

# The Message of 1 Maccabees

by J.K. McKee Virtual Chanukah 2009

Today's broad Messianic community often finds the season of *Chanukah* to be one of great blessing and enjoyment.<sup>1</sup> More than anything else, we get to commemorate the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Greek occupiers of the Land of Israel. We get to honor their courage and sacrifice in standing up for the God of Israel and His Torah, and how they were tenacious in not giving into the pressures of pagan assimilation. *Chanukah* is a season where we get to remember the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the miracle of the *menorah* remaining lit for eight days. We should all find *Chanukah* to be a very special time that teaches us many important spiritual lessons.

The historical record behind the celebration of *Chanukah* is not at all complicated, but it is often inaccessible to many Biblical readers. Why, you may ask? Because it is principally found in the Apocryphal books of 1&2 Maccabees (with associated information found in 3&4 Maccabees). These texts are not considered canonical Scripture by either Judaism or mainline Protestantism, as they form an appendix onto the Greek Septuagint. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy consider the Apocryphal books to be canonical Scripture, and in Anglicanism the Apocryphal books are commonly referred to as deuterocanonical. Most of today's Messianics do not principally use a Bible version (i.e., RSV/NRSV or NEB/REB) that has the Apocrypha included, and unless one is either a trained scholar in Biblical Studies or a budding amateur theologian, many of today's evangelical Christians are unfamiliar with the important role the Apocrypha plays in understanding the world of First Century Judaism.

Not all of you, fortunately, are completely unfamiliar with the Books of the Maccabees. During the season of *Chanukah*, your Messianic congregation or fellowship leader has likely made some reference to these texts. Some of you may have an edition of the *Oxford Annotated Bible*<sup>2</sup> or the *Oxford Study Bible*<sup>3</sup> (or even more recently *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*),<sup>4</sup> ecumenical study Bibles that include the Apocrypha, and you have been able to follow along should you hear teachings from the Books of the Maccabees. Yet even for those of you who have been able to do this, most of our attention during the week of *Chanukah* is only spent addressing 1 Maccabees chs. 1-4, the historical record that deals with the initial occupation of Judea, the defilement of the Temple, the initial zealotry of the Maccabees, and then their liberation of Jerusalem and cleansing of the Temple. Very little attention is given to the wider historical issues, including not only more of the victories of the Maccabean forces, but also how the Jewish nation interacted with the powers present in the Second Century B.C.E. Mediterranean, playing a tenuous role as it vied for its independence among shifting alliances. **I think we can all safely agree that a review of the historical record is in order.**

Most scholars are in agreement that the text known as 1 Maccabees was originally written in Hebrew, as it bears signs of original Semitic syntax and the likely preservation of various idioms, even though what we have today has survived to us in (Alexandrian) Greek translation.<sup>5</sup> If 1 Maccabees is considered to be a legitimate historical work (cf. 16:23-24), then its composition needed to be completed sometime during the early or middle reign of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.), placing it near the end of the Second Century B.C.E. The author of 1 Maccabees is strictly anonymous, with it being thought that he was possibly related to Simon, a brother of Judah Maccabee. In all likelihood, though, the author of 1 Maccabees was probably a second generation admirer of the original Maccabees, and he saw the hand of Providence at work in their distinct human actions in saving the Jewish people. It is suggested by some that 1 Maccabees does show

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been reproduced from the paperback edition of the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*, pp 61-84.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, RSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller, eds., *The Oxford Study Bible*, REB (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, ed & trans., *The Septuagint With Apocrypha* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), Apocrypha pp 139-182; Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 1:1039-1099.

some discontent with the Hasmonean rule present among those of the author's generation, although he certainly respected the Maccabees and believed that the Jewish people could gain great inspiration by knowing about what they accomplished.<sup>6</sup>

The narrator of 1 Maccabees takes us back all the way to the expanse of Alexander the Great across the ancient world in the Fourth Century B.C.E. (1:1-3a). It is said that "When at last the world lay quiet under his sway, his pride knew no limits; he built up an extremely powerful army and ruled over countries, nations, and principedoms, all of which rendered him tribute" (1:3b-4). Alexander dies, and the empire he had built is split up and taken over by four of his generals (1:5-9a), generals who "brought untold miseries on the world" (1:9b). Moving forward to the period of importance, "An offshoot of this stock was that impious man, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus," who apparently had been a prisoner in Rome (1:10). It will be important for you to keep in mind that just how certain royal dynasties in history bore many monarchs named Louis (France), George and Edward (Britain), or Friedrich and Wilhelm (Prussia), so too are the Greek kings of Syria often known by the name Antiochus. The Antiochus we are principally concerned about—who caused the whole series of problems for the Jewish people—is surnamed *Epiphanēs* or "God manifest," and was a very ambitious man who desired to be worshipped as a deity.<sup>7</sup>

While Antiochus Epiphanes is acceding in power, "there emerged in Israel a group of renegade Jews, who inveigled many by saying, 'We should go and make an agreement with the Gentiles round about; nothing but disaster has been our lot since we cut ourselves off from them'" (1:11). These Jews thought it best to become like the pagan nations at large, especially as the Seleucid Greek kingdom was expanding. They built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, removed the mark of circumcision via epispasm,<sup>8</sup> repudiated God's Torah, and intermarried with the heathen (1:12-15).

The original desire of Antiochus Epiphanes was not necessarily to conquer the Jewish people. The narrator describes how "Antiochus determined to become king of Egypt and so rule both kingdoms" (1:16b), taking over where the Greek Ptolemies had been ruling since the time of Alexander. He amasses a great force and is able to pillage Egypt, taking great spoil (1:18-19), and now believing himself to be invisible, he begins his return home by marching with a "a strong force against Israel and Jerusalem" (1:20). Much like previous conquerors before him, Antiochus Epiphanes ransacked the Jerusalem Temple, stealing whatever gold and treasure he could find (1:21-24). As one can imagine, there was great lament and mourning throughout the land (1:25-28).

"Two years later, the king sent a governor to put the towns of Judaea under tribute. When he arrived at Jerusalem with a powerful force his language, though friendly, was full of guile, for once he had gained the city's confidence he launched a sudden and savage attack" (1:29-30a). As bad as the previous theft of Temple treasures had been, the Land of Israel would now be under the complete jurisdiction of Antiochus' kingdom, and even though some flowery language was used to indicate somewhat peaceful intentions—people were killed, women were captured, and livestock seized (1:32). Jerusalem itself was turned into a military fortress (1:33), "garrisoned by impious foreigners and renegades" (1:34)—foreign troops and rebellious Jews. The narrator can only issue a lament similar to Psalm 79 (1:37-40).

Things get even worse for the Jews, thanks to the impetuous Antiochus Epiphanes. "The king issued an edict throughout his empire: his subjects were to become one people and abandon

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<sup>6</sup> This data is briefly summarized from "The Two Books of Maccabees," in R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp 1260-1261.

<sup>7</sup> Antiochus Epiphanes is a different leader than the earlier monarch Antiochus the Great or Antiochus III (ruled 222-187 B.C.E.), who Josephus records was quite beneficent and gracious toward the Jews in Phrygia (*Antiquities of the Jews* 12.148-153).

Consult the Introduction to the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

<sup>8</sup> Epispasm is a procedure by which skin is stretched over the head of a circumcised man's penis, over time effectively nullifying circumcision. Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 7:18: "Was a man called with the marks of circumcision on him? Let him not remove them."

their own customs" (1:41), presumably in a way to honor and ultimately worship him as their leader. *This would begin by adopting Greek religion.* Many of the diverse peoples in Antiochus' realm did this (1:42), "and many in Israel willingly adopted the foreign cult, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath" (1:43). Written orders were sent to Jerusalem and Judea that participating in Temple worship was prohibited (1:44), and so the Temple was purposefully defiled (1:45-46). The great abomination commanded by Antiochus was:

"Pagan altars, idols, and sacred precincts were to be established, swine and other unclean beasts to be offered in sacrifice. The Jews were to leave their sons uncircumcised; they had to make themselves in every way abominable, unclean, and profane, and so forget the way and change all their statutes. The penalty for disobeying the royal decree was death" (1:47-50).

The Jewish people were commanded to completely turn their back on God's Torah and His commandments, defiling themselves with sinful paganism, under the threat of death. Sadly, as this decree went forth in the towns of Judea, "Those of the people who were ready to betray the law all thronged to their side in large numbers. Their wicked conduct throughout the land drove Israel"—here presumably meaning those faithful to God—"into hiding in every possible place of refuge" (1:52-53). The terrible actions committed cause the author to consider this as "the abomination of desolation" (1:54), and he depicts how Torah scrolls were ripped up and burned, and how anyone—including mothers who circumcised their infant sons—were put to death (1:55-61). In spite of these atrocities, "many in Israel found strength to resist...They welcomed death and died rather than defile themselves and profane the holy covenant. Israel lay under a reign of terror" (1:62a, 63-64).

Onto the scene emerges a certain man named Mattithias, a member of a priestly family from Jerusalem who lived in the town of Modin, who also had five sons (2:1-5). He is aghast over the terrible events happening in Jerusalem (2:6-11), expressing how "We see the temple, which is our splendour and glory, laid waste and desecrated by the Gentiles. Why should we go on living?" (2:12-13). He and his sons put on sackcloth and mourn (2:14).

It is not surprising that the enforcement brigade makes its way to Modin, to make sure that the apostasy of worshipping and sacrificing to Greek gods is proceeding (2:15). When many of his countrymen comply, Mattathias stands away (2:16). The Seleucid officers actually promise Mattathias and his sons status as the king's "Friends," and great riches and honor, if as leaders of the community they comply (2:17-18). Mattathias, foaming with righteous indignation, exclaims that he will not give into such demands:

"Though every nation in the king's dominions obeys and forsakes its ancestral worship, though all have chosen to submit to his commands, yet I and my sons and my brothers will follow the covenant made with our forefathers. Heaven forbid we should ever abandon the law and its statutes! We will not obey the king's command, nor will we deviate one step from our way of worship" (2:19-22).

Having declared his loyalty for God and for His Torah, an apostate Jew came forward in compliance with Antiochus' decrees to offer pagan sacrifice (2:23). Mattathias is infuriated and he kills the man (2:24), and then "At the same time he killed the officer sent by the king to enforce sacrifice, and demolished the pagan altar" (2:25). The narrator connects this to the zeal of Phinehas who killed Zimri in the wilderness trek (2:26; cf. Numbers 26:7-8). Mattathias issues a plea that those who are loyal to the Law of God are to follow him, and so he and his sons escape to the hills (2:27-28).

Many Jews faithful to the Torah escaped to the desert with their families, and word makes it back to Jerusalem that there are disobedient people in Antiochus' realm (2:29-31). A group of Jews is mercilessly attacked on the Sabbath, and although they are given a chance to renounce their religion (2:32-33), they viciously refuse to profane the Sabbath (2:34). This group of Jews is mowed down and massacred for not defending themselves on *Shabbat*, up to a thousand people in total (2:35-38). When hearing about their faithfulness, Mattathias and his colleagues certainly grieve. But, they recognize that if they are not willing to defend themselves on the Sabbath, then they will certainly all be wiped out (2:39-41). Hence in Jewish law today, it is

permitted to violate a ritual command to save human life, and military, police, firefighters, and doctors are all permitted to work on *Shabbat*.

Mattathias' paramilitary force grows in numbers and becomes organized, and they begin a unique guerilla campaign throughout the occupied Land of Israel (2:42-44). They turn their energies against rebellious Jews who had forsaken God's Torah and covenant, and they "swept through the country, demolishing the pagan altars and forcibly circumcising all the uncircumcised boys found within the frontiers of Israel" (2:45-46). They did well, standing up for a righteous cause in defense of the Law of God (2:47-48). An aged man, Mattathias prepares to die, and he encourages his sons to continue, by recalling to them the holiness of the Torah and the examples of their forefathers in history (2:49-64). He commissions his son Simon to be a counselor to them, and his son Judah (or Judas as the REB renders it) to be their military commander (2:65-66). He admonishes, "Assemble to your side all who observe the law, and avenge your people's wrongs. Repay the Gentiles in their own coin, and give heed to what the law decrees" (2:67-68). Mattathias dies and is buried in the family tomb at Modin (2:69-70).

The war with the Seleucids begins to heat up as Judah Maccabee comes forward to succeed his father. He is given extreme accolades by the author of 1 Maccabees (3:1-9). The Maccabean force experiences two quick victories. The first is against Apollonius, whose plans Judah is informed about, and who is encountered and killed (3:10-11). Judah Maccabee takes his sword "and for the rest of his life he used it in his campaigns" (3:12). The second occurs when an ambitious Syrian military commander, Seron, believes that he can gain renown by putting down the Jewish rebellion. He guides a large force, reinforced by apostate Jews, to wreak vengeance on the Maccabees (3:13-15). Judah's army is overwhelmed when they see the force, fainting with hunger, but Judah is clear to say how victory does not come from numbers but from Heaven (3:16-19). The cause that they are fighting for is just. Judah issues some inspiring words to his band:

"Our enemies, inflated with insolence and lawlessness, are coming against us; they mean to kill us and our wives and children for the sake of the plunder they will get. But we are fighting for our lives and for our laws and customs, and Heaven will crush them before our eyes; you have no need to be afraid of them" (3:20-22).

Following this, a surprise attack is launched which overwhelms Seron's forces (3:23-24). "Judah and his brothers came to be regarded with fear, and alarm spread among the Gentiles round about. His fame reached the ears of the king, and the story of his battles was told in every nation" (3:25-26). Having had success, King Antiochus is infuriated and prepares to mobilize a massive force to crush this insurrection once and for all (3:27). He opened his treasury and gave a year's pay to his troops, with a command to be prepared to serve as required (3:28).

Ironically enough, the narrator depicts how this invincible king did not have the financial resources to enact his plan immediately. There was disaffection throughout his realm because of the Hellenistic religion he had imposed on everyone (3:29). Furthermore, he lived quite luxuriously (3:30). Antiochus goes off to Persia to collect tribute before his campaign against the Jews can begin (3:31). Lysias, a member of the royal family, is left as overseer until he returns (3:32). He is granted a sizeable military force to try to crush any rebellion in Judea and Jerusalem (3:33-37). Lysias chooses three men: Ptolemaeus, Nicanor, and Gorgias to go into Judea and try to stop the rebellion (3:38-39). A reinforced force of forty-thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry enter into the Promised Land, and the war heats up even more.

Judah Maccabee and his guerilla army hear the news of the new Seleucid force, brought to do nothing more than bring about "the complete destruction of the nation" (3:42). Even though many were distraught, "they said among themselves, 'Let us restore the shattered fortunes of our people; let us fight for our nation and for the holy place'" (3:43), and rather than feel defeated, they redoubled their efforts. Arriving at Mizpah, a Maccabean force fasts, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and they take inspiration from the reading of the Torah (3:46-48). With the priestly garments by their side, and Nazirites who had recently completed their vows, these people cried out to God and asked Him to rectify the situation. They wanted God to urgently intervene so that

the Jewish people and their way of life would not be destroyed (3:49-54). Judah Maccabee organizes his forces (3:55), and in accordance with the Torah those who were exempt from military service were sent home (3:56). The band then moves just south of Emmaus, where they prepare at dawn to fight against the occupying army (3:57-58), believing that it is better to die fighting than look on while the Jewish people were wiped out (3:59).

Gorgias, having a detachment of five thousand men and a thousand special cavalry, plans to launch a surprise attack on Judah's position (4:1-2), but Judah hears of it, and moves his force to attack the Seleucids in Emmaus (4:3-4). When Gorgias reaches Judah's camp, he finds it deserted and believes the Maccabean troops to be running (4:5). When day comes, the Maccabean force of three thousand can be clearly seen, and they did not have all the armaments they needed for the attack (4:6-7). Judah inspires his troops by calling them to remember God's deliverance at the Red Sea (4:8-10), and how "there is One who liberates and saves Israel" (4:11). And so advancing their attack and sounding trumpets (4:12-13), "Judah and his men closed with them, and the Gentiles broke and fled into the plain...The pursuit was pressed as far as Gazara and the lowlands of Idumaea, to Azotus and Jamnia; some three thousand of the enemy were killed that day" (4:14-15).

The pursuit is broken off, and Judah instructs his troops not to take any spoils, as he reminds them that Gorgias' detachment is still out there (4:16-18). At that time a patrol from Gorgias spots them, seeing that those at Emmaus had been routed (4:19-20). "They were panic-stricken as they took in the scene, and when, further, they saw the army of Judah in the plain, ready for action" (4:21). Reporting back of the devastation, Gorgias' taskforce flees to Philistia (4:22), and the Seleucid camp at Emmaus is plundered (4:23-25). "Those of the Gentiles who escaped with their lives went to Lysias and reported all that had happened. He was stunned at the news, bitterly disappointed that matters with Israel had not gone as he had intended; they had turned out very differently from the king's instructions to him" (4:26-27).

"The following year Lysias mustered sixty thousand picked infantry and five thousand cavalry to bring the war with the Jews to an end" (4:28). The narrator describes how marching into Idumea, Judah's forces numbered ten thousand (4:29), and he prayed to the Lord as Savior of Israel, praying that his Jewish force would defeat the Seleucid army just as David had defeated the Philistines (4:30). He specifically prays, "let this army be hemmed in by the power of your people Israel, and let the enemy's pride in their troops and mounted men be humbled; so fill them with cowardice, make their insolent strength melt away, let them reel under a crushing defeat; may they fall by the sword of those who love you. And let all who know your name praise you with songs of thanksgiving" (4:31-33). About five thousand of Lysias' soldiers are lost in hand-to-hand combat (4:34), and he was forced to withdraw to Antioch, procuring the services of mercenaries, by which he could return to Judea with a much greater army (4:35).

Seeing that Lysias has retreated, Judah and his brothers see a great opportunity. They say to themselves, "Now that our enemies have been crushed, let us go up to cleanse and rededicate the temple" (4:36). The Maccabean force goes up to Mount Zion, they see how Antiochus' forces had utterly ruined the Temple and altar, and they lamented loudly before the Lord (4:37-40). The citadel garrison of Seleucids guarding Jerusalem is engaged, and select priests who were loyal to the Torah began the process of cleaning up the defilements in the Temple complex (4:41-43). The altar that had been defiled by unclean and unfit animals is demolished, and they took unhewn stones and built a new altar (4:44-47). The Temple was repaired, and all new consecrated vessels were made (4:48-49). New burnt offerings and incense could be presented before God, and "When they had set the Bread of the Presence on the table and spread out the curtains, their work was completed" (4:50-51).

On the 25th of Kislev, "sacrifice was offered, as laid down by the law, on the newly constructed altar of whole-offerings. On the anniversary of the day of its desecration by the Gentiles, on that very day it was dedicated with hymns of thanksgiving, to the music of harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people prostrated themselves in worship and gave praise to Heaven for prospering their cause" (4:52-55). The rededication ceremony for the Temple and altar lasted for a total of eight days, as proper and clean sacrifices and offerings were made (4:56-57). "At the lifting

of the disgrace brought on them by the Gentiles there was very great rejoicing among the people” (4:58). So significant was the celebration of rededicating the Temple, after freeing Jerusalem from Seleucid occupation, that Judah Maccabee and his brothers, “and the whole congregation of Israel decreed that, at the same season each year, the dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning on the twenty-fifth of Kislev” (4:59).

**It is at this point that most Messianics commemorating *Chanukah* and reading 1 Maccabees stop.** But this is no fairy tale where all things have ended happily ever after. It is obvious that the fight against Antiochus Epiphanes and the Seleucid Greeks is by no means over. The only reason Jerusalem was captured is because Lysias had retreated to restore his army back to full strength. 1 Maccabees still has the end of ch. 4, and chs. 5-16 to go—which give us a fuller picture of how important this period is to Jewish history.

Judah Maccabee knows that the enemy is going to return, and so he has Mount Zion and Bethsura fortified (4:60-61). “The Gentiles round about were greatly incensed when they heard of the building of the altar and rededication of the temple. Determined to wipe out all of Jacob’s race living among them, they set about the work of massacre and extermination” (5:1-2). Knowing that the threat against his people is not only from the outside Seleucid Greeks, but also from the immediate neighbors who had sided with them, the Maccabean force needed to demonstrate that they were serious about being independent. A military campaign begins against those who had threatened the Jews, including the descendents of Esau in Idumea, the Baenites, Ammonites, and the town of Jazer (5:3-8).

A significant conflict begins to brew, as “The Gentiles in Gilead gathered against the Israelites within their territory, intent on destroying them” (5:9a). A group of Jews seeks refuge in a fortress at Dathema, sending a letter to Judah for his immediate help (5:9b-13). Receiving the letter, word from Galilee reaches Judah that a force is being amassed in the north from Ptolemais, Tyre, and Sidon (5:14), along with “all heathen Galilee” (5:15).

With one force amassing to the east, and another to the north, Judah has the Maccabean army divide in two. His brother Simon will take a contingent to repel those in the north, whereas Judah and his brother Jonathan will take a contingent to the east (5:17-18). Those left behind in reserve are to only defend Judea, and not engage the enemy while they were away (5:19). Both Simon’s and Judah’s taskforces were of eight thousand men each (5:20).

Simon is able to successfully invade Galilee, breaking the Gentile resistance, and his force kills nearly three thousand. The Jews from Galilee and Arabata are rescued, and they are taken to safety in Judea (5:21-23). Judah and Jonathan’s force crosses over the Jordan River east, and they confront friendly Nabateans, who recount to them what happened to the Jews in Gilead (5:24-25), as they are being held hostage in nearby towns and villages (5:26). They are told “Your enemies...are marshalling their forces to storm your strongholds tomorrow so as to capture them and destroy all the Jews in them in a single day” (5:27). What begins is a steadily quick liberation of each town that had a significant number of Jews, including: Dathema, Alema, Casphor, Maked, and Bezer (5:28-36). Judah Maccabee’s rallying cry was “Fight this day for our brothers!” (5:32), and the reaction of the forces of Timotheus was fear and fleeing at seeing the Maccabean soldiers (5:34).

Timotheus gathers another force, this time opposite Raphon, and sending spies into the camp Judah is told, “all the Gentiles in the neighbourhood had rallied in very great strength to Timotheus, who had hired the help of Arab mercenaries” (5:38-39). With the Maccabean detachment approaching the wadi that separated them, Timotheus observes that if they were to cross over to the other side, his force would not be able to succeed (5:40). But, if Judah were to cower, and they were to move ahead first, then they might have a chance at making them suffer (5:41). But Judah does not do this. He steadily moves his force toward the wadi, with orders that no one was to take a fixed position (5:42). The Maccabean force moves to the head of the enemy army, and it is said that “one and all they threw away their weapons and sought refuge in the temple at Carnaim” (5:43). Judah has the temple burned, and “With the overthrow of Carnaim, all resistance came to an end” (5:44).

With a contingent of Jews liberated, Judah Maccabee proceeds to lead them back to safety in Judea (5:45). They encounter a large and fortified town, Ephron, which was impossible to bypass (5:46), and fortified by the inhabitants (5:47). Peaceful overtures are made, but it was necessary for the Maccabean force to invade and kill the male inhabitants, razing the town, as it was obviously hostile to the Jews (5:48-51). When the group finally arrives in Judea, “With gladness and jubilation they went up to Mount Zion and offered whole-offerings, because they had returned in safety and without loss” (5:54).

The fact that Judah Maccabee and his brothers had the knowledge how to fight and win is indicated by the author. Azarias and Josephus were two Jewish commanders who heard the exploits of Judah and Jonathan, and thought that they could gain some fame by routing the Gentile forces (5:55-57). They took the forces they commanded to advance on Jamnia, but were defeated by Gorgias, losing some two thousand men (5:58-60). The narrator describes, “The people suffered this heavy defeat because those in command of them, thinking to play the hero themselves, had not obeyed Judas and his brothers” (5:61). Specifically it is said, “Those men were not...of that family whose prerogative it was to bring deliverance to Israel” (5:62). **Those with dishonorable intentions to fight would not be met with success.** Judah and his brothers, however, gain a great reputation because of their just cause (5:63-64).

Judah’s force continues to secure the safety of the Jews, as Gentile strongholds in the territory of Esau to the south, Hebron, Philistia, and Azotus are neutralized (5:65-67). We see how “he pulled down their altars and burnt the images of their gods; he carried off spoil from the towns” (5:68), not unlike how figures like David had centuries earlier. And during these conflicts we see “Several priests who, from a desire to distinguish themselves, had ill-advisedly gone into action, fell in the battle” (5:67). Once again, this is a reminder that those who fight to promote themselves will not succeed—especially as war and killing are not to be things that one would wish for.

While the Maccabees are purging the region of threats against the Jewish people, King Antiochus is off in Persia, the city of Elymais to be exact, collecting treasure (6:1-2). He is unsuccessful in capturing Elymais, and must withdraw to Babylon (6:3-4). Overseeing his campaign in Persia, word reaches him that Lysias has suffered defeat and has retreated, with the Jewish army gaining considerable strength and experiencing more victories (6:5-6). The narrator records how “they had pulled down the abomination built by him on the altar in Jerusalem and surrounded their temple with high walls as before” (6:7). Antiochus Epiphanes is dismayed about what has happened, and retires to his bed “ill with grief at the miscarriage of his plans” (6:8).

The scene of Antiochus—who having thought himself invincible, seems to be having no victory—is that “he lay for many days, overcome again and again by bitter grief, and he realized that he was dying” (6:9). He calls to himself the order of Friends, and asks them why he is bereft with pain and hardship (6:10-11). He testifies that he did wrong to Jerusalem in stealing the Temple treasures (6:12). He says, “I know why these misfortunes have come upon me; and here I am, dying of bitter grief in a foreign land” (6:13). Only having been to Jerusalem once, and having decreed an abomination in the Holy Place, he acknowledges this mistake as the cause of his downfall. Before dying King Antiochus appoints his friend Philip as regent over his empire, and asks him to raise his son Antiochus (6:14-15). He dies in the field a humiliated man (6:16).

Yet even while it may be tempting for us to close 1 Maccabees, as Antiochus Epiphanes is now dead—the conflict is still not over. “[T]he garrison of the citadel was confining the Israelites to the neighbourhood of the temple, and, by harassing tactics, giving continual support to the Gentiles” (6:18). Even though the Maccabees were having military successes, they had only established a stronghold in the Temple area, and among pockets of Jews throughout the region. There were still threats from all around that had to be dealt with—especially this citadel. “Judas determined to make an end of them; he gathered all the people to lay siege to the citadel” (6:19).

The reason things are not over is fairly clear: “some of the beleaguered garrison escaped and were joined by a number of apostate Israelites. They went to the king and complained: ‘How long must we wait for you to support our cause and avenge our comrades?’” (6:21). They express

pleasure in having followed the sinful dictates of Antiochus Epiphanes (6:22-23), and actually claim: “what was the result? Our own countrymen turned against us; indeed they put to death as many of us as they could lay hold of, and they robbed us of our property” (6:24). Other peoples were attacked by the Maccabees as well, and these rebellious Jews report on how Jerusalem and the Temple have been fortified (6:25-26). Lysias, the regent, is told, “Unless your majesty quickly takes the initiative against them they will go yet to greater lengths. There will be no stopping them!” (6:27).

Lysias “became furious as he listened” (6:28), and so he assembles his confidants in the order of Friends, his military officials, and various mercenaries from neighboring kingdoms (6:29). So incensed is he at the rebellion in Judea, “His forces numbered one hundred thousand infantry, twenty thousand cavalry, and thirty-two war elephants” (6:30). Moving in, Bethsura is laid siege (6:31), and Judah’s force moves forward to a position at Bethzacharia (6:32). Marching into battle against the Jews, the narrator recounts how a war elephant was stationed with a company of a thousand men, and how five hundred horsemen were also stationed with each war elephant (6:34-36). It was an impressive sight, as each beast was guided by an Indian driver (6:37-39). Marching forward, “trembling seized all who heard the din and clash of arms of this multitude on the march, for it was indeed a very great and powerful force” (6:41).

As the battle begins, Judah’s army is able to take down six hundred of the king’s men (6:42). A certain soldier, Eleazar Avaran, saw royal armor on one of the elephants. Believing that he could gain fame should the king be riding it, he ran underneath the elephant, killing it, but he was crushed under its massive corpse (6:43-46). The Jewish forces had to give up some ground to the Seleucid army. Lysias’ deploys a contingent that camped itself against Judea and Mount Zion (6:47-48), occupying Bethsura (6:49-50).

Having a garrison at Bethsura, Lysias begins a siege of the Temple. **So, as important as the rededication of the Temple was—the conflict involving the Temple is not yet over.** He “set up emplacements and siege-engines, with flamethrowers, catapults for discharging stones and barbed missiles, and slings” (6:51). The Temple defenders put up massive resistance, but since there had just been a sabbatical year there were insufficient foodstuffs to last very long (6:52-54). But just as it appears that the Temple is going to be desecrated again, Lysias hears some important news. Philip, the newly appointed regent and guardian of Antiochus’ son, had returned home from Persia “and was seeking to take over the government” (6:56). Lysias’ engagement with the Jews has to come to a quick end. “Hastily he gave orders for departure, saying...Every day we grow weaker, our provisions are running low, the place we are besieging is strong, and the affairs of the empire are pressing” (6:57). Take important notice of what Lysias plans to say to the Maccabees:

“Let us now offer these men terms, and make peace with them and with their whole nation. Let us guarantee them the right to follow their laws and customs as they used to do, for it was our abolition of these laws and customs that roused their resentment and led to all the troubles” (6:58-59).

Lysias receives the approval of his military commanders, and “an offer of peace was sent and accepted” (6:60). Even more important, “The king and his commanders bound themselves by oath, and on the terms agreed the defenders emerged from their stronghold” (6:61). Yet, even when Lysias recognizes that Antiochus’ foolishness in wanting the Jews to abandon the Torah and follow Greek religion is the cause of all this, “when the king entered Mount Zion and saw how strongly the place was fortified, he went back on his oath, and ordered the demolition of the surrounding wall” (6:62). Conflict started again, even though “with all speed he departed for Antioch, where he found Philip in possession” (6:63).

The internal intrigue in the Seleucid kingdom gets more complicated. Demetrius, son of Seleucus, had been a captive in Rome, and finally makes his way back to the royal palace (7:1). Being the nephew of Antiochus Epiphanes, he believes he can take the throne, and so the army arrests the young Antiochus and opportunistic Lysias (7:2). Demetrius has them both put to death, and assumes control of the Seleucid kingdom (7:3-4). The apostate Jews who followed Antiochus Epiphanes, led by an Alcimus who wanted to be high priest, appeal to Demetrius for help (7:5-7).

A man is chosen, one of the order of king's Friends named Bacchides, to wreak havoc on those living in Israel (7:8-9). Bacchides marches with a large force on Judea, but Judah Maccabee is able to see through his false offers of peace (7:10-11).

A group of Hasideans makes overtures of peace and friendship to Bacchides, who while in word is conciliatory, uses their trust to eliminate them (7:12-18). Encamped at Bethzaith, those who deserted to him were even slaughtered (7:19-20), all because of how "Alcimus put up a strong fight for his high-priesthood" (7:21), rallying Jews who would be politically loyal to the Seleucid Greeks (7:22). The narrator of 1 Maccabees, in spite of some of the issues present in his later generation, is no fan of Judea being a dependent state. "When Judas saw the extent of the havoc which Alcimus and his followers had wrought among the Israelites, far worse than anything done by the Gentiles, he went throughout the territory of Judaea and its environs, punishing deserters and debarring them from access to the country districts" (7:23-24). Alcimus was unable to easily fight Judah's demanding that the Jews be loyal to Israel, and returns to Demetrius (7:25).

Nicanor, a distinguished military commander and one who fiercely hated the Jews, is dispatched "with orders to wipe out that people" (7:26). He "arrived at Jerusalem with a large force and sent envoys to Judas and his brothers with false offers of friendship" (7:27). Nicanor greets Judah with some comradeship, but has secret plans to kidnap him (7:29). As Judah realizes what is happening, they do not meet again (7:30). His plot detected, their two armies engage near Capharsalama, with about five hundred of Nicanor's men killed (7:31-32).

The delicate nature of the Jewish independence that the Maccabees secured is seen in how Nicanor later goes up to Mount Zion, and some priests and Jewish leaders show him how they are offering up a sacrifice in the Temple for the Seleucid king (7:33-33). Nicanor does not take it seriously, demanding that Judah Maccabee and his force be turned over to them on the threat of burning down the Temple (7:34-35). The priests can do nothing more than pray to God: "take vengeance on this man and his army, and let them perish by the sword. Let their blasphemy not be forgotten; grant them no reprieve" (7:38).

Nicanor moves his army away from Jerusalem and makes camp at Beth-horon, being joined by reinforcements from Syria (7:39). Judah has a force of three thousand at Adasa, and appeals for God to intervene in the same way as He defeated Sennacherib's forces that once besieged Jerusalem (7:40-42; cf. 2 Kings 19:35). The narrator records how a battle took place on the 13th of Adar, with not only Nicanor suffering great defeat, but how he was the first to fall (7:43). "Seeing Nicanor fall, his men threw away their arms and fled" (7:44). Judah pursues them to Gazara, enlisting the support of Judean villages as his army moves forward (7:45). They attacked "the fugitives on the flanks, forced them back upon their pursuers, so that they all fell by the sword; not one of them survived" (7:46). A great spoil is taken, and Nicanor's head and right hand are taken to Jerusalem to be displayed (7:47). So great was the victory, an annual feast of Nicanor was established to be commemorated on the 13th of Adar (7:48-49),<sup>9</sup> as his defeat had inaugurated a significant time of peace (7:50).

There are certainly more military battles and conflicts to be considered in 1 Maccabees chs. 8-16, **but we now get a distinct view at how the rising independent Jewish state, led by the Maccabees, interacted among the political powers of the Mediterranean.**

Of great interest to the narrator is the fame that Judah Maccabee had heard of a steadily rising power called the Romans, who had mustered great victories in subduing the Gauls, conquering Spain, and in defeating any of the Greeks who had tried to fight them (8:1-11). These Romans offered faithful friendship to those who desired their protection, and their Senate is praised as a model for order and discipline (8:12-16). Judah Maccabee sends two representatives, Eupolemus son of John, and Jason son of Eleazar, to Rome to conclude an offer of friendship and alliance (8:17-19). They appear before the Roman Senate, and a letter is sent back to Jerusalem on a bronze tablet (8:20-22). The treaty that is concluded includes stipulations that Rome will come to the defense of the Jewish nation should it be attacked, assuming that the Jews do not aid

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<sup>9</sup> This stopped being commemorated after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

Rome's enemies with any supplies or war materiel (8:23-30). Furthermore, the Romans send a communication to King Demetrius, asking him why he has been attacking the Jews. With this is a threat that if they continue, they will have to face hostilities with Rome (8:31-32).

News of Nicanor's defeat had reached King Demetrius, and so he sends Bacchides and Alcimus a second time to Judea (9:1). They are successful at laying siege to Messaloth in Arbela (9:2), and they make their way further to make camp at Jerusalem, and from there march to Berea with twenty-two thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry (9:3-4). Judah was camped at Alasa with only three thousand elite troops, and then seeing the size of the enemy many desert and he is left with only eight hundred (9:5-6). With a fraction of his original force, Judah recognizes this as the time to strike, even if they must all die for their fellow countrymen (9:7-10). The fighting begins with great trumpets sounding all through the night (9:11-14), until Bacchides' right flank is able to be taken and they are pursued as far as Mount Azotus<sup>10</sup> (9:15). "The fighting became very heavy, and many fell on both sides" (9:17). Among the fallen was Judah Maccabee himself, as the Jewish force had to finally disperse (9:18). His body was taken by his brothers Jonathan and Simon to the family tomb at Modin (9:19-20), and he is considered a champion of Israel similar to the Ancient Israelite kings (9:21; cf. 1 Kings 11:41). The narrator describes how his record of Judah's exploits and achievements were too many to be recorded (9:22).

It was only to be expected that when Judah died, "the renegades in every part of Israel emerged from hiding, and all the evildoers reappeared" (9:23). Popular opinion among the Jews shifted away from being loyal to God's covenant and Torah (9:24), and the Seleucid leader Bacchides is able to exercise considerable political sway (9:25), with his forces able to reclaim Jerusalem and parts of Judea. Those who were loyal to Judah Maccabee and his close associates were hunted down (9:26). "It was a time of harsh oppression for Israel, worse than any since the days when prophets ceased to appear among them" (9:27). Having to reconsider what is going on, Judah Maccabee's friends choose his brother Jonathan as his successor, to command them in battle (9:28-31).

Word gets back to Bacchides that Jonathan has been chosen as the new Maccabean leader, and so he and his brother Simon must flee to the wilderness of Tekoa (9:32-33). Bacchides and his force pursue them on the Sabbath, crossing over the Jordan. Jonathan's supplies are stolen by the Nabataens, and the Jambrates kidnap Jonathan's brother John (9:34-36), killing him (9:38). During a wedding of one of their important leaders, at Nadabath, Jonathan and his remaining brothers ambush them and avenge John, cutting many of them down and taking spoil (9:39-42). Bacchides, hearing of this, continues his pursuit, and Jonathan says that the Maccabean force is in its worst plight ever (9:43-44). They cry out to Heaven, striking Bacchides' force and killing about a thousand. They eventually make their way swimming across the Jordan River, but Bacchides does not pursue (9:45-49).

Bacchides returns to his base in Jerusalem, and fortifies a number of places in Judea: Jericho, Emmaus, Beth-horon, Bethel, Timnath-pharathon, and Tephon (9:50), strengthening his hold on Bethsura and Gazara. He has intentions of harassing the Jews, and taking some of the leading citizens away in prison (9:52). His Jewish conspirator who desired the high priesthood, Alcimus, actually "gave orders for the wall of inner court of the temple to be demolished, thereby destroying the work of the prophets" (9:54). He starts to do this, but then suffers a stroke and is paralyzed from speaking, dying in great agony (9:55). Bacchides, able to subdue Judea, returns back to his king, with no major crisis ensuing for them for about two years (9:56-57). The remaining Maccabees, while not pursued, are able to return to some kind of normalcy as they try to reconsider what is to be done next.

The apostate Jews recognize that Jonathan and his band are still out there, living in some kind of peace. They propose to bring back Bacchides so that the Maccabees and all of their supporters can be seized and routed (9:58-59). Bacchides arrives back in Judea with a large force, but word gets out of the plan, and some fifty ringleaders of those who started this are killed (9:60-

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<sup>10</sup> This may be a scribal error for Mount Hazor.

61). Jonathan and Simon withdraw their forces to Bethbasi in the desert, and fortified a former stronghold (9:62). Bacchides takes his army to Bethbasi, besieging it (9:63-64). During the fight, Jonathan leaves Simon in charge of the town, and takes a contingent away to attack Bacchides' allies at Odomera, then returning toward Bethbasi (9:65-67). Incensed that his assault on the Maccabees did not succeed, Bacchides is furious at the frustrations of his apostate Jewish allies, and has many of them executed before returning home in defeat (9:68-69).

Bacchides recognizes that trying to subdue Judea is a futile endeavor, and so Jonathan is able to secure terms of peace with him (9:70). "Bacchides agreed and accepted Jonathan's proposals, swearing to him that as long as he lived he would harm him no more" (9:71). The Jewish prisoners of war he had taken are released, and Bacchides returns to his own country "never again to set foot on Jewish soil" (9:72). The narrator records how, "So the war in Israel came to an end. Taking up residence in Michmash, Jonathan began to govern the people and root the apostates out of Israel" (9:73).

**Although it may be tempting to stop reading 1 Maccabees, with the significant defensive conflict over, the work of building an independent Jewish state, reconstructing what was lost, now begins.** *The hope would be short lived.* Alexander Epiphanes, claiming to be the son of Antiochus Epiphanes, arrives in Ptolemais, being welcomed and proclaimed king (10:1). Hearing this, the recognized King Demetrius raises a large army to march against him (10:2). He sends a friendly and flattering letter to Jonathan, believing that by making peace with the Jews they will forget past conflicts and not support Alexander (10:3-5). Demetrius conveys upon Jonathan the title of ally, and encourages him to build up an army (10:6). Reading this letter to those of the citadel in Jerusalem, the people are naturally apprehensive (10:7-8).

Knowing that Demetrius will not move against them, Jonathan moves to Jerusalem and orders that the city be renovated and that the walls surrounding Mount Zion be fortified (10:10-11). Any remaining foreigners from the time Bacchides plagued the Jews flee, except a few apostate Jews in Bethsura (10:12-14). The pretender King Alexander hears what Jonathan is doing, and what the Maccabees had endured (10:15), asking "Where shall we ever find another man like this? Let us make him our Friend and ally at once" (10:16). Alexander sends a flattering letter to Jonathan, informing him that he has been appointed as one in the order of the king's Friends (10:17-20). He sends him a purple robe and gold crown, representing the authority of the priesthood (10:20). Jonathan is able to amass an army, and stockpile a quantity of weapons (10:21).

"Demetrius was mortified at the news," saying "How did we come to let Alexander forestall us in gaining the friendship and support of the Jews?" (10:22, 23). The former enemy of the Seleucid Greeks is now being courted by two rival leaders to be an ally (10:24-25). King Demetrius sends a long letter to Jonathan, promising things that his predecessors would not have even dreamed of. Demetrius says that the Jews have remained his faithful friends (10:26-28), he will not demand any tribute or certain taxes on them (10:29-30), the territory surrounding Jerusalem will be recognized as holy (10:31), he will not claim the citadel of Jerusalem as his own (10:32), any remaining Jewish prisoners of war will be immediately released (10:33), and all Jews living within his kingdom will be free to celebrate their holidays and sacred seasons (10:34-35). Up to thirty thousand of the king's soldiers will be Jewish, made up in special Jewish units with Jewish commanders, being given the same pay and privileges as the rest of the army (10:36-37). The high priest will be given control over Judea and surrounding territory annexed from Samaria (10:38). Demetrius also promises to give funds to pay the priesthood, and to also fund the continued refurbishment of the Temple in Jerusalem (10:39-45).

Perhaps due to the overly-beneficent nature of Demetrius' proposals, neither Jonathan nor the Jews put any faith in them, remembering their long history of conflict (10:46). "They favoured Alexander, because he had been the first to make overtures of peace, and they remained his allies to the end" (10:47). When Alexander and Demetrius finally engaged in battle, Demetrius' forces overwhelmed Alexander's, but Demetrius was killed in the fighting (10:48-50). This vacuum in power made Alexander the new leader, who then desires to patch things up with the Greek Ptolemies of Egypt, becoming the son-in-law of the king (10:51-54). King Ptolemy agrees to his

request, desiring to meet with him at Ptolemais where Alexander's marriage with Cleopatra<sup>u</sup> is held (10:55-58).

While at Ptolemais, King Alexander extends his courtesies to Jonathan to meet with him in person (10:59). Jonathan agrees, and brings with him gifts of silver and gold for both Alexander, Ptolemy, and members of the king's Friends (10:60). While there were various apostate Jews who wished to bring accusations against Jonathan, Alexander would not hear of them (10:61). Instead, he sees that Jonathan is dressed in purple and sat next to him, with no more word of any complaints against the Jewish leader (10:62-64). Jonathan is made a member of the king's Friends, and appointed as a governor of Judea and ally of Alexander (10:65-66).

Three years later, the late King Demetrius' son, Demetrius, arrives from Crete and begins a campaign to retake his father's throne (10:67-68). The Jews are targeted as being the one group opposed to him, and Demetrius' military commander, Apollonius, challenges them to come and fight in battle should they dare have the courage (10:69-73). Jonathan leaves Jerusalem with ten thousand picked men, joined by his brother Simon with reinforcements (10:74). He began to lay siege to Joppa where Apollonius had staged a garrison, but then the people, being frightened, turned the city over to Jonathan's forces (10:75-76). Jonathan and Apollonius engage their armies at Azotus, with Simon's forces coming to assist (10:77-82). Apollonius' infantry seeks refuge in the temple of Dagon, and Jonathan has Azotus burned and a great spoil taken (10:83-84). A total of eight thousand are killed (10:85). Moving back to Jerusalem, he camps at Ascalon, where the citizens greet him (10:86-87). Hearing of the victory, King Alexander sends him a special gold clasp, and gives him Accaron and its surrounding region as a personal gift (10:88-89).

If the conflict within the Seleucid kingdom could not get any more complicated, Ptolemy sees an opportunity for his Egyptian kingdom to invade and claim it for itself (11:1-2). He is welcomed in each of their towns, as he was the father-in-law of Alexander, leaving a garrison in each town (11:3). He sees the Maccabean victory over Azotus, and confers with Jonathan at Joppa (11:4-6). King Ptolemy assumes control over various coastal towns, scheming how he might overtake Alexander (11:7-8). As a part of his plan, Ptolemy writes a letter to the new King Demetrius, promising him his daughter who is King Alexander's current wife (11:9). He regrets consenting to the marriage, and causing a schism when she marries Demetrius (11:10-12). Ptolemy is now able to claim the crown of Asia as his own (11:13). Alexander is forced to flee to Arabia, but is killed by an Arab chieftain (11:14-16). His head is sent to King Ptolemy, but shortly thereafter Ptolemy dies and King Demetrius once again controls his realm (11:17-19).

As this is happening, apostate Jews had once again claimed the citadel in Jerusalem, and so Jonathan must see that it is liberated (11:20). This news infuriates King Demetrius (11:21), who moves himself down to Ptolemais for a conference with Jonathan (11:22). They meet, and Jonathan brings with him various presents for Demetrius (11:23-24). King Demetrius does not hear the complaints lodged against Jonathan, and honors him as a member of the order of king's Friends (11:25-26), recognizing him as the high priest (11:27). Jonathan requests that Judea and the three Samaritan districts be exempted from tribute (11:28), and King Demetrius agrees (11:29-37).

A short period of quiet comes to King Demetrius' country, and so he decides to disband the army, with the exception of some foreign mercenaries (11:38). This proves to be disastrous, as those who had served him become disaffectionate, giving rise to Trypho, a former follower of King Alexander. He goes to the Arab who had been watching over Alexander's son, Antiochus, and uses him to raise unpopularity for Demetrius with the troops (11:39-40). While this is happening, Jonathan asks King Demetrius to remove his troops from Jerusalem, and he agrees (11:41). Demetrius actually asks Jonathan to send him a detachment of soldiers to Antioch (11:42). This Jonathan does.

In Antioch a revolt is stirred up against King Demetrius, who is barricaded in the royal palace. The Jewish troops are deployed, saving him, and many of the rebels are killed (11:44-48). The people of Antioch, seeing what the Jews have done in defending the king, plead for him to

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<sup>u</sup> Cleopatra is another dynastic name for female members of the Ptolemaic royal family. The most famous Cleopatra (69-30 B.C.E.) would become a lover of both the Romans Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

stop the onslaught (11:49-50). While the Jewish contingent returns to Jerusalem with fame and booty, after things return to normal King Demetrius estranges himself from Jonathan (11:51-53).

The situation works well for Trypho, as the pretender Antiochus is crowned king, and King Demetrius must flee Antioch as Trypho takes over the city (11:54-56). The new, young King Antiochus recognizes Jonathan as high priest of Jerusalem, sending to him gifts, and giving his brother Simon authority over territory along the seacoast of Israel to the Egyptian border (11:57-59). Jonathan tours the territory that he commands, having to plunder Gaza until its people sue for peace, and moving north toward Damascus (11:60-62). Moving toward Kedesh-in-Galilee, Jonathan hears that some officers from the deposed King Demetrius had arrived there with a force, to deter him (11:63). Jonathan takes an army to meet them, with his brother Simon blockading and attacking Bethsura (11:65). Simon expels the inhabitants of the town and occupies it (11:66). Jonathan successfully engages the enemy at Hazor, even though many of his men panicked (11:67-74).

The complicated political situation and shifting of alliances in the region make it obvious that if the Jewish nation were to have any major partner that would not (immediately) turn on them, such a partner would need to be someone other than the Seleucid Greeks (Syria) or Ptolemaic Greeks (Egypt). "Jonathan considered that the time was now opportune to select representatives and dispatch them on a mission to Rome to confirm and renew the treaty of friendship with that city. He also sent a letter to the same effect to Sparta and elsewhere" (12:1-2). The Romans afford the Jews the proper courtesies (12:3-4).

The narrator then finds it important to include the text of the letter sent by Jonathan to the Spartans. In this letter is included a reference "to our brothers of Sparta" (12:6), and included in it a reference to a previous communication about a century-and-a-half earlier between Onias the high priest and Sparta's King Arius (12:7-8). The Jews wish to renew their ties (12:10), and note that "We never neglect any opportunity, on festal and other appropriate days, of making mention of you at our sacrifices and in our prayers, as it is right and proper to remember kinsmen; and we rejoice at your fame" (12:11-12). Various commentators feel that these are literary devices of a "diplomatic fiction of a common ancestry,"<sup>12</sup> only designed to flatter the Spartans. The letter acknowledges that the Jewish people "have been under the constant pressure of attacks on every side, as the surrounding kings have made war upon us" (12:13). They have chosen not to appeal to the Spartans for help, until now (12:14, 18).

The narrator of 1 Maccabees also finds it necessary to include a copy of the original letter that the high priest Onias had sent to Arius of Sparta (12:19-20). This letter attested, "A document has come to light which shows that Spartans and Jews are kinsmen, both being descended from Abraham.<sup>13</sup> Now that we have learnt of this, we beg you to write and tell us how your affairs prosper" (12:21-22), extending great courtesies to the Spartans (12:23). Many interpreters of 1 Maccabees are inclined to think that this letter was not genuine. Yet even if it were not originally sent to Sparta, and is only some kind of an add-on to the letters of Jonathan, R.K. Harrison notes how it "may conceivably have been of Jewish origin."<sup>14</sup> The author of 1 Maccabees, or a later editor, included this letter—whether originally sent or not—and by doing so reflected a view that the Ancient Spartans were descended from Abraham, and perhaps even included people from the scattered Northern Kingdom. What would have been the rhetorical effect for including this in the text? What would it have communicated to Jewish readers of 1 Maccabees?

The narrator moves us back to the conflict taking place. Demetrius' forces come back to attack Jonathan's forces again, this time with a much larger army (12:24). Jonathan is determined that Demetrius will not set foot on Jewish soil, and sends out spies to survey for a night assault (12:25-26). The enemy withdraws upon hearing that Jonathan's army is ready to attack them at night (12:27-28). The enemy flees leaving their fires lit (12:29), and although Jonathan orders a pursuit, they are unable to be overtaken (12:30). Jonathan instead orders his force to rout some

<sup>12</sup> Neil J. McEleney, "The First Book of the Maccabees," in *The Oxford Study Bible*, 1224.

<sup>13</sup> Grk. *en graphē peri te tōn Spartiatōn kai Ioudaiōn hoti eisin adelphoi kai hoti eisin ek genous Abraam.*

<sup>14</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1262.

Zabadaean Arabs, moving toward Damascus (12:31-32). Upon returning to Jerusalem, Jonathan summons his council and efforts are made to repair the walls of Jerusalem, and build various fortresses throughout Judea (12:33-38).

With Demetrius' forces engaging in conflict in Judea, Trypho now plans to assume control of Asia, and usurp the King Antiochus he had helped to install (12:39). He fears that Jonathan will be a major deterrent to his plans, and so he plots to have him captured and killed (12:40). Jonathan moves a force of forty-thousand to Beth-shan, and Trypho is reluctant to attack (12:41-42). Jonathan is instead received by Trypho with full honors, and is given great gifts (12:43). Trypho asks him why he has moved his army forward, because they are not at war. Jonathan is asked to not only send his army home, but to accompany Trypho to Ptolemais where it will be given to Jonathan along with a great number of troops (12:44-45). Jonathan believes the word of Trypho, leaving three thousand men mobilized (12:46). But having reached Ptolemais, he is seized, and those with him are killed (12:47-48).

Trypho sends a taskforce to wipe out the troops that Jonathan had not demobilized, but learning that he had been taken, they march ahead for battle, and Trypho's soldiers turn back (12:49). "Though all came safely home to Judaea, they were greatly afraid and mourned for Jonathan and those who were with him; the whole of Israel was plunged into grief. The Gentiles round about were all bent on destroying them root and branch. 'The Jews have no leader or champion,' they said; 'so now is the time for us to attack and we shall blot out all memory of them from among men'" (12:52-53).

Simon, Jonathan's brother and one of the original Maccabees, takes leadership. Word reaches him that Trypho is amassing a huge invasion force that is to destroy Judea, and so he must gather the assembly of Jewish leaders (13:1-2). He tries to encourage them by declaring, "I do not need to remind you how much my brothers and I and my father's house have done for the laws and the holy place, what battles we have fought, what hardships we have endured. All my brothers have fallen in this cause, fighting for Israel; only I am left" (13:3-4). Simon is not one to complain, but will rather stand up and defend his people (13:5-6), and the people instill in him their confidence (13:7-9). Fortification of the walls of Jerusalem continues (13:10), and Jonathan son of Absalom is sent to occupy Joppa (13:11).

Trypho marches his army from Ptolemais, taking with him Jonathan who is still alive, meeting Simon's force at Adida (13:12-13). Trypho demands one hundred talents of silver and two of his sons as hostages to let him go (13:14-16). Although believing it to be a trick, Simon has the necessary monies brought to him and concludes the transaction, knowing that his fellow Jews would demand Jonathan's safe return (13:17-18). The ransom is paid, but Jonathan is not let free (13:19).

Trypho marches his army through the country to ravage it, and Simon's force follows it on a parallel course (13:20). The garrison of his citadel needed supplies, though, but is deterred by a snowstorm (13:21-22). Withdrawing to Bascama, Jonathan is executed, and Trypho returns home to Asia (13:23-24). Jonathan's remains are taken back to the family tomb at Modin, and Simon has the mausoleum ornately decorated to honor his family members who had fallen (13:25-30). Meanwhile, having returned to Asia, Trypho assumes the throne of the Seleucid kingdom, and has the young King Antiochus put to death (13:31-32).

Simon sees to it that the fortresses in Judea are rebuilt, along with high towers and barred gates, stocked with provisions (13:33). Simon also seeks to form better relations with Demetrius, the rival of Trypho (13:34-35), who sends back a letter indicating that there will be peace between him and the Jewish people (13:36-40). "Israel was released from the gentile yoke; the people began to write on their contracts and agreements: 'In the first year of Simon, the great high priest, general, and leader of the Jews'" (13:41-42). The narrator recounts Simon's feat of occupying Gazara, which had been one of the last hostile strongholds in Judea (13:43-46). While besieging the city, Simon shows mercy on its inhabitants and allows many to leave, removing it of idolatry (13:47). "Everything which was polluted he threw out, and he settled there men and women who would keep the law. He strengthened the fortifications, and he built himself a residence in town"

(13:48). The final hostile stronghold was the citadel at Jerusalem, whose occupants were allowed to surrender after a famine, and not receiving any relief supplies (13:49-50). At this point, the conflict had been going on for a total of twenty-five years (13:51), and the citadel at Jerusalem was made Simon's principal base (13:52). His own son, John, was appointed commander of his forces, making Gazara his headquarters (13:53).

King Demetrius still has his eyes on retaking his kingdom away from Trypho, and so he moves his forces into Media to elicit supplies and support from the Persians (14:1). Hearing about this, the Persian monarch Arsakes has one of his generals engage him in battle and take him alive (14:2-3).

"As long as Simon ruled, Judaea was undisturbed. He sought his nation's good, and they lived happily all through the glorious days of his reign" (14:4). Simon had captured the port of Joppa, to secure an overseas communication line (14:5). He extended the borders of the country (14:6), and former prisoners of war were able to be repatriated home (14:7a). Control over Gazara, Bethsura, and the citadel were assured, "from which he removed all pollution. None could withstand him" (14:7b). Life returned to normal for the Jews, with people planting crops and eating well (14:8-9). "Simon supplied the towns with food in plenty and equipped them with weapons for defense, so that his renown spread to the ends of the earth. Peace was restored to the land and throughout Israel there was great rejoicing" (14:10-11). Everyone had a part in the prosperity that came (14:12), with security established (14:13). The poor were protected, the Torah was honored, and apostates were removed (14:14). The Temple was once again brought back to high standing, properly furnished with the right materials (14:15).

The narrator records how when word of Jonathan's death reached the Jews' allies in Sparta and Rome, they were deeply saddened (14:16). They were, however, pleased that Simon had succeeded his brother (14:17), and a renewal of the friendship treaty was sent on bronze tablets, to be read to those in Jerusalem (14:17-19). A copy of the message from the Spartans is reproduced by the author of 1 Maccabees (14:20-23). Simon, to confirm for the treaty of alliance, sends an envoy, Numenius, to Rome with a large gold shield (14:24).

Knowing about all of the sacrifices and accomplishments of Simon and his family, especially in defending the rights of Israel, the Jews had special bronze tablets commissioned, as well as a monument built for the Maccabees on Mount Zion (14:25-27). The message that recounts the lives of Jonathan and Simon is long, as it instills a significant degree of absolute authority in the dynasty that their family had established (14:28-47). Copies of the message were to be placed in the precincts of the Temple, and placed on record with the Jewish treasury (14:48-49).

King Antiochus, the son of the deposed King Demetrius, has it in his heart to take back his father's kingdom (15:1-4). He writes a letter to Simon, and in it promises to release the Jewish people from any debts or tribute that was owed to his father's kingdom (15:5-8). The Jews were totally free to mint their own currency (15:6), and he promises to make their two realms close friends when his throne is established (15:9). The new King Antiochus is able to put Trypho to flight (15:10). Trypho flees all the way to Dor, with one-hundred twenty-eight thousand soldiers on his back (15:11). Antiochus establishes a blockade of both troops and ships to prevent his escape (15:12).

At this point, the narrator interrupts, as the Jewish envoy Numenius had returned from Rome, along with letters to deliver to the various regional kings (15:13). Lucius, the Roman consul, writes King Ptolemy of Egypt and informs him that an alliance with the Jews has been renewed. He says not to threaten the Jews, and to turn over any apostate Jews who have escaped back to them (15:14-21). The same letter was sent to the other regional kings (15:22-24), indicating that a rising power was on the Jews' side.

Problems erupt for Simon as this next King Antiochus launches a siege on Trypho on Dor (15:25). Simon sends a battalion of two-thousand to him, along with gifts of gold and various supplies. Antiochus refuses them, and breaks off diplomatic contact. He sends a member of his order of Friends, demanding that Simon withdraw from *his cities* of Joppa, Gazara, and the citadel in Jerusalem (15:26-28). This new monarch accused Simon, "you have made yourselves masters of

many places in my kingdom” (15:29), and he demands appropriate compensation for *his* losses (15:30). Furthermore, if proper tribute is not paid, then war will begin (15:31).

Athenobius, the king’s Friend, relays the message to Simon, and makes notice of the wealth that the Jews possess (15:31). All Simon can tell him in response is, “We have neither occupied other people’s land nor taken possession of other people’s property; we have taken only our ancestral heritage, unjustly seized for a time by our enemies. We have grasped the opportunity to reclaim our patrimony” (15:32-34). Simon acknowledges, though, the problems with Joppa and Gazara, and offers them for sale (15:35).

Athenobius returns to Antiochus in anger, and the king is furious at what he hears. Athenobius also recounts to him the wealth of Simon that he had seen (15:36). As this is happening, Trypho escapes by ship to Orthosia (15:37). Antiochus gives orders to Kendebaeus to occupy the coastal zone, blockade Judea, and rebuild and fortify Kedron (15:38-39). This he does, and he begins to harass the Jews by capturing and killing many (15:40-41).

John, in charge of the Maccabean army, reports back to his father what Kendebaeus has been doing (16:1). Simon summons John and Judas, who are his oldest sons, and gives them an important commission: “My brothers and I and my father’s family have fought Israel’s battles from our youth until this day, and many a time have we been successful in rescuing Israel. Now I am old, but mercifully you are in the prime of life. Take my brother’s place and mine, and go out and fight for our nation. And may help from Heaven be with you!” (16:2-3). John amasses a great army of twenty-thousand men and cavalry, and marches against Kendebaeus (16:4). While his force is reluctant to fight at first, they strike Kendebaeus’ army, and many are killed (16:5-8). Even though Judas is wounded in the fighting, Kendebaeus flees to Kedron, and others flee to forts built around Azotus. John sets fire to Azotus, with two thousand of the enemy killed (16:9-10).

An ambitious, wealthy Jew from Jericho, named Ptolemaeus, sees a chance for Simon and his sons to be put “out of the way” (16:13), and for himself to be made high priest (16:11-12). Sadly, on a tour of the region, Simon and his sons Mattathias and Judas are brought to the home of Abubus at Dok. There, Ptolemaeus sets his trap and has them all killed (16:13-16). The narrator says, “It was an act of base treachery in which evil was returned for good” (16:17).

Ptolemaeus intends to declare his loyalty to King Antiochus, and asks him for troops and for assistance (16:18). Support comes to him, and “He ordered some of his men to Gazara to make away with John” (16:19a) as well, giving gold and gifts to the senior officers (16:19b). Other troops would be sent to occupy Jerusalem (16:20). John, however, gets word that his father and brothers have been murdered, and that assassins are out to get him (16:21). “The news came as a great shock to John, and, learning of the plot against his life, he arrested and put to death the men who came to kill him” (16:20). The author ends 1 Maccabees in describing that he had accomplished many feats himself, worthy of a son of one of the original Maccabees (16:21-22). While the succeeding priest, John Hyrcanus, did make some controversial decisions during his tenure as Jewish leader, the author of 1 Maccabees is not concerned about them in his work.

**Most of our attention during the season of *Chanukah* is often focused around 1 Maccabees chs. 1-4,** but as it should be obvious, there is so much more to learn about the complicated history of the period. We see poor, tiny Judea, stuck in the middle of major powers. There are complicated and entangling alliances. The Maccabean leaders simply want their people to survive, worshipping God at the Temple, and following His Torah. They do what is necessary to ensure that the Jewish people are not wiped out. They are first guerilla fighters, then they learn to lead a professional army, and they try their hand at diplomacy. They gain respect in the region, and from far-off allies like Sparta and Rome. *They do what they have to do.*

Much is learned from this period of Jewish history, how Antiochus Epiphanes thought himself invisible, but was ruined for defiling the Temple. Those who come after him, perhaps not thinking themselves to be as divine as he, certainly were ambitious and wreaked more havoc on the Jewish people. They certainly thought themselves to be vastly superior to tiny little Israel.

So having seen some of what the Jews were up against in 1 Maccabees, with their peace and livelihood threatened *even after the Temple was rededicated*—is it surprising that by the time

of the Apostles, non-Jewish inclusion among the Jewish Believers *as their equals* (Galatians 3:28), was so controversial? Would not thoughts of all the persecutions that the generation of the Maccabees endured, the broken and failed promises by the Jews' pagan neighbors, and still being stuck in the midst of hostile Gentiles—be something that affected your worldview? It is fairly easy to see how many of the Jewish Believers had some prejudices to overcome.

What can we learn from a record of history like 1 Maccabees as today's Messianic movement? What might it teach us about Jewish attitudes to the nations' salvation in the Book of Acts and Apostolic letters? What might it teach us about the need to be sensitive to unique Jewish needs in our faith community, and how we should not at all dismiss the importance of *Chanukah*? Indeed, if we are to learn anything from this—not only should we rejoice in the rededication of the Temple, but non-Jewish Messianics should learn to be honest and truthful to their (Messianic) Jewish brothers and sisters. They should be shown true respect and honor, as *we are all recipients* of the sacrifices of the Maccabean leaders from over two millennia ago!

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