

Practice Commentaries

This study guide models what a good commentary might look like on the test. You don't have to make all these points. I look for one main point and three or four accurate details. The text in Calibri font is what you will be given on the test. The text in Courier font and underlining indicate an excellent answer. To indicate what you are commenting on you can use underlining (as here), arrows, or numbers. Italics emphasize key terms, which you should use.

Comment on each of the following passages. As appropriate, indicate:

- *Source (and how you know)*
- *Speaker, pronouns, and allusions*
- *Relevant context*
- *Major theme, issue or tendency (evidenced by keywords from the text)*
- *In some cases, it might be interesting to note the other side of the issue, or what position is being argued against.*

1. In those days there appeared in Israel transgressors of the law who seduced many, saying: "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles all around us; since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us." The proposal was agreeable; some from among the people promptly went to the king, and he authorized them to introduce the ordinances of the Gentiles. Thereupon they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to the Gentile custom. They disguised their circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant; they allied themselves with the Gentiles and sold themselves to wrongdoing.

The source is 1 Macc (secular, anti-Gentile)

The transgressors of the law are Jews who broke the Jewish law because they favored *universalism* and *assimilation* to the Gentiles (non-Jews, particularly Seleucid Greeks). They do not want to be separate from the Greek culture and economy. They favor unity, at the expense of their own distinct identity.

The author opposes the assimilation, and promotes maintaining separation from the Gentiles by holding onto the traditional Jewish laws. This is an example of *particularism*, as opposed to universalism.

In those days is the reign of the king, namely Antiochus Epiphanes. He is a bad guy but in this passage didn't really start it.

The gymnasium was controversial for two reasons. It was more of a Greek cultural center (including idolatry) than just a place to exercise. Also, the Greeks exercised naked, which offended some Jews.

The author holds circumcision as an essential marker of Jewish identity. The assimilationists did not want to be different or offensive to the Greeks, who thought circumcision was mutilating the beautiful human body.

This conflict between Jews over universalism/assimilation vs. particularism started the Maccabean revolt.

The "Gentiles custom" is practically synonymous with "wrongdoing" so the audience was probably not Gentile (unlike Josephus).

Since we separated from them may refer to the division of humanity into nations after Noah, or the policy of mandatory divorcing of foreign wives.

The holy covenant is the covenant made by their ancestors with God (who is not mentioned in 1 Macc). The author views a covenant with God and a covenant with Gentiles as incompatible.

2. As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king's order. When Mattathias saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused; he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar. At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he showed his zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did with Zimri, son of Salu.

The source is 1 Macc (promotes Maccabean revolt and Hasmonean priesthood)

He is Mattathias, father of Judah Maccabee. This passage describes him starting the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks and assimilationist Jews.

The king is Antiochus Epiphanes, who ordered that all his subjects should be united in sacrificing to some common gods (*universalism*).

Mattathias kills the Jew who was willing to following the order (perhaps to be unified with the Gentile neighbors, or just to save his life). Mattathias thought it was necessary for Jews not to sacrifice to gods besides Israel's God.

It was debated whether Jews killing other Jews was okay, but this author praises the violent zeal. The author justifies Mattathias' violence by comparing him to the positive biblical figure Phinehas, who also killed a Jew (for sleeping with a non-Jew). In the Bible, God rewarded Phinehas by making him and his descendants *high priest*. Later, Mattathias' descendants will claim the high priesthood even though they were not from the right family. The author implies that they earned the right, not by birth, but by the same violent zeal that earned Phinehas the high priesthood.