a Seleucid, Offered the Jews Funds to Repair Jerusalem and the 2nd Temple

Government of Judea

- Under Antiochus III's Successor, Seleucus IV Philopater, Relations Between the Jews and the Seleucids Deteriorated
- Under Antiochus IV Epiphanes ("God Made Manifest"), Things Took a Dire Turn
- He Ruled 175-164 BC and Strove to Eradicate Judaism
- In 168 BC, He Attempted to Destroy All Copies of the Torah and He Ordered Everyone to Make Offerings to Zeus
- He Put a Statue of Zeus in the Temple and Put Another Altar on Top of the Temple Altar; He Sacrificed a Pig There

Government of Judea

- Antiochus IV Epiphanes Ordered the Sabbath Be Profaned and Banned It
- He Abolished Jewish Circumcision
- Anyone Caught with a Torah or an Uncircumcised Child Was Subject to Death
- He Murdered Women with Uncircumcised Children and Hung Their Dead Children Around Their Necks
- Mattathias, an Elderly Member of a Priestly Family from Modein, Led the Revolt Against Antiochus IV Epiphanes

Maccabean Revolt

- Mattathias Had 5 Sons: Judas (Maccabeus, “the Hammer”), Jonathan, Simon, John, and Eleazar
- The Revolt Started When Mattathias Destroyed a Greek Altar in His Village and Killed Antiochus’ Emissary
- The Revolt Lasted From 166 to 142 BC; A Guerilla War Fought Against Antiochus and His Syrian Mercenaries
- After 3 Years, the Maccabees Took the Temple
- They Removed the Pagan Altar, the Statue of Zeus, and the 2nd Temple Altar
- They Cleansed the Temple and Built a New Altar
- They Rededicated the Temple in 165 BC; the Hanukkah (Dedication) Lasted 8 Days and a Tiny Jar of Oil Kept the Candles Burning

Maccabean Revolt

- At the End of the Revolt in 142 BC, Judah Was Independent Again, Until the Romans Took Control in 63 BC
- Judas Maccabeus Led the Revolt from 166-160 BC
- From 160 to 143 BC, Jonathan, His Brother, Served as High Priest
- From 143 to 134 BC, Simon, Mattathias' Last Son, Served as High Priest and Established the Hasmonean Dynasty
- Upon Simon's Death, The Hasmonean Dynasty Reverted to an Aristocratic Hellenistic Regime of Jewish Hellenizers

The Office of High Priest

- During the Greek Period, the Office of High Priest Began to Be Sold to the Highest Bidder
- As the Political Winds Changed, Frequent Shifts in Who Served as High Priest
 - Jason, Brother to Onias III, High Priest in 176 BC, Bribed Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Got Himself Appointed High Priest
 - 3 Years Later, Menelaus Offered Antiochus a Bribe Which Was More Than 22,550 Pounds of Silver and Menelaus Became High Priest

Important Religious Developments

- The Books of the Hebrew Canon Became Formalized During the Greek Period
- The Septuagint:
 - Starting 275 BC, the Hebrew Books of the Old Testament Translated from Hebrew into Greek; the Septuagint Translation
 - “The Translation of the Seventy”; Also Referred to as LXX Translation
 - *The Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* States That Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285 -247 BC) Ordered the Hebrew Law Translated into Greek; 72 Jews, 6 from Each of the 12 Tribes
 - Work Started with the Pentateuch
 - Work Completed in the 2nd Century BC

Important Religious Developments

- Other Writings: Dead Sea Scrolls

- A Collection of 981 Ancient Jewish Manuscripts Which Date from the 3rd Century BC to the 1st Century AD
- Most Scholars Attribute This Collection to the Essene Community at Qumran (6 Miles South of Jericho)
- Most Texts Are in Hebrew; A Few Extra-biblical Texts in Aramaic
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- 30% Are Non-canonical Books Such as *1 Enoch*
- 30% are Secular Books Outlining the Rules and Practices of the Various Jewish Groups or Sects; *The Community Rule*; *Rule of Blessing*

Qumran



Map of Qumran; Copyright: The Community at Qumran
– Bible Mapper Atlas; www.biblemapper.com

The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Temple Scroll



The Temple Scroll; Qumran; Israel;
www.alamy.com

Important Religious Developments

- Other Writings: Apocrypha

- Books of Doubtful Authenticity and With Questionable Value to the Rest of Scripture
- Books Excluded from the Hebrew and Protestant Canons; Some Books are in the Catholic and Orthodox Canons
- Both Jewish and New Testament Apocrypha
- Jewish Apocrypha from the Greek Period:
 - *Tobit*
 - *The Wisdom of Solomon*
 - *Ecclesiasticus*

Important Religious Developments

- Other Writings: Pseudepigrapha

- “Books Under False Names”; The Claimed Author May Not Be the True Author or the Work is Attributed to Someone Who Lived in the Past
- *The Book of Daniel*; Not Written by the Prophet Daniel, but Possibly Written During the Greek Period
- Other Jewish Pseudepigrapha:
 - *The Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates*
 - *1 Enoch*
 - *Jubilees*
 - *Testaments of the Twelve Prophets*
 - *The Assumption of Moses*
- Jude, Jesus’ Brother, Quotes from *1 Enoch* in His New Testament Epistle

Important Religious Developments

• Synagogues

- During the Time of Ezra, the Priests and Levites Were Responsible for Teaching the Law to the People
- As Synagogues Continued to Develop, Lay Scribes or Elders of the Pharisaic School Assumed This Duty

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The Sadducees

- Date Back to the 2nd Century BC
- An Aristocratic Class That Concerned Themselves with Everything Happening in the Temple
- Religious Focus: Exclusively on the Torah (1st 5 Books of Moses)
- Over Time, They Became Very Wealthy and Political
- They Often Held the Role of High Priest and Chief Priest, as Well as the Majority of the Sanhedrin
- Did Not Believe in the Resurrection of the Dead nor in an Afterlife
- Denied the Existence of Angels and Demons

The Pharisees

- Rigidly Legalistic
- Very Exacting in Their Interpretation and Observance of Jewish Law
- Religious Focus: the Written Torah Plus a Body of Oral Law Used to Further Interpret the Written Law
- Example: the 4th Commandment States Do No Work on the Sabbath; The Pharisees Defined Work in Great Detail
- Pharisees Taught That Every Soul is Imperishable, and the Resurrection of the Dead is Possible, but only for the Righteous; the Wicked Condemned to Eternal Torment
- They Believed in Angels and Spirits

The Essenes

- A Mystic Jewish Sect Dating from the 2nd Century BC to the 1st Century AD
- Practiced a Ritual Purity and a Strict Observance of the Sabbath; Refrained from Defecating on the Sabbath
- They Did Not Believe in Animal Sacrifices, so This Separated Them from Worship in the Temple
- Believed That Souls Were Immortal, but Denied the Resurrection of the Body, Which to Them Was Corrupt
- Religious Focus: Their Own Torah Interpretation

Important Religious Developments

- Diaspora
 - During the Greek Period, Jews Moved out of the Levant
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 - Became More Pronounced During the Greek Period as Jews Fought to Separate Themselves from Greek Practices They Viewed as Defiling
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