

The history of the middle east to 1914 essay sample

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1. One of the themes in these three chapters of the novel is the gradual development of monotheism—the belief that there is only one god—and the desire to convert the Hebrew people to monotheism. Please describe one episode from each of these three chapters and explain how each episode illustrates the rise of monotheism.

Michener works on the development of Judaism as a monotheistic faith over the thousands of years he spans in his book, *The Source* (1965) In a compartmentalized narrative where fifteen period specific stories create a complex big picture, the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters (167 to 364) of the novel deal with the times between 1400 BCE and 600 BCE. Tales of friction, faith and heroic endeavor recount the passion of Hebrew zealots for supremacy and drive forward the concept of one god in the pluralistic culture of Makor.

The fourth chapter,(167 to 232) An Old Man and His God tells the story of Zadok, a Moses like figure in lifelong conversation with his god the invisible El Shaddai. Leading his nomadic clan from the desert into the future, the diplomat in Zadok surfaces repeatedly in his quest for a peaceful transition to urban life. Seeking out and meeting the Canaanites halfway, agreeing even to marry his daughter to a worshipper of Baal and Astarte in the interests of peace, (215) the old man is nevertheless summoned by El Shaddai and told to stop the abominations in Makor, failing which, the town must be destroyed.(218) The refusal of Uriel, the Governor to accept the supremacy of El Shaddai and the subsequent massacre of the inhabitants of Makor lead to an annihilation of the pluralists (231) and the foundation of a monotheistic society.

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The Psalm of the Hoopoe Bird (235 to 322) sees the inhabitants of Makor now a frontier outpost of King David's empire accepting the supremacy of Yahweh, an evolution of El Shaddai. However, they still go to Baal for humdrum favors. The tale, which concentrates on the genius of the engineer Hoopoe turns with the arrival of a refugee, the destitute singer Gershom. Composing and singing odes to Yahweh, he wins the heart of David and goes with him to Jerusalem. His songs and psalms on Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews carry the faith forward through centuries and contribute significantly to the spread of monotheism.

An old nondescript widow who is visited by Yahweh to communicate his will to the Hebrews of Makor carries forward the concept of allegiance only to Yahweh and to no other in The Voice of Gomer (325 to 364). The widow Gomer is chosen by Yahweh to foretell the defeat of the Egyptians, (342) the fall of Makor and the slavery of the Israelis (354).

She rushes to the top of the hill, where Baal stays, with a motley band of followers and pushes the monolithic stone, which represents the god of the Canaanites down the slope breaking it into a hundred pieces. (357) The Hebrews driven off to Babylon for years of slavery and unable to take Baal or Astarte with them are exhorted by her to think only of Jerusalem and of the psalms of David and Gershom; extolling the one God Yahweh in their days of slavery. (363)

2. In your opinion, which people were most responsible for the war and the destruction of Makor at the end of "An Old Man and His God"—Zadok and his people or Uriel and his people? Please choose one side

or the other—fence straddling hurts—and support your answer by describing at least two specific events from the book in detail.

Fanatics have always caused war and destruction and Makor in the 1400s B. C. E. is true to type. Toughened by generations in the desert, covetous of the comforts of settled and affluent lives, the Hebrews are fiercely protective of their religion. Led by the zealot Zadok and guided by their god El Shaddai, they show a repeated proclivity for the military solution. (167 to 232)

The tale begins with Zadok making flint tips for their rough spears. (170) As the clan nears the city of Makor in the quest of their next habitat, there is palpable resentment among the men at being told that force will need to be eschewed for the time being. (184)

The confrontation between the Hebrews and the Canaanites takes on a serious dimension with the murder of the Hebrew girl Jael at the hands of her husband. (211) At this crucial moment, Uriel the Canaanite temporizes. He is clearly in no mood for conflict and while assessing the wealth of his city and his relationship with Zadok, remains content with shows of military strength. The sons of Zadok have however already carried out a detailed reconnaissance of the path to the well, located areas of weakness and frozen their strategy for capturing the source of water. They are ready for war. (212)

The next point of conflagration occurs with Zadok coming face to face with the Canaanite rituals at the temple of Astarte. He determines them to be abominations, unacceptable to El Shaddai and his people. (217) The compromise that hereto marked his interaction with Uriel is absent and his

demand is that of the fanatic; stop the rituals of the temple and accept the supremacy of El Shaddai.(219) Even his precious daughter is abandoned as he tells his sons that El Shaddai has ordained the destruction of Makor. The Hebrews strike first. (221)

3. Throughout the “ Psalm of the Hoopoe Bird”, Kerith and Hoopoe are in conflict what are the reasons for this conflict, how does their conflict get settled, and who came closest to winning the conflict—Kerith or Hoopoe? Please develop your answer in detail by describing two specific events from this chapter.

Jabaal, the Hoopoe is the tragic hero of the story, defeated and unrecognized in his victory. Kerith, his lovely wife realizes her dream of going to Jerusalem, but with another man and that too as part of King David’s entourage. She wins, but possibly not the way she wanted it to be.

Hoopoe is a brilliant builder, an innovator in the true sense of the word. A descendant of Zibeon the Canaanite he acknowledges the supremacy of Yahweh but remains a worshipper of Baal. (237) His wife Kerith, whom he loves dearly, is the daughter of a Hebrew priest of Makor, passionate in her devotion to Yahweh and her desire to make her home in Jerusalem.(237) While Kerith thinks of Jerusalem as the spiritual abode of Yahweh and her final destination, for Hoopoe the city is just another opportunity for potential building assignments. This is the root of the conflict between husband and wife and while Hoopoe does think of going to Jerusalem, he would much rather solve Makor’s defense problem first by building a connecting tunnel from the well to the city.

Kerith cares enough for her husband to realize that he will not go to Jerusalem happily without realizing his dream and to this end takes it upon herself to convince the General Amram to supersede the Governor and sanction the tunnel assignment. She wills herself to wait for the three years it will take to build the tunnel and on the Generals' visit to Makor prevails upon him to agree to the project and grant the necessary resources. (268)

Hoopoe and his lieutenant, the slave Moasheb create a stunning engineering marvel and build an underground tunnel from the well to a point inside the city innovating and finding solutions to all the hurdles which cross their path. (290) However, when David comes to visit Makor and inspect the tunnel Kerith's victory in her husband's success turns to ashes.

David in his old age is scarcely impressed with the engineering achievement (312) and discarding Hoopoe decides to take the bard Gershom with him to Jerusalem.(313) Kerith, already enamored with Gershom's singing and his devotion to Yahweh decides to go to Jerusalem with him and rejecting all her husbands' pleas to stay back, merges into David's entourage. Hoopoe looks on from the wall that he had built, disconsolate, trying to locate his wife, but to no avail. (314)

4. Why does Yahweh choose Gomer as His prophet, what are the main messages which Yahweh delivers through Gomer, what is Gomer's main mission from Yahweh, and on a scale from 1 to 10, how successful is she in completing her mission? (with 10 being most successful). You should describe specific events to support your answer.

The Voice of Gomer is The voice of Yahweh.

Gomer, the old and poor widow of Jathaan is the vehicle chosen by Yahweh to tell the Hebrews about their future. Returning from the well along the David tunnel, she is thrown off her feet and in the presence of a brilliant light The Voice tells her that He shall henceforth speak through her lips to save the Hebrews and make them find their god again.(350)

Gomer is an unlikely prophet. An aged and worn out woman, she depends upon the largesse of her well-wishers to stay alive with some form of dignity. The Voice first visits her to order the sending of her son Rimmon to Jerusalem (328) Again, on their first sighting of the holy city, words spill forth from her mouth about what happened a hundred years ago when Jerusalem was saved from the besieging Assyrian army. (336) It is then that the profundity of the happening strikes them.

In her first prophecy, the Egyptians hear Gomer's powerful voice telling them about their impending defeat, that their attack on Babylon will have disastrous results and that the Babylonians will annihilate them and force them into slavery. Egypt will surely be lost, she says. (342) Silenced by the Governor on the instructions of the angry Egyptian captain her words nevertheless soon come true. Messengers bring news of Nebuchadnezzar's famous victory and the total destruction of the Egyptian army. (348)

Her mission is to secure the will of Yahweh; to ensure that the Israelis enter the bondage of Babylon because of their sins and remember only Jerusalem even in their days of miserable slavery. She has many questions for Yahweh and despairs over the treatment she must mete out to Mikaal, Rimmon's
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lovely wife, because of her birth into a family that worships Baal and Astarte. (354, 355) Yahweh comes to her often telling her that the people of Israel have sinned beyond forgiveness. Their lust for foreign gods shall be punished by slavery, And that only after they pay for their sins will they still emerge as a nation, while Babylon and other states shall perish. (350-356)

On a scale of 1 to 10, it would be churlish to give Gomer anything less than a full ten. In the face of public contempt, internal conflict and personal distress she does not turn away in any way from the bidding of Yahweh. She shouts, raves and rants telling the people of Makor not just to stop building the wall but also to surrender to the Babylonians. She embarrasses her son, destroys the monolith of Baal on the hilltop and stones the temple of Astarte.

The Governor has no option but to consign her to chains and the dungeon but her voice refuses to be stifled. She still exhorts the people of Israel to accept the slavery of Nebuchadnezzar for such is their destiny and the only way to final redemption. After the battle and the defeat of the city while she does not hesitate to drive away Mikael from her son she also visits the prisoners and tells them gently to think only of Jerusalem and to sing its praises in their years of slavery, in their worst moments and in the face of death in captivity. (361-363)

Even the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar do not escape her wrath as she talks of their impending obliteration at the hands of the Persians. Stabbed in the chest by a Babylonian soldier at the bidding of the enraged emperor she is thrown down the well shaft; doing the bidding of Yahweh until her death.

Yes, full marks.

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5. In the "Tell" section of "The Voice of Gomer", Cullinane, Vered, and Eliav discuss and debate one major issue or question. What is this main issue, what position do they each take on this issue, which view do you agree with, and why? Develop your answer in detail. To support your opinion, please find and use at least two recent books and/or articles on this topic.

Cullinane, the Irish Catholic from Chicago, Eliav, the Jewish Administrator of Tell Makor and Vered, his Israeli fiancé take up the issue of the position of women in Jewish society at the Kibbutz mess hall and continue the discussion sporadically over the tenure of the dig. For two men and a woman of their intellect and achievements the debate is trite and circumscribed by the limitations of their origin and nationalities.

Cullinane, the American scholar finds the women in Israel still suppressed in the latter half of the twentieth century, a full fifteen years after the establishment of the Israeli state, Citing his visits to several synagogues where seating for women is sequestered from that of men (Michener, 343) He thinks it is due to the Jewish religion, which differentiates greatly between men and women and draws on the Talmud and the Torah to substantiate his claims. Quoting extensively from the Talmud where it is said that "Happy is he whose children are male and woe to him whose children are female" (Michener, Pg343") and "talk not overmuch with women, even with one's wife" (Michener, Pg 343), as well as local newspapers which carry reports like "" It is the function of Jewish girls to marry at seventeen and have children as quickly as possible" (Michener, Pg344)

Cullinane concludes that the concept of respect which the Jews have for their women is nothing short of archaic and would fit in nicely in the thirteenth century. (Michener Pg 345) Brushing aside the presence of famous Jewish women in the past as too far back and too far between he has little more than condescension for the appointment of women like Golda Meir in positions of authority. These appear to him to be more a token towards gender equality than a sign of the importance of women in Jewish society. (Michener, Pgs 344 and 346) In fact, he comes up with the rather preposterous suggestion that Christianity overwhelmed Judaism because of its' appeal to women.

The Jewish couple on the other hand is unnecessarily defensive about the issue and present lame justifications for the apparent inferiority of their women. These range from " Our religion reveres them (women)" (Michener, Pg 343) to " we Jews go pleasantly along with little divorce, little prostitution and less neuroticism" (Michener, Pg 345) and " a Jew makes the best husband in the whole world". (Michener, Pg 345) They take pains to explain that Jewish women are not active in the outside world because they are content to be homemakers and strengtheners of the family unit. There is widespread respect for women and as they are content with their lives, religious equality is not central to their needs. (Michener, Pg 343 to 345)

I do not agree in entirety with any of the views expressed and find it difficult to understand how such educated, well-traveled and experienced professionals could take up predictable and stereotyped positions. While

there is some merit in both points of view, they suffer from being too telescoped and mired in history.

We need to go back to the sixties when these conversations take place to understand that it was the decade of free thought and freedom.

The colonized world was throwing off its shackles, Martin Luther King was fighting for black civil rights and the hippie movement had started gaining ground. Israel was an infant state and had been born after one of the greatest massacres of history. The country was preoccupied with its many missions, the development of an affluent state, the establishment of military strength, the defense of its territory in a hostile environment and giving retribution to the perpetrators of the Nazi atrocities. Social issues, while important were to be taken up organically and with time.

In a spirited defense of the Jewish woman Tracy R. Rich, researcher and author states that “ the position of women in halakah (Jewish Law) that dates back to the biblical period is in many ways better than the position of women under American civil law as recently as a century ago” (Judaism 101, the position of women) and that “ Women had the right to buy, sell, and own property, and make their own contracts, rights which women in Western countries (including America) did not have until about 100 years ago.” (Judaism 101, the role of women)

The position of women in most major religions, be it Judaism, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism was secondary and religion had been used as a tool for male supremacy for thousands of years all over the world. Women were

uniformly relegated to the home with lip service being paid to their importance in society.

While it is thus unfair of Cullinane to compare the status of women in Israel, a state in infancy with the status of women, be they Jewish or Christian in mature democracies like the United States Vered is being equally stereotypical when she says that what Jewish girls want most is “ A home, a family, a secure haven” (Michener, Pg 345). She is just reinforcing tradition, “ There is no question that in traditional Judaism, the primary role of a woman is as wife and mother, keeper of the household” (Judaism 101, the role of women) and keeping out the winds of change.

Cullinane thus just expresses a truism when he says that Jewish women will follow their American and Russian counterparts when reform movements hit the country. This is more than borne out by the status of women in Israel today. According to a 2001 report by R. Werczberger, of the Research and Information Center, The Knesset on The Advancement of the Status of Women in Israel (Jewish Virtual Library), women have made astonishing progress in Israel since 1948 in education, income and job opportunities. Even the military has opened all its doors and women are entering politics and civil life in large numbers. The “ initiatives involve a variety of issues: in particular issues of gender, equality at work, violence against women, welfare, health and fertility, and more.” (Werczberger, R, 2001)

The winds of gender equality are now blowing all over the world, of course with greater strength in the free democracies and its' flow is irreversible. In this context, the conversations between Cullinane, Eliav and Vered do seem

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to be archaic and anachronistic in today's Israel and it is surprising that none of them had the foresight to predict the rapid evolution of the Jewish woman. It surely is easier to dig for the past than to predict the future.

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