

The Jews of Greece

Hellenism, Holocaust, and Hope for the Future

By Tim M. Sigler, Ph.D.

Growing up in the United States, one might think that matzo ball soup and gefilte fish are an essential part of Jewish identity. But that's not the case in Greece. Rather than the northeastern European inspirations of Ashkenazi Jewry, the cuisine and many other Jewish cultural practices in Greece are much more influenced by Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. As one member of the community put it, "We never ate matzo balls or gefilte fish. We ate the whole fish—you don't ground up what you're not ashamed of!" But the chronicle of this ancient community actually goes back much farther than the Late Middle Ages.

Jews and Greeks have a long and complicated history of cultural and military interaction. The word Javan (Hebrew, *Yavan*) is mentioned six times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 10:2, 4; 1 Chr 1:5, 7; Isa 66:19; and Ezek 27:13) and refers both to Javan the individual descendant of Noah's son Japheth and Javan the people group from his lineage. Since the letters j, i, and y are often interchangeable in various alphabetic systems, it is easy to see how the name Javan is associated with the alternatively spelled *Ioan* from whom the Ioanians or Greek-speakers from western Anatolia and Aegean islands derive their name. So, the Greeks, or their forebearers, are mentioned right away in the early account of Genesis.

Since Israel serves as the land bridge between three continents, Jews were at times caught in the middle of conflicts between the Greeks and the Persians. The Jerusalem-based prophets Haggai and Zechariah both date their calling to the second year of Persian king Darius I (the Great) who reigned 521-486 BCE and lost the famous Battle of Marathon to the Athenian Greeks

in 490 BC.¹ His vicious son Xerxes I (the Great) regained a temporary Persian advantage over the Greeks ten years later in the Battle of Thermopylae.² Xerxes I is also known as Ahasuerus who took Esther as his queen and allowed the Jewish people to defend themselves against the enemies that wicked Haman the Agagite had incited against them—the background to the feast of Purim. As we’ll see, Hanukkah has an even more direct link to the intersection of Jewish and Greek history.

HELLENISM

Alexander the Great, son of Philip II of Macedon, conquered the Persians and established a rule that stretched from the Mediterranean all the way to China. Yet he died young and unexpectedly in 323 BCE, and his empire was divided up among his four successors (the *Diadochi*). However, none of these successors were his rightful heirs. His Macedonian influence was diminished, and there was confusion for forty years before the Hellenistic world would be “settled into four stable power blocs: Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucid Mesopotamia and Central Asia, Attalid Anatolia, and Antigonid Macedon.”³ All of this was prophesied years before by the prophet Daniel.⁴

Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with

¹ His agate cylinder seal is on display at the British Museum. See <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/agate-cylinder-seal/ewHhhuoIbkFMYQ>.

² See <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/divided-kingdom/2391-the-baltimore-running-festival-the-300-and-esther?highlight=WyJncmVlY2UiLCJncmVlY2UncyJd>.

³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great#Fall_of_the_Empire_and_the_East

⁴ By 305 BCE, “Ptolemy, along with Cassander, Seleucus and Lysimachus (most likely to be identified as the four horns), declared themselves the successor kings to Alexander.” John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2000), p. 744.

which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these. (Dan 11:3-4; see also 8:21-22).

These four regions of rule became the Hellenistic Empire which lasted from the end of Alexander's wars until 146 BCE with the annexation of Greece by the Roman Republic. The influence and imposition of Greek language and culture took hold throughout the empire, and many conquered people groups appreciated the art, architecture, education, entertainment, and wealth that the Greeks had to offer.

Judea was now ruled by Seleucid Greeks to the north in Syria. And many welcomed the cultural influences of Hellenism. Even the word *synagogue* comes from Jewish Koiné Greek and means "an assembly." According to a legend recorded in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the Greek King Ptolemy II Philadelphus asked seventy-two Jewish scholars to translate the Torah into Greek for his library in Alexandria. Eventually the rest of the Tanakh was translated into Greek and is known as the Septuagint (or LXX). No matter how they may have been produced, the Old Greek (OG) translations of the Hebrew Bible have become an important witness to the history of the Scriptures.

One of the Seleucid Greek rulers was Antiochus IV. He called himself *Epiphanes* ("God manifest") and others mockingly called him *Epimanes* ("the Madman"). In 167 BCE, he entered the Temple in Jerusalem, removed its golden menorah, altar of incense, and table of showbread, and stole its veils and tapestries. On the 25th day of the Jewish month of Chislev, Antiochus forced the daily sacrifices to cease when he offered a pig on an altar he had erected in the honor of Zeus atop the altar designated for worship of the God of Israel.⁵ Judah the Maccabee led a revolt against the Greek forces and retook Jerusalem rededicating the temple exactly three years later

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (XII.5.4). See <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/ant-12.html>.

on Chislev 25, 164 BCE (1 Macc 1:54; 4:59). Hanukkah celebrates this testament to Jewish survival with the Feast of Dedication. Interestingly, “the Greek word *hellenismos* is first used of the adoption of or enthusiasm for Greek culture” in this Jewish book recording the story of Hanukkah (2 Macc 4:13).⁶ It is also this same work that maps out a number of Greek cities where Jewish communities developed after this reprisal in Jerusalem.

According to 1 Maccabees 15:23 and also the Jewish historian Philo (c. 30 BCE – c. 45 CE), in the years following the revolt the Jews built up communities in Sparta, Delos, Sicyon, Samos, Rhodes, Kos, Gortynia, Crete, Cnidus, Aegina, Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetonia, Attica, Argos, Corinth and Cyprus.⁷

Corinth and Cenchreae

The Book of Acts records that when Paul visited Greece, he found well-established Jewish communities in these same places and others. He traveled to Corinth—a cosmopolitan city located on the southwest side of the Isthmus flanking the Gulf of Corinth on the west and the Saronic Gulf on the east. The Isthmus of Corinth connects the Peloponnese region in the south to Attica in the north and east. The operation of the *Diolkos*, a paved trackway for the transport of ships and goods, capitalized on this position by providing an expedient alternative to the formidable 190-mile journey around the Peloponnesian Peninsula. The Roman Emperor Nero, who ruled from 54-68 CE, brought 6,000 Jewish prisoners from Judea to attempt the digging of a canal through the Isthmus, but troubles elsewhere diverted his attention, and it was not until 1893 that the canal was finally completed.⁸ Corinth commanded three major harbors: Cenchreae and Schoenus on the eastern coast and Lechaem on the western side. Paul shaved his head as part of

⁶ Greg R. Stanton, “Hellenism,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2000), p. 465.

⁷ See <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/greece-virtual-jewish-history-tour#World%20War%20II>.

⁸ See <http://aedik.gr/the-canal/the-history-of-the-canal/?lang=en>.

a Nazirite vow at Cenchreae (Acts 18:18; Num 6:1-21), and Phoebe was a deaconess who served the believing community there (Rom 16:1).

Philippi

Named after Phillip II, the father of Alexander the Great, some speculate that this important city did not have a synagogue structure in the first century. While not a hub of Jewish life in the first century, it was on the Via Egnatia and important enough that Paul and Silas visited the city en route to Thessaloniki. Unfortunately, they quickly became unwelcomed by local Gentiles after ruining their fortune-making through healing their slave girl from her demonic fortune-telling (Acts 16:12-40).

Jewish men and women gathered by the river in Philippi as the appointed place for prayers (Acts 16:16). While a recent discovery of a grave stone mentions the presence of a synagogue at a later time, it should be noted that there is not a synagogue or active Jewish community in Philippi today. Nevertheless, Philippi had a group that met for regular prayer near the Gangites River.

According to Jewish pietists concerned about assimilation, a minimum of ten Jewish men was necessary to constitute a regular synagogue and thus indicate a city where Jewish people would be likely to form their own community; this number of Jewish men may not have lived in Philippi. But in places with no official synagogue, Jewish people preferred to meet in a ritually pure place near water; ritual washing of hands before prayer seems to have been standard in Diaspora Judaism, and excavations show the importance of water to synagogues.⁹

Athens

In Athens, a famous inscription bears the image of a menorah and a lulav—
commemorating the golden lampstand from the tabernacle in Ex 25:31-35 and the bundle of

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *IZVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1993), 368.

leafy plants to be waved at the Feast of Tabernacles/Sukkot mentioned in Lev 23:39-40.¹⁰ It was discovered in the agora—the gathering place at the center of the city’s athletic, commercial, artistic, spiritual and political life. Some have suggested that this inscription provides evidence of a fifth-century synagogue in the city.

Throughout Israel, a number of mosaic floors also illustrate life in Hellenistic Jewish communities. Common images include menorahs, lulavs, shofars, and incense shovels. These typically surround an image of a Torah ark (*aron hakodesh*), which derives its name from the Ark of the Covenant that was first in the holy of holies of the traveling tabernacle and later housed in the Temple in Jerusalem. These beautiful masterpieces evidence sophisticated artistry, but some synagogue mosaics also expose the syncretistic blending of Judaism with the pagan aspects of Hellenism. The famous floors at Hamat Tiberias, Beit Alpha, Naaran, Susiya, Huseifa, and Sepphoris (Tzipori) include zodiac wheels and images of pagan deities along with traditionally Jewish and biblical themes. This mishmash of religious beliefs was alive and well in Athens and provided the backdrop for Paul’s famous speech on the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Acts 17:16-34.

Ioannina

When considering the Jewish history of Greece, there are actually two very diverse traditions, and the history of Ioannina illustrates this better than anywhere else.¹¹ Romaniote Jews arrived 2,300 years ago to appreciate cultural and economic opportunities in the years following Alexander, and Sephardic Jews arrived just over 500 years ago after the expulsion

¹⁰ See <https://artifacts.jewishmuseum.gr/artifacts/tombstone-16/>

¹¹ Rae Dalven, *The Jews of Ioannina* (Belgrade, Serbia: Cadmus Press, 1990); “The Jewish Community of Ioannina – The Memory of Artefacts” an exhibit of the Jewish Museum of Greece.

from Spain in 1492.¹² Romaniote Jews spoke Greek and assimilated with majority culture, but they also had “their own language, Yevanic, or Judeo-Greek, a version of Greek infused with Hebrew and written with the Hebrew script.”¹³ Sephardic Jews arrived from Spain and Portugal where they spoke Ladino, a Judeo-Spanish language written in Hebrew script. In the centuries following 1492, most of the Romaniote communities were assimilated by the more numerous Sephardim.

Ioannina, a postcard-pretty town in northwestern Greece with a medieval fortress perched by a bright blue lake and surrounded by snow-capped mountains, once was the center of Romaniote Jewish life. Today, however, the community in Ioannina numbers fewer than 50 members, most of them elderly. The last time the community celebrated a bar mitzvah was in 2000.¹⁴

The Romaniote hold the record for having the most ancient synagogue communities in the Mediterranean context as well as the most enduring synagogue in the Americas. “A ruined second-century BCE synagogue on the Aegean island of Delos is believed to be the oldest discovered in the Diaspora.”¹⁵ In the United States, a community named after the original town of Ioannina is called Kehila Kedosha Janina. It is “tucked between a Chinese merchant and a glass shop in New York’s Lower East Side, [and] is the last remaining Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.”¹⁶ There are also two active Romaniote synagogues in Israel, one in Tel Aviv, and one in Jerusalem. About half of the Ioannina community moved to New York after the turn of the century. Most of those who remained were deported to Auschwitz on Erev Pesach, 1944. Other communities in the region were deported at the same time (e.g., Kastoria in North central Greece). There were significant connections between the Jews of Ioannina and those in

¹² See <https://www.jewishmuseum.gr/en/the-jews-of-greece-2300-years-of-history-and-tradition/>

¹³ See <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/greeces-last-romaniote-jews-1.5243995>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See <https://www.pbs.org/video/the-city-concealed-kehila-kedosha-janina/>.

Albania, too; the latter survived the war for the most part due to the hospitality of the Albanians.¹⁷

HOLOCAUST

Canaris Constantinis became the president of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), an organization formed after the war to help assess and rebuild what was lost. His work provides a depressing account of the devastation left by the Nazi occupation. Constantinis painstakingly traveled throughout the country and visited synagogues, community centers, offices, schools, businesses, nursing homes, cemeteries, and other Jewish properties in an effort to reconstruct Jewish life in the country and re-organize some sense of structure for the remnant population. His son later published these notes to show numerous locations where once-thriving Jewish communities either became inactive or simply dissolved.¹⁸ Of all the countries the Nazis occupied, Greece lost more of its Jewish population than any other—a full 86 percent perished.¹⁹

Thessaloniki

After the arrival of Sephardic Jews in the 15th century, Thessaloniki came to be known as *Jerusalem of the Balkans*. Greece took its first state census in 1913: “in a total of 157,889 citizens in Thessaloniki, 61,439 were Jews, 45,889 were Turks, and 39,956 were Greeks . . .”²⁰ Of the three largest demographic groups, the Jewish population was the most numerous and culturally influential. In 1919, the Jewish workforce was recorded as follows: 750 professionals, 1,900 businessmen, 6,100 small merchants, 7,450 office and shop clerks, 7,750 craftsmen and

¹⁷ Personal interview with Mattithiah Friedman, a descendant of the Manhattan Romaniote community.

¹⁸ Moses C. Constantinis, *The Jewish Communities of Greece after the Holocaust: From the Reports of Canaris D. Constantinis 1945* (Athens, 2017), 32.

¹⁹ See https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=401:holocaust&catid=99:2009-06-04-07-06-01&Itemid=76.

²⁰ Christos Zafiris, *Thessaloniki of the Jews* (Athens: Epikentro, 2017), 60.

workers, 9,000 longshoremen, porters, boatmen, and fishermen.²¹ These included bankers, traders, craftsmen, farmers, silk growers, and other entrepreneurial businesses. The Allatini family opened the largest flour mill in the East—the biggest in the Balkans—and became extremely influential.

Even more sacred than the synagogue, was the Jewish school. Talmud Torah Hagadol, a high-level school for religious instruction, had been in operation in Salonica since 1520 and had left an indelible mark on the community. However, some more elite members of the community began looking for better opportunities for their children and invited educators from Paris to bring their Alliance Israélite Universelle to Salonica in 1873. In 1913, they enrolled 3,180 students in their eight private schools with instruction in French.²² There was growing involvement in cosmopolitan learning, athletic teams, social clubs, and all the joys of modernity.

Devin Naar, Professor of Sephardic Studies at Washington University, carefully documents how some of the Salonican Jewish community's educational and social choices came back to haunt them.²³ In 1933, the community appointed Zvi Koretz as chief rabbi. He was an impressively trained, liberal-minded scholar with a doctorate from the College for the Science of Judaism in Berlin. Whether through his foolish hopes or simply poor leadership, his counsel to the local community and interactions with the Greek government and Nazi occupying forces contributed to the community's uniquely tragic losses. Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg laments, "For the German bureaucrats, he was an ideal tool."²⁴ The *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* recounts, "About 20 transports, carrying 43,850 Salonican Jews, arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau

²¹ Rena Molho and Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, *Jewish Sites in Thessaloniki* (Athens: Lycabettus Press, 2009), 8.

²² Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 143-147.

²³ *Ibid.*, 37-88.

²⁴ Raul Hilberg, *The Annihilation of European Jews* (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 2:740.

between March 20 and August 18, 1943. Most of the new arrivals were immediately gassed.”²⁵

Some 90 percent of Thessaloniki’s Jewish community perished.

After the German takeover of 1941, aided by Greece’s neighbors who like jackals plundered Jews’ properties, the formerly cosmopolitan and open character of the city was replaced by a religio-nationalist policy, marking the Jews for eventual destruction and systematically marginalizing the Jewish community.²⁶

Heartbreakingly, some of this human hatred still persists today throughout Greece. Even as the broader Greek society and community leadership in Thessaloniki attempts to acknowledge their failures toward its Jewish citizens, the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party has become the third-largest political party in the Greek Parliament. And their swastika-like logo was found spray-painted on the city’s Holocaust memorial along with leaflets claiming that the mayor is a “slave of the Jews.”²⁷ Today, Freedom Plaza memorializes and honors the victims of the Holocaust in the same place where thousands were gathered by the Nazis before being sent to their deaths.²⁸ And a major project is being undertaken to construct the Holocaust Memorial & Human Rights Educational Center as a public monument prominently along the city’s western waterfront.²⁹

Out of the ashes, the Jews of Salonica seek to understand their reality and rebuild their community. Considering their devastating losses, it is surprising what still exists and what is planned for their future. There was an impressive crowd at the Friday evening synagogue service. I was told that there was a special event for the children, and there must have been nearly 100 in attendance at the catered meal the community shares together afterwards. It was impressive that many locals could converse in Hebrew. Their Chabad rabbi was very welcoming,

²⁵ Robert Rozett, “Solonika,” *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 2:399.

²⁶ Paolo Polini, *Solonica*. See <http://www.aldenfilms.com/new.html#video17>.

²⁷ See <https://www.timesofisrael.com/greek-jews-condemn-neo-nazi-vandalism-of-thessaloniki-holocaust-memorial/>.

²⁸ See <https://inthessaloniki.com/item/freedom-plaza-jewish-community-holocaust-monument/>.

²⁹ See <http://www.holocausteducenter.gr/>.

and their visiting rabbi from Belgium is especially enjoyable and gregarious. They publish a smart looking weekly newsletter with a drash on the weekly Torah portion, and there is the daily hope for a minyan (10 men to hold a prayer service).

The Ports of Thessaloniki and Haifa

Israeli tour guide Erez Geron mentioned the connections between Thessaloniki and Haifa. When the Jews were given up from Thessaloniki, only those who were away assisting with the building of the port of Haifa survived. Later, the mayor of Haifa from 1951 to 1969, Abba Hushi or Khoushy—born in 1898 as Abba Schneller, visited Thessaloniki in commemoration of the connection between the two cities. Since most of the workers in the port of Thessaloniki were Jewish, it was closed on Saturdays in honor of the sabbath.³⁰

Veria (Berea)

Veria's Jewish heritage dates back to at least the first century CE as Paul preached in their synagogue in Acts 17:10-15. Like Philippi, Veria—and the synagogue itself—is situated along a river. The Tripotamos River is formed from three tributaries, and it runs through the Jewish neighborhood of Barbouta. Since rivers and landscape tend to stay in the same general location even over centuries, and since it is common for Jewish places of worship to have access to running water for ritual purification, it is likely that the modern synagogue is located in the same general area as its ancient counterpart.³¹

The area was originally home to Romaniote Jews from earliest times who later assimilated with the Sephardic majority in Thessaloniki, about 45 miles away. Today's synagogue was built from stone in 1850 and served the local Sephardic community. While the

³⁰ See

<http://segulamag.com/en/articles/%D7%94%D7%A1%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9D/>.

³¹ See <http://www.jewishtraveler.co.il/e-veria/>.

synagogue building is maintained, there are not enough Jewish residents in the area to hold regular services. An occasional visit by a delegation from elsewhere may hold special services from time to time. In the last few years of hosting student trips and biblical studies tours to Greece, I've had the privilege of visiting Veria with some regularity—and each time I've met Israeli tourists who have come to northern Greece to see the history and honor the memory of the departed community. A gifted Gentile tour guide and a local evangelical pastor are happy to receive guests and tell the story of the Jewish hope and history of the area.

Sidebar:

Take the Anti-Defamation League Survey on Jewish Stereotypes³²

1. Jews are more loyal to Israel than to [this country/the countries they live in]*
2. Jews have too much power in international financial markets
3. Jews have too much control over global affairs
4. Jews think they are better than other people
5. Jews have too much control over the global media
6. Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars
7. Jews have too much power in the business world
8. Jews don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind
9. People hate Jews because of the way Jews behave
10. Jews have too much control over the United States government
11. Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust

* Respondents living in countries with an estimated Jewish population greater than 10,000, or more than 0.1% of the overall population, or where ADL has surveyed in the past were read the statement “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to this country.” Respondents residing elsewhere were read the statement “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the countries they live in.”

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Only nine Jewish communities throughout Greece remain active today with approximately 5,000 Jewish people living in the country—mostly in Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Chalkis, and Corfu. Restoration and conservation projects continue to preserve the history of Greek Jewish life. Impressive work is being done at Jewish museums in Athens,

³² Find it at http://global100.adl.org/public/ADL_GLOBAL_100_SURVEY_QUESTIONNAIRE.pdf.

Thessaloniki, and Rhodes. Jewish heritage tours and websites have sprung up for those wanting to experience “Kosher Greece.” Athens boasts a thriving though hidden elementary school for Jewish children, and it was impressive to hear how many locals at synagogues both there and in Thessaloniki could converse in modern Hebrew. The Israel-Greece Chamber of Commerce promotes ties between the business and social communities in the two countries.³³

Famous Jews of Greek Ancestry

The Romaniote Jewish community produced many famous rabbis, liturgists, ethicists, philosophers, physicians, politicians, musicians, and poets, and at least two who claimed to be the Messiah—**Moses of Crete** in the 5th century CE and **Sabbatai Zevi** in the 17th century. Many may not be aware that the following people of note also hail from families with Greek-Jewish ancestry: **Vidal Sassoon** (1928 – 2012) the British-American hairstylist, businessman, and philanthropist who grew up in a Greek Jewish community in west London, his father was from Thessaloniki; the former President of France **Nicolas Sarkozy** (born 1955) descends from Jews from Thessaloniki; **Jamie-Lynn Sigler** (born 1981) of *The Sopranos* fame, her father is of Sephardic Greek heritage; Literature Nobel Prize recipient **Patrick Modiano** (born 1945) is the son of Italian Jews who settled in Greece and helped develop Thessaloniki’s banking industry; **Michael Castro** (1945 – 2018) a poet and translator who was named the first Poet Laureate of St. Louis, he grew up in the Romaniote Jewish community in Manhattan; Democratic California State Senator **Henry Stern** (born 1982); and **Jack Howard Jacobs** (born 1945) a retired U.S. Army colonel and a Medal of Honor recipient who appears on news channels as a military analyst.

³³ See <https://www.israelgreece.com/en/about/>.

Greek Culture in Israel Today

Some 700 Greek songs have been translated into Hebrew and popularized by Israeli artists. As the whole country prepares to enjoy the Shabbat, each Friday at 4 p.m. Israel Radio broadcaster Yaron Enosh dedicates his program almost exclusively to Greek music and culture—and this affinity for Greek music in Israel has been around for decades. Though not Jewish himself, Aris San (1940 – 1992) moved to Israel from Greece, became an Israeli citizen, and popularized Greek music in his new homeland. President Shimon Peres told the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation, “In Israel we love the Greek Music. For us Greece is a country but also a melody.”³⁴ The famous Greek singer, Stelios Kazantzidis (1931 – 2001) was a musical icon among Israelis. One writer describes him as “the voice that contained all the pain and desires of post-war, poverty-stricken Greeks, many of whom had to migrate to make a living abroad.”³⁵ Ben Shalev in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* called Kazantzidis “The Greek pillar of Israeli music.”³⁶ His music filled the emotional spectrum from joy to sorrow and pain to pleasure. Israeli broadcaster Samiko Reitan says, “[Kazantzidis] was the voice of the people, of the weary, the exploited, the betrayed. And the voice of the refugee and the emigre, too.”³⁷ Such pathos relates well to the groans and glories of Jewish history. Today, twelve internet radio stations broadcast exclusively Greek music, with an Israeli listenership of over 800,000 people!³⁸ A station near Tel Aviv, Radio Agapi, broadcasts Greek music from Israel 24 hours a day.

And what goes better with music than food? The cuisine of Greece is having a cultural comeback of its own. Some see this as a return to the cultural roots of many Sephardic Israelis

³⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_music_in_Israel.

³⁵ See <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/09/14/stelios-kazantzidis-the-voice-of-post-war-poverty-stricken-greece/>.

³⁶ Ben Shalev in <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/1.5118854>.

³⁷ Samiko Reitan in <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/1.5118854>.

³⁸ See <https://world.greekreporter.com/2014/05/14/israel-radio-show-dedicated-to-greece/>.

whose ancestors lived in the Balkans.³⁹ Greek taverna style eateries with names like Yasas, Yassou, Kalamata, Ouzeria, Greco, Sparta, and Olympus are popping up in Old Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Herzliya, and even Jerusalem. Athens is only an inexpensive two-hour flight away, and many Israelis travel to the mainland or the islands of Corfu, Kos, Mykonos, or Santorini for an almost local yet international getaway.

Jerusalem and Athens

Philosophers and theologians have asked the question for centuries: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”⁴⁰ One answer to this question comes from the co-founder and past director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Nicholas Stavroulakis. He points out that “it was within this world” “founded by Alexander the Great and his successors, or built according to Greek urban ideals by the Romans” “that modern post-Exilic and Rabbinic Judaism was born, as was that of its estranged sister, Christianity.”⁴¹ More than mere cultural and culinary affinities, these cultures share the role of providing the historical and linguistic background that unites the two Testaments—one written in Hebrew and one written in Greek. Those who search the Hebrew Scriptures about the Messiah will see striking fulfillments in the Greek: what is concealed in the Old is revealed in the New.

The divine plan was revealed to the prophet Daniel that both Alexander (11:3-4) and Antiochus (8:9-14) would come to trouble Israel—but their dominion would not last. Ultimate sovereignty and shalom would come through “Messiah the Prince” who would give His life as a

³⁹ See <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/171526/greek-food-in-israel>; and https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/for-this-greek-immigrant-jewish-new-year-brings-back-sweet-memories--and-foods--of-home/2018/08/31/a3fc1a9a-ab0b-11e8-8a0c-70b618c98d3c_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.54f2e602e6ed.

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *De praescriptione*, vii. Unfortunately, Tertullian (c. 155-240) the original inquirer, was an early example of an emerging form of replacement theology that saw the Church supplanting Israel in God’s redemptive plan—as if God were finished with the Jewish people. For an explanation and counter to this notion, see Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

⁴¹ Nicholas Stavroulakis, *The Jews of Greece: An Essay* (Athens: Talos Press, 1997), 9.

sacrifice to “make reconciliation for iniquity” by being “cut off” prior to destruction of the Temple in the year 70 CE (9:24-27).

Similarly, the prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when the nations (including those from *Javan* and the Greek coastlands) would come and worship the promised Messiah in Jerusalem.

I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,” says the LORD, “as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. (Isaiah 66:19-20)

When Messiah Jesus returns to rule and reign in Jerusalem, his fame and salvation will be known throughout the earth. Even now, His offer of salvation today “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Rom 1:16).

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Websites and Museums

ADL Global100
Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece
Holocaust Museum of Greece
Jewish Museum of Greece
Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki
Jewish Heritage Europe
Jewish Heritage Tours
Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) News Archive
Jewish Virtual Library
Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum
Kosher Greece
Museum of the Jewish People - Beit Hatfutsot
Rhodes Jewish Museum
Synagogue Etz-Hayyim of Chania
Yerusha: Jewish Archives Europe