

The Message of 2 Maccabees

by J.K. McKee Virtual Chanukah 2009

There is a huge amount of difference between the style and approach of 1 Maccabees, when compared to 2 Maccabees.¹ Whereas 1 Maccabees attempts to be a relatively objective historical analysis of the events that befell the Jewish people, the compiler of 2 Maccabees attempts to show his audience a theological perspective of what took place. In 1 Maccabees, while we may encounter Judah Maccabee, and his brothers Jonathan and Simon, as appealing to past Israelite history for inspiration—in 2 Maccabees we see the omnipotence of God working directly through the Jewish people. They are His servants, put in dire straights, who will be vindicated throughout eternity because of their faithfulness to Him and to His Torah. The Maccabees appeal to God to intervene when hope appears lost. We get a glimpse into the lives of some of the “normal people” who suffered under the tyranny of the Seleucid Empire.

Unlike 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees covers a much shorter historical period of about fifteen years, from right before the ascension of Antiochus V, son of Antiochus Epiphanes, to about 160 B.C.E. 2 Maccabees 4:7-15:36 parallels much of 1 Maccabees chs. 1-7. 2 Maccabees claims to have originally been part of a larger, five volume work no longer extant, that had been written by a Jason of Cyrene. 2 Maccabees was condensed by an editor or Epitomist, who certainly interjects his thoughts as he summarizes what he considered to be the main points of Jason's original work. The original audience of 2 Maccabees is the Jewish community of Egypt (1:1-2:18), and so because of this, the editor or Epitomist of 2 Maccabees is sometimes thought to be a contemporary of the Jewish philosopher Philo,² placing 2 Maccabees' composition sometime in the late First Century B.C.E. or early First Century C.E.

The emphasis of the editor is to focus on the people who fought and were martyred during the Seleucid period, something he does quite well. Yet because of this, it may be that he was more concerned with his literary abilities than with attention for the historical detail originally laid out in Jason's work. Some interpreters of 2 Maccabees feel that the Epitomist may have exaggerated some of the facts and figures, superimposing his own religious ideas onto the actual events, as he details that his focus was “on the main points of my outline, [and] I shall leave to the original author the minute discussion of every particular” (2:28). Reading 2 Maccabees as a literary work first, and not necessarily historical, will aid us for understanding the people of the time—even if the events have been clouded in flowery language. Unfortunately, we do not have Jason's work to make a proper comparison, so the accuracy of whether various miracles or supernatural works actually took place, will need to be considered *by you* as you read the text for yourself.

Let us remember, though, as R.K. Harrison observes, “the Epitomist performed a valuable service in preserving the bulk of a work that is no longer extant. His condensation was admittedly meant for popular consumption, and the gratitude with which it was received”³ led to the Greek text of 2 Maccabees translated into other contemporary languages. The accounts preserved in 2 Maccabees undeniably affected First Century Jewish theology, and the worldview of many Jews during the ministry of Yeshua. For that reason alone, today's Messianic community needs to be familiar with it.

A main purpose of 2 Maccabees is to persuade the Jewish community in Egypt to continue to remember the Festival of Dedication, which they had forgotten to do. The editor begins his work by writing two letters, the first being a general letter to the Egyptian Jews, expressing a desire for their well being (1:1-6). He also appeals to the past crises experienced by the Judean Jews, and even how the original author Jason took up arms against his own people who had defected to the Seleucids (1:7). God intervened on their behalf, as “We prayed to the Lord and were answered; we brought a sacrifice and an offering of fine flour, we lit the lamps, and laid out the Bread of the Presence” (1:8). **The role that the Temple plays is quite important for the**

¹ This article has been reproduced from the paperback edition of the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*, pp 85-114.

² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1273.

³ *Ibid.*

Epitomist of 2 Maccabees. Reminding the Egyptian Jews of the faithful actions of their Judean brethren, he says, “Now we instruct you to observe the celebration of a feast of Tabernacles in the month of Kislev” (1:9), as what would become the eight-day celebration of *Chanukah* was partially modeled after *Sukkot*, something they would have been familiar with from the Torah.

The second, and much longer letter, is written to Aristobulus (1:10), who was some kind of a Jewish teacher or philosopher to Ptolemy IV Philometor (180-145 B.C.E.) of Egypt. Thanks are issued to God for saving the Jews from the invaders (1:11-12). The Epitomist records an interesting death, or at least fall, of Antiochus Epiphanes, much different than that recorded in 1 Maccabees 6:1-17. While in Persia, Antiochus had “a force that seemed invincible,” but “they were cut to pieces in the temple of the goddess Nanaea⁴ through a stratagem employed by her priests. On the pretext of a ritual marriage with the goddess, Antiochus, escorted by his Friends, had come to the temple to secure the considerable treasure by way of dowry...As soon as he was inside, the priests shut the sanctuary; then, opening a secret trapdoor in the panelled ceiling, they hurled stones at them, and the king fell as if struck by a thunderbolt. They hacked off limbs and heads and threw them to those outside” (1:13-16). In the Epitomist’s words: “Blessed in all things be our God, who handed over the godless to death!” (1:17).

He also goes into describing to Aristobulus how significant it would be for the Egyptian Jewish community to observe the Festival of Dedication “on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, so that you may celebrate a feast of Tabernacles” (1:18a), as *Sukkot* would again serve as an appropriate prototype for what would become *Chanukah*. (It may be that references to *Sukkot* are made, so that the Egyptian Jews would have a frame of reference for remembering the much newer commemoration of *Chanukah*.) A considerable part of the Epitomist’s letter is spent discussing how the sacred fire that was to be used in the Temple had been preserved during the period of the Babylonian exile, invoking a sense of nostalgia for the Temple worship that had continued in spite of the hardship that the Jews had faced (1:18-2:12).⁵ He affirms that the account of how the fire was preserved during the Exile is available for the Egyptian Jews to see, no differently than the chronicles of Israel’s kings and the works of David (2:13), as well as the relevant documents that concerned the recent conflict between the Jews and Seleucid Greeks (2:14-15). The Epitomist summarizes the importance of what he is about to deliver, writing,

“Since we are about to celebrate the purification of the temple, we are writing to impress upon you the duty of holding this festival. God has rescued his whole people and granted to all of us the holy land, the kingship, the priesthood, and the consecration, as he promised by the law. We have confidence that God will soon show us compassion and gather us from everywhere under heaven to the holy place, for he has delivered us from great evils and purified that place” (2:16-18).

The Epitomist’s opening commentary is over with these two letters, and he can now begin his summary of Jason of Cyrene’s original five-volume work (2:19a). He records how Jason not only compiled a history of Judah Maccabee and his brothers, but also the war that the Maccabees fought against Antiochus Epiphanes and his successors (2:19b-20). Apparently, Jason’s work also included supernatural encounters that the Maccabees had. Jason is said to have “described the apparitions from heaven which appeared to those who, in the cause of the Jewish religion, vied with one another in heroism. Few though they were, they ranged through the whole country, taking booty and routing the foreign hordes; they recovered the world-renowned temple, liberated the city of Jerusalem, and reaffirmed the laws, which were in danger of being abolished. All this they achieved because the Lord showed them clemency and favour” (2:21-22).

In reviewing the Epitomist’s work, he reminds those reading that his is a condensed summary for which he slaved over day and night: “The task which I have taken on myself in making this summary is no easy one; it means hard work and late nights” (2:26). And we are reminded again, we no longer have access to Jason of Cyrene’s original volumes (2:28), to which

⁴ Identified with the Greek goddess Artemis.

⁵ In reading 2 Maccabees 1:18b-2:12, you will have to decide if this is a legendary story concocted by the Epitomist, an exaggerated account of how the fire was preserved, or something more-or-less historically accurate.

we can compare. The Epitomist proceeds, comparing himself not to the architect of a house, but rather one who (artfully) paints inside it (2:29).

Unlike 1 Maccabees, which begins principally with the rise of Alexander the Great and the division of his empire following his death, the narrative of 2 Maccabees tells us more of the internal issues going on in Judea. Apparently, Antiochus Epiphanes' ordered defilement of the Temple was not the first action taken by a Seleucid monarch. The Epitomist details how during the administration of the Jewish high priest Onias, "the Holy City enjoyed unbroken peace and prosperity, and there was exemplary observance of the laws, because he was pious and hated wickedness. The kings themselves held the sanctuary in honour and embellished the temple with the most magnificent gifts; King Seleucus of Asia even met the whole cost of the sacrificial worship from his own revenues" (3:1-3). Apparently, there had been a time when there were excellent relations between the Jews and their various Greek neighbors.

The first problems erupt when a certain Simon, administrator of the Temple, has a quarrel with Onias over the Jerusalem city market. Perhaps envious of power, he goes to Apollonius, governor of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia (3:4-5), telling them that the treasury of Jerusalem was filled with untold riches, riches that could belong to the Seleucid king (3:6). Apollonius informs the king of what he has been told, who then sends an official named Heliodorus to remove the Temple riches (3:7). Heliodorus embarks on an inspection tour of the region, and is received warmly by the Jews when he reaches Jerusalem (3:8-9). He asks about the allegations of the Temple treasury hoarding tax monies, and so the high priest explains how the funds are largely held for disbursement to orphans and widows (3:10). Heliodorus, however, informs that because the king has given orders, the Temple funds must be turned over to the royal treasury (3:13).

When the day came for the Temple funds to be tallied and taken away, the Epitomist records there was great distress throughout the city—the high priest not only in agonizing pain, but also people offering significant prayers in sackcloth and ashes (3:14-19). "[W]ith outstretched hands all made solemn entreaty to Heaven. It was pitiful to see the crowd lying prostrate in utter disarray and the high priest in agony and apprehension" (3:20-21). As Heliodorus prepares to appropriate the Temple funds for the king, the prayers of the people are heard (3:22-23). The Epitomist says, "just as he was arriving with his escort at the treasury, the Ruler of spirits and of all power sent a mighty apparition, so that everyone who had dared to accompany Heliodorus collapsed in terror, stricken with panic before the might of God" (3:24). Angelic beings then appear to beat Heliodorus, so that he might stay away from the Temple treasures:

"There also appeared to Heliodorus two young men of surpassing strength and glorious beauty, magnificently attired. Taking their stand on either side of him, they flogged him, raining on him blow after blow. Suddenly, overwhelmed by a great darkness, he fell to the ground, and his men quickly took him up and placed him on a stretcher. This man, who so recently had entered the treasury accompanied by his whole bodyguard and an attendant crowd, was now borne off utterly helpless, publicly compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of God" (3:27-28).

The Jews who witnessed this praised God for His intervention (3:30), and Heliodorus' various companions appealed to Onias the high priest to pray for him, so that the Lord would spare his life (3:31). Knowing how the king might react, Onias offered a sacrifice for Heliodorus on behalf of the Jewish nation (3:32). "As the expiation was being made, the same young men, dressed as before, again appeared to Heliodorus, and standing over him said: 'You should be very grateful to Onias the high priest; it is for his sake the Lord has spared your life. You have been scourged by God; now proclaim his mighty power to all men.' With these words they vanished" (3:33-34). Heliodorus, having been visited by two of God's angels, then proceeds to make "lavish freewill-offerings to the Lord who had spared his life" (3:35), and "To everyone he bore witness of the miracles of the supreme God which he had seen with his own eyes" (3:36). Returning to the king, Heliodorus reports how the presence of God filled the Jewish Temple, opposing those with evil intent (3:37-39).

The incident in the Temple treasury begins a series of unfortunate events for the Jewish nation. Simon, who had originally told Apollonius of the great Temple riches, is incensed, spreading rumors about Onias the high priest (4:1). The Epitomist comments, “He had the effrontery to accuse of conspiracy against the government one who was a benefactor of the city, a protector of his fellow-Jews, and a staunch upholder of the law” (4:2). His supporters resort to murder (4:3), likely killing various opponents. Apollonius continued to encourage Simon on his course of action (4:4), and things got so bad that Onias feels he has no choice but to appeal to the king himself for the sake of all the Jews (4:5). “He saw that unless the king intervened there could be no peace in public affairs, nor would Simon be stopped in his mad course” (4:6).

King Seleucus dies and is succeeded by his brother Antiochus, who would also be known as Epiphanes (4:7a). As this takes place, “Jason, Onias’s brother, procured for himself the office of high priest by underhanded means” (4:7b). Jason, the new high priest, promises Antiochus great sums of money (4:8-9a). Add to this how Jason actually asks the new king for permission “to set up a gymnasium for the physical education of young men, and to enrol in Jerusalem a group to be known as ‘Antiochenes’” (4:9b), as though they were citizens of the capitol Antioch. We see that “The king gave his assent; and Jason, as soon as he had secured the high-priesthood, made his fellow-Jews conform to the Greek way of life” (4:10).

The previous allowances for the Jews, which had been negotiated by John, the father of Eupolemus,⁶ were set aside by Jason (4:11a). The Epitomist records all of the dastardly deeds done by this new “high priest,” which were anti-Torah and which affected many of the Jews who looked to the Temple for spiritual guidance:

“He abolished the institutions founded on the law and introduced practices which ran counter to it. He lost no time in establishing a gymnasium at the foot of the citadel itself, and he made the most outstanding of the young men adopt the hat worn by Greek athletes. So with the introduction of foreign customs Hellenism reached a high point through the inordinate wickedness of Jason, an apostate and no true high priest. As a result, the priests no longer showed any enthusiasm for their duties at the altar; they treated the temple with disdain, they neglected the sacrifices, and whenever the opening gong called them they hurried to join in the sports at the wrestling school in defiance of the law. They placed no value on dignities prized by their forefathers, but cared above everything for Hellenic honours. This brought misfortune upon them from every side, and the very people whose way of life they admired and tried so hard to emulate turned out to be vindictive enemies. To act profanely against God’s laws is no light matter, as will in due course become clear” (4:11b-17).

Jason was quite zealously inclined toward Hellenistic religion and culture. For the games held at Tyre, he sent a group of his Antiochenes with three hundred drachmas of silver to be offered in the sacrifice to Hercules (4:18-19a). These Antiochenes, Jewish citizens of Antioch, thought this to be improper, and so the money was instead spent to outfit various triremes⁷ (4:19b-20).

The politics of the region begin to play a role in how the new King Antiochus acts toward the Jewish people. Upon the coronation of the new King Philometor of Egypt, he learns that Egypt is “hostile to his interests” (4:21). Antiochus comes to Jerusalem, being greatly welcomed by the people (4:22), and then he moves himself to Phoenicia, obviously wanting to take a closer look at what is happening to the south.

As bad as Jason was as high priest, he could not hold onto his office indefinitely. Menelaus, a brother of the Simon who had informed Apollonius of the great Temple treasure, is sent by Jason to the king on important business (4:23). “Menelaus, once in the king’s presence, flattered him with an air of authority, and diverted the high-priesthood to himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver. He arrived back with the royal mandate, but with nothing else to make him worthy of the high-priesthood; he had the passions of the cruel tyrant and the temper of a savage beast. Jason, who had supplanted his own brother, was not supplanted in his

⁶ Eupolemus would later negotiate the Maccabees’ treaty of alliance with Rome (1 Maccabees 8:17).

⁷ A trireme was an ancient class of warship, with three banks of oars.

turn and forced to seek refuge in Ammonite territory" (4:24-26). The Epitomist records how things get even more complicated with this new high priest, Menelaus, who has no intention of paying King Antiochus what he had promised (4:27). The funds are continually demanded, though, and so Menelaus is summoned to meet with the king (4:28-29).

King Antiochus is not there when Menelaus arrives, due to a revolt in Tarsus and Mallus that must be put down (4:30), and so he leaves an Andronicus behind as his regent (4:31). Thinking that he can manipulate Andronicus, Menelaus presents him with some special gold from the Temple treasure (4:32). The deposed high priest Onias had heard about this, coming to Daphne, right outside Antioch (4:33). Onias denounces Menelaus, and because of this Menelaus persuades Andronicus that he needs to be eliminated. A meeting is arranged between Andronicus and Onias, and although Andronicus appears to greet him and gives him various assurances of safety, "Then at once, with no respect for justice, he made away with him" (4:34).

The murder of the high priest Onias, who had been a Torah-faithful Jew, "caused indignation and resentment not only among the Jews but among many from other nations as well" (4:35). When King Antiochus returns from the west, a petition protesting Onias' murder is sent to him by the Jews of Antioch, also considered to be "a crime detested equally by the Gentiles" (4:36). King Antiochus is actually described as being "moved to pity and tears" (4:37), and he becomes so angry that Andronicus is not only stripped of his high position, but he is led to the very place where Onias was murdered, and is executed there himself (4:38).

Back in Jerusalem, Lysimachus, brother of Menelaus and the one left to oversee the Temple, "entered on a career of sacrilege and plunder in Jerusalem" (4:39a). But as this occurs, and as news reaches the people of how much gold had been taken away and given to Andronicus, popular opinion falls against Lysimachus (4:39b). Lysimachus, the acting high priest, actually assembles a force of three thousand and orders an attack against those in opposition (4:40). This only incenses the people more against him. "Recognizing that Lysimachus was behind the attack, some of the crowd seized stones, others blocks of wood, others again handfuls of burning embers that were lying about, and they hurled them indiscriminately at Lysimachus and his men. The result was that many were wounded, some were killed, and the rout was complete; the temple robber himself they put to death near the treasury" (4:41-42).

When King Antiochus comes to Tyre, charges are pressed against Menelaus in regard to this incident (4:43-44). Menelaus, however, is quite conniving and manipulative, and promises a Ptolemaeus a large sum of money if he will persuade Antiochus to change his intent toward him (4:45-46). What happens? The Epitomist writes, "Menelaus, the author of all the mischief, was acquitted and the charges brought against him were dismissed, but the king condemned to death the unfortunate accusers, men who would have been let go entirely as innocent had they appeared even before Scythians" (4:47).⁸ He can only further observe how bad Menelaus was for the Jewish nation, stating,

"At once those who had pleaded for their city, their people, and their sacred vessels, suffered this undeserved penalty. It caused even some of the Tyrians to show their detestation of the crime by providing a splendid funeral for the victims. Yet thanks to the cupidity of those in power, Menelaus, this arch-plotter against his fellow-citizens, continued in office and went from bad to worse" (4:48-50).

King Antiochus undertakes a second military expedition against Egypt (5:1), and during this time the Epitomist relates how there were various supernatural signs "seen in the sky all over Jerusalem" (5:2a) for forty days. These included "galloping horsemen in golden armour, companies of spearmen standing to arms, swordsmen at the ready, and squadrons of cavalry in battle order. Charges and countercharges were made in this direction and that; shields were brandished, spears massed, javelins hurled; breastplates and golden ornaments of every kind blazed with light. That the phenomenon might portend good was the prayer of everyone" (5:2b-4).

⁸ The Scythians were a nomadic people from north of the Black Sea who were known for their considerable cruelty. The Apostle Paul makes specific reference of them in Colossians 3:11, and how the power of Yeshua has the capacity to change even the most barbaric of people.

A false report is heard that King Antiochus was killed in battle (5:5a), and so the deposed high priest Jason uses it as an opportunity, leading a surprise attack on Jerusalem with one thousand men (5:5b). The Epitomist observes how “Jason embarked upon an unsparing massacre of his fellow-citizens, for he did not grasp that success against one’s own kin is the greatest of failures” (5:6a). His attack against Jerusalem is a failure, though, and he had to return to Ammonite territory for asylum (5:7). He had to move from place-to-place, eventually making his way to Egypt, and then having to cross over to Sparta⁹ where he dies in exile (5:8-9).

King Antiochus, not having died in Egypt, hears what is going on in Judea. What he does should be no surprise. “It was clear to the king, when news of those happenings reached him, that Judaea was in a state of insurrection, and he set out from Egypt in a savage mood. He took Jerusalem by storm” (5:11). Over a period of three days, the Epitomist says that eighty-thousand were slaughtered, with about the same number sold into slavery (5:12-14). Yet this is not enough. “Not satisfied with this, and guided by Menelaus, who had turned traitor to both religion and country, the king had the audacity to enter the most holy temple on earth. The villain laid his polluted hands on the sacred vessels, and profanely swept up the votive offerings which other kings had made to enhance the splendour and fame of the shrine” (5:15-16). Do note, however, **that this is not the significant defilement that the Maccabees would later have to cleanse**; this is only a ransacking of the Temple with King Antiochus taking massive spoil away. But while this utterly inflames the Epitomist, he is forced to conclude that what took place was Divine punishment from God:

“The pride of Antiochus passed all bounds. He did not understand that the sins of the people of Jerusalem had for a short time angered the Lord, and that this was the reason why the temple was left to its fate. Had they not been guilty of many sinful acts, Antiochus would have fared no better than Heliodorus, who was sent by King Seleucus to inspect the treasury; like him, he would have been flogged and his presumption foiled at once. But the Lord did not choose the nation for the sake of the sanctuary; he chose the sanctuary for the sake of the nation. That was why the sanctuary itself had its part in the misfortunes that befell the nation, and afterwards shared its good fortune; it was abandoned when the Almighty was roused to anger, but restored again in all its splendour when the great Master was reconciled with his people” (5:17-20).

King Antiochus makes his way back to the capitol at Antioch, along with eighteen hundred talents of treasure from the Temple (5:21a). The Epitomist offers an editorial comment, “Carried away by arrogance he thought that he could make ships sail on dry land and men walk over the sea!” (5:21b). Seleucid Greek overseers are left to watch over Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans convened (5:22-23a). Menelaus is viewed as a total turncoat Jew, “who was more brutally overbearing than the others” (5:23b). The king sends a large force into Judea to quell any chance of rebellion, although some literary exaggeration is likely seen in the Epitomist’s summary: “he sent Apollonius, commander of the Mysian mercenaries, with an army of twenty-two thousand men; his orders were to slaughter all the adult males and to sell the women and children into slavery” (5:24). An incident of how this Apollonius deceives the Jews by coming in peace is recalled, murdering a great number of people on the Sabbath (5:25-26). From this incident enters Judah Maccabee onto the scene, who escaped with nine others into the desert, where he and his companions had to feed on wild animals and sparse vegetation (5:27).

Shortly after, “King Antiochus sent an elderly Athenian to compel the Jews to give up their ancestral customs and to cease regulating their lives by the laws of God” (6:1). As Antiochus’ agent of evil, “He was commissioned also to pollute the temple at Jerusalem and dedicate it to the Olympian Zeus” (6:2a). Even the sanctuary of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim was also to be dedicated to Zeus, god of Hospitality (6:2b)—quite something to be recorded, considering how the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along!

What happened to the Temple of God on Mount Zion was a hard scene indeed to bear, and what is described in 2 Maccabees is much more detailed than simply pigs being slaughtered on

⁹ The Epitomist says that he went to Sparta “because of the Spartans’ kinship with the Jews” (5:9), *dia tēn sungeneian*.

the altar. The Epitomist summarizes how “This evil onslaught bore hard on the people and tried them grievously, for the Gentiles filled the temple with licentious revelry: they took their pleasure with prostitutes and had intercourse with women in the sacred precincts. Moreover, they introduced things which the law forbade, and heaped the altar with offerings prohibited as impure. No one was allowed to observe the sabbath or to keep the traditional festivals or even to admit to being a Jew at all” (6:3-6). King Antiochus’ birthday had to be honored every month (6:7a), and the Jews were forced to participate in the feast of Dionysius, god of revelry (6:7b). Jews living throughout the region were ordered to do the same (6:8), on the threat that “they should put to death everyone who refused to conform to the Greek ways” (6:9a).

Two horrific examples immediately considered are the deaths of two women who had their infant sons circumcised (6:10), and how a group of Jews who had observed the Sabbath in caves were burned alive, after failing to defend themselves (6:11). The Epitomist of 2 Maccabees is very reluctant to mention any specific examples, observing, “I beg my readers not to be disheartened by those tragic events, but to reflect that such penalties were inflicted for the discipline, not the destruction, of our race” (6:12). Perhaps this is an observation that simply destroying the Jews would not be enough to convey the greatness and superiority *and divinity* of King Antiochus and his Greek culture, as the Jews should have just followed his decrees. At the same time, what has taken place to the Jews, as the Epitomist thinks, may be the discipline of God upon His people, who knew His ways and failed to resist sin (6:13-17).

One of the most significant incidents to consider is the example of the aged Torah teacher, Eleazar, who refused to forcibly eat pork (6:18). His story is one that aptly summarizes the continued Jewish animosity to this day toward the swine. This often hatred toward pigs is by no means pigs’ fault; it is because the Seleucid Greeks demanded that the Jewish people eat pork to prove that they had turned their backs on their God. The Epitomist recounts, “[B]ut preferring death with the honour to life with impiety, [Eleazar] spat it out and voluntarily submitted to the torture. So should men act who have the courage to reject food which despite a natural desire to save their lives it is not lawful to eat” (6:19-20). Eleazar’s associates tried to persuade him that all he needed to do was to pretend to eat pork, escaping death (6:21-22), but Eleazar refused (6:23). Eleazar says that to do this, at his old age, would be quite hypocritical for the young people to witness:

“If I went through with this pretense at my time of life, many of the young might believe that at the age of ninety Eleazar had turned apostate. If I practiced deceit for the sake of a brief moment of life, I should lead them astray and stain my old age with dishonour. I might for the present avoid man’s punishment, but alive or dead I should never escape the hand of the Almighty. If I now died bravely, I shall show that I have deserved my long life and leave to the young a noble example; I shall be teaching them how to die a good death, gladly and nobly, for our revered and holy laws” (6:24-28a).

After asserting this, Eleazar was taken off to be tortured (6:28b), with his former associates considering him to be mad (6:29). At the point of death after being beaten senseless, Eleazar would groan, “To the Lord belongs all holy knowledge; he knows what terrible agony I endure in my body from this flogging, though I could have escaped death; yet he knows also that in my soul I suffer gladly, because I stand in awe of him” (6:30). Eleazar then dies a martyr’s death, the Epitomist’s eulogy being, “So he died; and by his death he left a noble example and a memorial of virtue, not only to the young but also to the great mass of his countrymen” (6:31).

Another example of martyrdom is considered by the Epitomist, one of seven brothers and their mother who were tortured, for failing to eat pork in violation of the Torah (7:1). Their tenacity in not giving in is seen in how one speaks out, “What do you expect to learn by interrogating us? Rather than break our ancestral laws we are prepared to die” (7:2). This account is written as though King Antiochus himself is present (7:3a), leading some scholars to actually question its validity. No location of this scene is given in the text, so it is not impossible for the seven brothers and their mother to have been taken to a place, outside of Judea, where Antiochus could personally see some of the so-called “Jewish rabble.” Consequently, King Antiochus orders

that this brother, speaking for his family, have his tongue cut out, and then be scalped and mutilated in front of everyone (7:3b-4). He is then roasted alive in the presence of his family (7:5). All they could say to each other was, “The Lord God is looking on...and we may be sure that he has compassion on us. Did not Moses say to Israel in the song plainly denouncing apostasy, ‘He will have compassion on his servants?’” (7:6).¹⁰

The second brother is asked whether or not he will eat pork, and he refuses to not only partake of it, but is quite blunt in refusing to speak the torturer’s language (7:7-8a). As he is dying, all he can say is, “Fiend though you are, you are setting us free from this present life, and the King of the universe will raise us up to a life everlastingly made new, since it is for his laws that we are dying” (7:8b-9). He expected a life of resurrection to come, a reward for his steadfastness to God.

The third brother is tortured to eat pork (7:10), but refuses with the words, “his [God’s] laws mean far more to me than they [the brother’s hands] do, and it is from him that I trust to receive them again” (7:11), meaning in the resurrection. The Epitomist observes, “Both the king himself and those with him were astounded at the young man’s spirit and his utter disregard for suffering” (7:12). After dying, the fourth brother is also tortured (7:13). All he can say before dying is, “Better to be killed by men and to cherish God’s promise to raise us again! But for you there will be no resurrection” (7:14). He either reflected a Jewish view that the resurrection was only for the righteous, or that the resurrection he was to experience was one of being ushered into God’s future Kingdom on Earth—something the Seleucid Greek oppressors were certainly not going to experience.

The fifth brother is dragged forward (7:15), and what he says is very important: “Mortal as you are, you have authority among human beings and can do as you please. But do not imagine that God has abandoned our nation. Wait, and you will see how his mighty power will torment you and your descendants!” (7:16-17). What the sixth brother has to say when he is brought forward is important to consider. He acknowledges that the Jewish people are being punished for their crimes against God, in denying His Torah, but also that the punishers are not going to get away with what they are doing:

“Do not delude yourself: it is through our own fault that we suffer these things; we have sinned against our God and brought these appalling events on ourselves. But do not suppose you yourself will escape the consequences of trying to contend with God” (7:18-19).

The Epitomist, while expressing high regard for these brothers, also expresses high regard for their mother. He says, “The mother was the most remarkable of all, and she deserves to be remembered with special honour. She watched her seven sons perish within the space of a single day, yet she bore it bravely, for she trusted in the Lord” (7:20). She had encouraged each of her sons *in their native language*, no less (7:21), and recognized that God as their Creator would bring them back to life again in the resurrection, because they have been steadfast in not giving up on His Torah (7:22-23).

King Antiochus is sitting there, observing these things, suspecting that although he could not understand her words, he was being insulted (7:24a). Knowing how far he has gone with killing six of seven sons, Antiochus changes his tactics from one who tortures. With only one brother left alive, the Epitomist describes, Antiochus “assured him on oath that once he abandoned his ancestral customs he would make him rich and enviable by enrolling him as a king’s Friend and entrusting him with high office” (7:24b). King Antiochus urges the mother to tell her surviving son to accept (7:25), and so she finally agrees to try (7:26). What she actually tells her son in front of the tyrant can never be forgotten:

“I implore you, my child, to look at the heavens and the earth; consider all that is in them, and realize that God did not create them from what already existed and that a human being comes into existence the same way. Do not be afraid of this butcher; accept death willingly and prove yourself worthy of your brothers, so that by God’s mercy I may receive back both you and them together” (7:28-29).

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 32:36.

She barely finishes her words, and the seventh and her final son speaks out (7:30a). His zeal for the God of Israel is difficult to overlook:

“What are you all waiting for? I will not submit to the king’s command; I obey the command of the law given through Moses to our forefathers. And you, King Antiochus, who have devised all manner of atrocities for the Hebrews, you will not escape God’s hand. It is for our own sins that we are suffering, and, though to correct and discipline us our living Lord is angry for a brief time, yet he will be reconciled with his servants. But you, impious creature, most villainous of the human race, do not let vain hopes buoy you up or empty delusions carry you away when you lay hands on Heaven’s servants. You are not safe from the judgement of the omnipotent, all-seeing God. My brothers, after a short period of pain, have under God’s covenant drunk of the waters of everlasting life; but you by God’s verdict will pay the just penalty of your brutal insolence. I, like my brothers, surrender my body and my life for our ancestral laws. I appeal to God to show favour speedily to his people and by whips and scourges to bring you to admit that he alone is God. May the Almighty’s anger, which has justly fallen on our race, end with me and my brothers!” (7:30a-38).

The result of this apologetic speech to King Antiochus causes him to just rage, and so the seventh brother is punished far worse than the previous six (7:39). The Epitomist can only say, “the young man, putting his trust in the Lord, died without having incurred defilement” (7:40). The mother also dies, and the editor closes his recalling of those who were tortured for their faithfulness to God’s Law (7:41-42).

Much of what is seen in 2 Maccabees chs. 8-15 is paralleled by the war accounts in 1 Maccabees. Judah Maccabee and his brothers now enter the literary scene. Forced into the wilderness, Judah Maccabee and his companions recruit a force of six thousand men, people who had remained loyal to God and to the Torah (8:1). “They appealed to the Lord to look with compassion on his people whom all were trampling underfoot, to take pity on the temple now profaned by apostates, and to have mercy on Jerusalem, which was being destroyed and would soon be levelled to the ground. They prayed him also to give ear to the blood and cried blood that cried out to him for vengeance, to keep in mind the infamous massacre of innocent children and the blasphemous deeds against his name, and to show his hatred of wickedness” (8:2-4). They all appealed to God for His deliverance, and for discernment in how they were to proceed.

The Epitomist considers the growing Maccabean force to be an important tool of God, asserting, “Once [Judah’s] band of partisans was organized, the Gentiles found Maccabaeus invincible, now that the Lord’s anger had changed to mercy” (8:5), as it was time for the Jewish people to be vindicated. “Maccabaeus came on towns and villages without warning and burnt them down; he recaptured strategic positions, and inflicted many reverses on the enemy, choosing the night-time as being especially favourable for these attacks. Everywhere there was talk of his heroism” (8:6-7).

The Seleucid commissioner, Philip, was very worried about what had started, writing to Ptolemaeus, governor of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, for help (8:8). He sends Nicanor, a member of the king’s Friends, and with him twenty-thousand troops, in the Epitomist’s estimation, “to exterminate the whole population of Judaea” (8:9), and with him the general Gorgias. Profits from selling Jews as slaves could be used to pay off some tribute that King Antiochus still owed the Romans (8:10-11).

When Judas and his men heard that Nicanor was coming, many of them deserted and fled (8:12-13), but those who stayed, “disposing of their recent possessions, joined in prayer to the Lord for deliverance from the godless Nicanor, who had put them up for sale even before any fighting took place” (8:14). They appealed to God for His intervention, not for what they had done, but rather “on the ground of the covenants God had made with their forefathers, and because they bore his holy and majestic name” (8:15). Judah Maccabee appealed to his force not to fall into panic, because they had a just cause to fight for, and for them to remember the desecration of the Temple and suppression by Gentiles of the Jewish religion (8:16-17). He appealed to his army, “They rely on weapons and deeds of daring...but we put our trust in Almighty God, who is able

with a nod to overthrow our present assailants and, if need be, the whole world” (8:18). Judah reminded the Maccabean army of previous times when God had intervened, such as the defeat of Sennacherib (8:19; 2 Kings 19:35), and a massive defeat of the Galatians with the Macedonians (8:20).¹¹ As the Epitomist says, “His words put heart into his men and made them ready to die for their laws and their country” (8:21a).

In this first major engagement recorded, Judah divides his army into four groups, with three of his brothers—Simon, Josephus, and Jonathan—commanding a division of fifteen hundred (8:21b-22). A man named Eleazar delivers a Scripture reading “from the holy book,” crying out “God is our help” (8:23). The Epitomist details how “With the Almighty fighting on their side they slaughtered over nine thousand of the enemy, wounded and disabled the greater part of Nicanor’s forces, and routed them completely” (8:24). The money that the slavetraders were going to buy them with is also seized, and the remaining enemy is pursued until dark (8:25). They stop fighting because of the Sabbath, then offering appropriate praise and thanksgiving to God for the victory (8:26-27). When the Sabbath is over, some of the spoils they had collected are distributed among their fellow Jews who had been persecuted, various widows and orphans, and among the Maccabees’ own families (8:28). “This done, all together made supplication to the merciful Lord, praying him to be fully reconciled with his servants” (8:29).

The momentum of victory continues, as “The Jews now engaged the forces of Timotheus and Bacchides, killed over twenty thousand of them, and gained firm control of some of the high strongholds” (8:30a). The Maccabees are sure to distribute the booty that they capture to Jewish victims of the Seleucids, orphans, widows, the elderly, and their own growing army (8:30b). The weapons that are captured are “carefully collected and stored at strategic points” (8:31). The Epitomist records the execution of an officer who was in charge of Timotheus’ bodyguard, who “was an utterly godless man who had caused the Jews great suffering” (8:32). One can certainly detect that the pains and torture inflicted upon the Jews are returned to the Seleucid Greeks. The Epitomist recounts, “During the victory celebrations in their ancestral capital, they burnt alive the men who had set fire to the sacred gates, including Callisthenes, who had taken refuge in some small house; so he received the due reward of his impiety” (8:33).

Nicanor, described as “that double-eyed villain who had brought along the thousand traders to buy the Jewish captives” (8:34), has to scurry away in utter defeat. The Epitomist of 2 Maccabees has this to say about him:

“[Nicanor] was with the Lord’s help humiliated by the very people whom he had dismissed as of no consequence. He threw off his magnificent garment, and all alone made his escape across country like a runaway slave; he was, indeed, exceedingly fortunate to reach Antioch after the destruction of his army. He who had undertaken to secure tribute for the Romans by taking prisoner the inhabitants of Jerusalem now proclaimed to the world that the Jews had a champion and were invulnerable, because they kept the laws that this champion had given them” (8:35-36).

While the Seleucid Greek occupiers of Judea are experiencing defeat at the hands of Judah Maccabee and his forces, things are not going well for Antiochus Epiphanes in his Persian campaign. The Epitomist records how he tried to plunder the temples of Persepolis and gain control, but the local population rose up against him, forcing him “into a humiliating withdrawal” (9:2). (Apparently, the death described earlier in 1:13-17 is of Antiochus’ companions, and not that of himself, as will be seen in ch. 9). Retreating to Ecbatana, a report reaches King Antiochus of how the forces of Nicanor and Timotheus had been defeated (9:3), “and this so roused his anger that he proposed to make the Jews suffer for the injury inflicted by those who had routed him” (9:4a). Antiochus Epiphanes was so arrogant, that he actually thought that he would make the Jewish people pay not for the forces he had sent to fight them, *but* on account of the Persians who had just defeated him.

¹¹ This is a conflict that may have involved Jewish mercenaries, alluded to in Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 12.148-153; cf. John R. Bartlett, “2 Maccabees,” in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 841.

Antiochus is so angry, that he pushes his charioteer not to stop until they reach their destination (9:4b), but as the Epitomist records, “riding with him was the divine judgement! In his arrogance he said: ‘Once I reach Jerusalem, I will make it one big Jewish graveyard’” (9:4c). **Antiochus Epiphanes would never make it to Jerusalem, or even that far out of Persia.** “[T]he all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, dealt him a fatal, invisible blow. No sooner had he uttered the words than he was seized with incurable pains in his bowels and acute internal suffering” (9:5), in the Epitomist’s view, “a punishment entirely fitting for one who had inflicted many unheard-of torments on the bowels of others” (9:6). Yet, even in such pain he insisted that the journey speed on, and became even more vengeful and threatening against the Jews (9:7a). This only made things worse, because “as the chariot hurtled along he fell from it, and so violent was his fall that he suffered agony in every limb” (9:7b). King Antiochus was never to be the same again, as his body would be ravaged and he would succumb to a flesh-eating disease. The Epitomist’s literary skills should not be overlooked in his description:

“He, who in pretension to be superhuman had been thinking that he could command the waves of the sea and weigh high mountains on the scales, was brought to the ground and had to be carried on a stretcher. The power of God was thus manifest to all. Worms swarmed from the body of this godless man and, while he was still alive and in agony, his flesh rotted off, and the whole army was overwhelmed by the stench of decay. It was so unbearably offensive that no one was able to convey the man who only a short time before had seemed to reach to the stars in the heavens” (9:8-10).

Humiliated not only by a recent military defeat, but now broken in body, “Antiochus began to moderate his monstrous arrogance; scourged by God and racked with incessant pain, he was coming to see things in their true light” (9:11). The Epitomist ably describes how “He was unable to endure his own stench,” and so he cries, “It is right for mortals to submit to God and not claim equality with him” (9:12). **Antiochus Epiphanes was having to recognize the superiority of God, and how significantly presumptuous he was in his exploits.**

Antiochus Epiphanes would not be granted any significant mercy by God, and he was going to die (9:13), but the Epitomist records how he recognized his error, and reversed his approach to the Jews on his deathbed. Antiochus vowed “that the Holy City, which he had been hurrying to level to the ground and transform into a graveyard, he would publicly declare to be free; to all the Jews, a people he had considered not to be worthy of burial but fit only to be thrown out with their children as carrion for birds and beasts, he would now give privileges equal to those enjoyed by the citizens of Athens; the holy temple, which he earlier had plundered, he would adorn with the most magnificent gifts, and would replace all the sacred vessels on a much more lavish scale, and he would meet the cost of the sacrifices from his own revenues. In addition, he would even turn Jew and visit every inhabited place to proclaim God’s might” (9:13-17).

Is some of this exaggerated? That King Antiochus would not only give the Jews citizenship rights only enjoyed by Athenians, but that he would convert to Judaism himself? *What we know for certain is that he lamented his mistake against Israel’s God.* King Antiochus sends a letter to the Jewish people, what the Epitomist considers “as a kind of olive branch” (9:18). In this letter, he wishes the Jews well (9:19-20), and actually says that he keeps “an affectionate remembrance of your respect and goodwill (9:21a). Antiochus describes his physical illness (9:21b), and how he has chosen a successor for himself (9:22-26). His son, another Antiochus, will be encouraged to follow the new policies of “moderation and benevolence” (9:27) toward the Jews. But even though he may have seen the proverbial “light” in his final days, the Epitomist by no means considers his sins atoned for. His epitaph of Antiochus Epiphanes is, **“So this murderer and blasphemer, suffering the greatest agony, such as he had made others suffer, met a pitiable end in the mountains of a foreign land”** (9:28). His body was brought back, but his close friend Philip feared the successor Antiochus (9:29).

You can definitely get a sense from examining the remaining chapters of 2 Maccabees that the Epitomist is jumping over a great deal of data, which Jason of Cyrene likely elaborated on more fully. The Epitomist summarizes how Jerusalem and the Temple precinct were recovered

by Judah Maccabee (10:1). The pagan altars are demolished, the sanctuary is purified, sacrifices are offered for the first time in two years, and the worship vessels are restored to their rightful place (10:2-3). When the Temple practices are restored, prayer is offered to the Lord, “that he would never again allow them to fall into such disasters but, were they ever to sin, would discipline them himself with clemency rather than hand them over to blasphemous and barbarous Gentiles” (10:4). The Epitomist asserts how on the 25th of Kislev, the same day on which the Temple had been previously defiled, it was now restored to proper order (10:5). Following the rededication, a commemoration of what the Maccabees had done took place, lasting eight days, not too dissimilar from the prior remembered Feast of Tabernacles:

“The joyful celebration lasted for eight days, like the feast of Tabernacles,¹² and they recalled how, only a short time before, they had kept that feast while living like wild animals in the mountains and caves. So carrying garlanded wands and flowering branches, as well as palm-fronds, they chanted hymns to the One who had so triumphantly achieved the purification of his own temple. A decree was passed by the public assembly that every year the entire Jewish nation should keep these days holy” (10:6-8).

We see here the establishment of *Chanukah* as a unique and special national holiday for the Jewish people. This new Feast of Dedication originally used the Feast of Tabernacles as a prototype for celebration, but was to remember the liberation and dedication of the Temple from the Seleucid Greek occupiers of Jerusalem. Yet we are reminded, simply because the Temple has now been rededicated before the Lord, and is back in working order, the conflict with the Seleucids *is by no means over*. While there is debate among interpreters whether or not the material that follows is actually in historical order, it still gives the reader an important picture of how the Jewish nation was encroached upon by adversaries.

The Epitomist moves his readers forward, having just described the death of Antiochus Epiphanes (10:9), now intending to discuss the evil that his son and successor, Antiochus Eupator, performed (10:10). Upon becoming king, Antiochus appointed Lysias as governor of Coele-Syria, who succeeded Ptolemaeus (10:11). The Epitomist makes the important observation that “Because of the injustice formerly done to the Jews, Ptolemaeus had taken the lead in treating them with justice and endeavoured to maintain amicable relations with them. For this he was denounced to Eupator by the king’s Friends; on every side he heard himself called traitor...He still enjoyed power, but no longer respect, and he ended his own life by taking poison” (10:12-13). This official, who had favorable policies toward the Jews, was not trusted and eventually committed suicide.

When a man named Gorgias becomes governor of the region, “he hired mercenaries and seized every opportunity of attacking the Jews” (10:14). The same was true of the nearby Idumeans, who saw an opportunity “to foment hostilities” (10:15). The Idumeans make themselves a prime target of the Maccabees, as Judah Maccabee issues “public prayers entreating God to fight on their side” (10:16), then launching an assault on the Idumeans. According to the Epitomist, “They pressed the attack vigorously and captured them, driving off those who manned the walls and cutting down everyone they encountered. No less than twenty thousand of the enemy were killed” (10:17).

Nine thousand took refuge in two forts able to withstand a siege (10:18). Judah leaves his brothers Simon and Josephus, along with a Zaccheus, behind to attack, as he leaves for other areas that needed help (10:19). The Epitomist records that “Simon’s men were avaricious, and when they were offered some seventy thousand drachmas by some of those in the forts, they accepted the bribe and let them slip through their lines” (10:20). There is some serious controversy about this statement because of what follows: “On being informed of this, [Judas] Maccabaeus denounced the men before the assembled leaders of the army for having sold their brothers for money by letting their enemies escape to fight again, and he had them executed as traitors” (10:21-22a). While the Idumean fort is destroyed, and “his military operations were crowned with complete success” (10:23a), it could appear that Simon as his brother (and later successor) is a

¹² Grk. *skēnōmatōn tropōn*; “in the manner of the feast of booths” (RSV).

complete failure. Yet, John R. Bartlett suggests, “If Simon here is Judas’s brother, 2 Maccabees discredits him utterly; but if this Simon is included among the traitors killed, the identification falls.”¹³ It is not impossible that this is another Simon.

Timotheus, who had been previously humiliated by the Maccabees, returns to attack the Jews, this time with a force of mercenaries and cavalry (10:24). The piety of the Maccabees is lauded: “At his approach, [Judas] Maccabaeus and his men made their prayer to God; they sprinkled dust on their heads and put sackcloth around their waists, prostrated themselves on the altar-step and entreated God to show them favour—in the words of the law: ‘to be an enemy of their enemies and an opponent of their opponents’” (10:25-26; cf. Exodus 23:22). The Maccabean force moves a considerable distance from Jerusalem to meet Timotheus’ army (10:27), and as put by the Epitomist, “For the Jews success and victory were assured, not only because of their courage but still more because they had recourse to the Lord, whereas the other side had only their own fury to lead them into battle” (10:28).

The battle ensues, and growing more fierce the Epitomist describes how “there appeared to the enemy five magnificent figures in the sky, each riding a horse with a golden bridle. Placing themselves at the head of the Jews, they formed a circle round Maccabaeus and kept him unharmed under the protection of their armour, while they launched arrows and thunderbolts at the enemy, who, confused and blinded, broke in complete disarray” (10:29-30). Because of this supernatural military intervention, it is recorded that twenty-five thousand infantry and six hundred cavalry of the enemy are killed (10:31).

Timotheus flees to Gazara in defeat, to a stronghold with a heavy garrison (10:32). He is pursued by Judah Maccabee, who lays siege to the place for four days (10:33). As the Jews attack, “The defenders, confident in the strength of their position, hurled horrible and wicked blasphemies at them until, at dawn on the fifth day, twenty young men from the Maccabean force, burning with rage at the blasphemy, bravely stormed the wall and in savage fury cut down all they encountered” (10:34-35). This serves well for the rest of the Maccabees who attack, as the stronghold is taken and many are burned alive, with the city occupied (10:36). Timotheus himself, hiding in a cistern, too meets his end (10:37). The Epitomist can say, “In celebration of their achievement, the Jews praised with hymns and thanksgivings the Lord who showers benefits on Israel and gives them the victory” (10:38).

This great victory does not go without a backlash from the Seleucids (11:1). The viceregent Lysias, musters an army of eighty thousand, and a large amount of cavalry, to march against the Jews. His intention was to make Jerusalem a fully Gentile city (11:2), including “the temple subject to taxation like all gentile shrines and the high-priesthood up for auction each year” (11:3). The Epitomist observes, “Reckoning not at all with the might of God, he was carried away by the thought of his tens of thousands of infantry, his thousands of cavalry, his eighty elephants” (11:4). Invading Judea, he fortifies himself about twenty miles from Jerusalem (11:5).

The Epitomist narrates how “When Maccabaeus and his men were informed that Lysias was besieging their strongholds, they and all the people, wailing and weeping, prayed the Lord to send a good angel to deliver Israel” (11:6). Judah Maccabee took up arms, and urged his companions to do so to rescue their fellow Jews (11:7). The Epitomist describes how “While they were still in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, there appeared at their head a horseman arrayed in white and brandishing golden weapons” (11:8). The Maccabees’ only response to seeing this is one of joy: “With one voice they praised their merciful God and felt so strong in spirit that they could have attacked not only men but also the most savage animals, or even walls of iron” (11:9). When the battle commences, to the Epitomist, defeat of the enemy is just inevitable:

“Under the Lord’s mercy and with their heavenly ally they came on in battle array. Like lions they hurled themselves on the enemy, laid low eleven thousand foot-soldiers, as well as sixteen hundred cavalry, and put the remainder to flight. Most of those who escaped had lost their

¹³ Bartlett, in *ECB*, 843.

weapons and were wounded, and Lysias himself saved his life, if not his honour, by ignominiously taking to his heels” (11:10-12).

Lysias had to escape from the devastating defeat described by the Epitomist. He was a man who “was no fool, and as he took stock of the defeat he had suffered he realized that the Hebrews were invincible, because God in his power fought on their side” (11:13). Lysias sends representatives to the Jews to broker a peace agreement, promising that the king will be favorable to them (11:14). Judah Maccabee agrees, especially because “the king had accepted whatever written terms Maccabaeus had forward to Lysias from the Jewish side” (11:15). The Epitomist includes the Maccabees’ letter to Lysias, which mostly includes how the two sides were trying to wish one another well, in the hope of cordial relations for the future (11:16-21).

The king’s letter, delivering instructions to Lysias, is also included (11:21). It is perhaps of no small importance that King Antiochus first writes, “Now that our royal father has joined the company of the gods...” (11:22a). Within the instruction to Lysias includes a reference to how the Jews were obviously not prepared to adopt Greek ways (11:24a), and how it is best that they remain allowed to observe their own religion and laws (11:24b). He says, “We hereby decree that their temple be restored to them and that they be allowed to regulate their lives in accordance with their ancestral customs” (11:25). Lysias is expected to convey this good intention to the Jewish people (11:26). King Antiochus also sends a letter to the Jewish people themselves, granting a period of amnesty for Jews to return home (11:27-30). Quite notable is the stipulation, “The Jews may follow their own food-laws...” (11:31a). Another interesting part of this section of 2 Maccabees is the interjection of the Romans Quintus Memmius and Titus Manilius, who were apparently active diplomats in the East overseeing Roman interests.¹⁴ They too are informed of the new policies of the Seleucid regime, and have apparently served as intermediaries on behalf of the Jews (11:32-38).

Simply because a peace between the new King Antiochus and the Jews has been established on paper, by no means is an indication that it is going to be enacted. The Epitomist is forced to tell his audience more accounts of where the Jews’ safety was threatened. After this peace agreement is brokered, “The Jews busied themselves on their farms, but they were prevented from leading stable and tranquil lives by some of the governors of the region” (12:1b-2a). The exploits of the Maccabees that are described—even though the Temple has already been rededicated—communicate to the Jews’ neighbors that they will defend themselves and their interests.

“A dastardly atrocity was perpetuated by the inhabitants of Joppa: they invited the Jews living among them to embark with their wives and children in boats they had provided, giving no indication of any animosity towards them” (12:3). Apparently, being a largely non-Jewish city, the people of Joppa wanted the Jews to peacefully leave, given the complicated history of recent events. “As it was a public decision by the whole town and because they wished to live in peace and suspected nothing, the Jews accepted; but once out at sea the people of Joppa sank the boats, drowning no fewer than two hundred of the Jews” (12:4). Judah Maccabee hears of this, and orders up his troops (12:5). Being righteously indignant, he was “invoking God the just judge,” falling “upon the murderers” (12:6a). The port of Joppa was lit on fire during the night (12:6b). Judah was unable to return to attack the city itself, as he learned that the people of Jamnia were planning a similar ploy to the Jews there. So, Judah attacks Jamnia, lighting its port and ships on fire—such a sight that the flames were able to be seen in Jerusalem (12:7-9).

While the attack on Jamnia had been a success, the Epitomist describes that they were set upon by five thousand Arabs, and five hundred horsemen (12:10). Only with God’s help in battle were the Jews victorious (12:11a). Interestingly enough, seeing the futility of trying to fight the Jews in the future, “The defeated nomads begged Judas to make an alliance with them, promising to supply cattle and to furnish the Jews with all other assistance” (12:11b). Judas agrees, and allows the Arabs to return to their tents (12:12).

¹⁴ Neil J. McEleneay, “The Second Book of the Maccabees,” in *The Oxford Study Bible*, 1250.

Judah Maccabee continues his campaign of establishing Jewish dominance over the region. He attacks Caspin, a walled city (12:13). The people are confident that their town is sufficiently fortified, treating “Judas and his men with insolence, abusing them and uttering the most wicked blasphemies” (12:14). The Maccabees, though, call upon “the great Ruler of the universe” who had defeated Jericho “without the aid of battering-ram or siege-engine” (12:15). Caspin was rushed and captured. The Epitomist describes, “The carnage was indescribable; the nearby lake, a quarter of a mile wide, appeared to be overflowing with blood” (12:16).

Judah Maccabee has every intent on capturing Timotheus, the governor of the region, who alludes them. His force makes its way to Charax, a place inhabited by Tubian Jews (12:17). Timotheus had withdrawn from the district, yet he did leave behind a strong garrison (12:18), which the Maccabean generals Dositheus and Sosipater quickly destroyed, killing ten thousand (12:19). Judah Maccabee himself, though, divides his forces into various sub-units, hurrying in pursuit of Timotheus, who had a hundred and twenty thousand infantry and twenty-five hundred cavalry (12:20). As the Maccabees advance on Timotheus’ force, the Epitomist recounts how “panic seized the enemy, who were terrified at a hostile manifestation of the all-seeing One. In headlong flight they rushed in all directions, so that frequently they were injured by their own comrades and run through by the points of their swords” (12:22). Judah’s forces take advantage of their confusion, killing thirty thousand (12:23). Timotheus was captured by the Maccabean forces commanded by Dositheus and Sosipater, but was actually able to convince them to let him go. He was a man of influence, after all, and could use his power to set free some of the Jewish family members who had been taken prisoner (12:24-25). Whether he actually did this is not stated.

Another stronghold is attacked at Carnaim, where twenty-five thousand are killed (12:26). The next target is Ephron, a city heavily fortified with “a great supply of engines of war and missiles” (12:27). The Jewish force once again invoked “the Ruler whose might shatters the enemy’s strength,” and “made themselves masters of the town and laid low as many as twenty-five thousand” (12:28). The Maccabean forces move again to Scythopolis, seventy-five miles from Jerusalem (12:29). There, they are actually told by the Jews that there was “goodwill shown them by the people and the kindness with which they had been treated in times of misfortune” (12:30). Appreciating this, “Judas and his men thanked them, charging them to be no less friendly to the Jews in the future” (12:31a), returning to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks (12:31b).

When their observance is over, the Maccabees march against Gorgias, who was in control of Idumea (12:32). In battle, he comes out with a force of three thousand men and four hundred cavalry (12:33), with only a small number of Jews killed (12:34). In the battle, a Tubian Jew, Dositheus, “caught hold of Gorgias by his cloak and was dragging the villain off by main force, with the object of taking him alive” (12:35a). Instead, a Thracian horsemen bore down on him, cutting off his arm, enabling Gorgias to escape (12:35b).

The fighting against Gorgias’ force proved exhausting for the Maccabees, in particular those commanded by Esdras (12:36a). So, Judah “appealed to the Lord to show himself their ally and leader in battle” (12:36b), and so he issues a battle cry of hymns in Hebrew to God, launching a surprise attack (12:37). Later, regrouping his forces, Judah settles for the Sabbath at Adullam (12:38). Following this, the bodies of those who had died were collected for burial (12:39). As they collect the dead, idolatrous amulets of Jamnia, forbidden by the Torah, are found, and this is believed to be the very reason that these soldiers died (12:40).

Some very interesting words are then provided by the Epitomist, as praise is actually issued to God for revealing this secret (12:41). The Maccabees turn to praying, especially so that this sin of them carrying idols can be erased (12:42a). “The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from wrongdoing, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen” (12:42b). Monies are collected so that a sin-offering could be made back in Jerusalem (12:43a). This is considered to be “a fit and proper act in which he took due account of the resurrection” (12:43b). The challenging words to understand are where the Epitomist describes,

“Had he not been expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and senseless to pray for the dead; but since he had in view the splendid reward reserved for those who die a godly death, his purpose was holy and devout. That was why he offered the atoning sacrifice, to free the dead from their sins” (12:44-45).

Some later Catholic theologians would take these words and around them develop the doctrine of Purgatory, a temporary place of holding for the righteous dead until their final sins are extirpated, enabling them to enter Heaven. Because of the difficulty of the situation witnessed here in 2 Maccabees, and the literary style of the Epitomist in summarizing Jason of Cyrene's original work, readers need to be cautious in the conclusions they draw.¹⁵ Was it really the intention for Judah Maccabee to atone for the sins of these Jews who had fallen? *Or is this a conclusion of the Epitomist?* Could the original intention of Judah Maccabee—in at least trying to atone for these sins—actually been to serve as a warning to the rest of his living force who had not (at least to him) used idolatrous amulets?

While we can be thankful that the editor of 2 Maccabees affirms the doctrine of resurrection, his hamartology or theology of sin may be too clouded in his unique writing style. He may also reflect an ancient Jewish view that only the righteous were to experience the resurrection and be welcomed into the world to come, whereas the Apostolic Scriptures affirm Daniel 12:2 and the condemned also experiencing a resurrection unto judgment (Revelation 20:6). **This is ultimately why 2 Maccabees is a part of the Apocrypha or deuterocanon.**

The Epitomist's record continues, as Judah Maccabee hears that Antiochus Eupator is marching with a large army against Judea (13:1), accompanied by Lysias. This force included one hundred ten thousand infantry, five thousand three hundred cavalry, twenty-two elephants, and three hundred special chariots (13:2). Also joining them was the high priest Menelaus: “This he did most disingenuously, not for his country's good, but because he believed he would be established in office” (13:3). It is observed, though, “The King of kings...stirred up the anger of Antiochus against this wicked man, and when Lysias produced evidence that Menelaus was responsible for all the troubles, the king ordered him to be taken to Beroea and there executed in the manner customary at that place” (13:4). This opportunist, who had committed heinous deeds against his own people, is finally rewarded for his sins. The unique method of death that Menelaus experiences does not go unnoticed:

“In Beroea there is a tower some seventy-five feet high, filled with ashes; it has a circular device sloping down sheer on all sides into the ashes. This is where the citizens take anyone guilty of sacrilege or any other heinous crime, and thrust him to his doom; and such was the fate of the renegade Menelaus, who, in accordance with his just deserts, was not even given burial in the earth. Many a time he had desecrated the sacred ashes of the altarfire, and by ashes he met his death” (13:5-8).

The high priest Menelaus is apparently thrown into a cremation cauldron, where in this town, criminals were executed. Without doing a thorough background study, suffice it to say this was one of the worst methods of dying that a Jew—even an unfaithful one—could experience. Historically, the Jewish people have extensively frowned on cremation, believing that God will not be able to resurrect a body from ashes. According to the Epitomist, Menelaus was so evil, he had even desecrated a place where criminals were dishonored in death.

Simply because Menelaus is vacated, does not mean that the Maccabees will have an easy time against Antiochus Eupator. The Epitomist says, “In savage arrogance the king came on, aiming to inflict sufferings on the Jews far worse than they had endured under his father. When Judas learnt of this, he ordered the people to invoke the Lord day and night, and pray that now more than ever he would come to their aid, since law, country, and holy temple were all at risk” (13:9-10). **Even though the Temple had been rededicated, more sustained conflict was on the scene.** Judah Maccabee was insistent that the Jewish nation not fall into the hands of idolaters, just as they were starting to rebuild themselves (13:11). It is stated that at his orders “They all

¹⁵ As Bartlett notes, “This passage, witnessing to the idea of prayer for the dead, has been the cause of much Protestant reluctance to accept this and other apocryphal books as Holy Scripture” (in *ECB*, 846).

complied: for three days without respite they prayed to their merciful Lord, they wailed, they fasted, they prostrated themselves” (13:12a).

Judah convenes a council of war, and it is decided not to wait for the enemy to invade Judea, taking Jerusalem—but with the help of God to march out and fight (13:13). The Epitomist lauds, “He committed the outcome to the Lord of the universe, and exhorted his troops to fight nobly to the death for the law, temple, and city, for their country and their way of life” (13:14). Setting camp at Modin, Judah gives his army the watchword “Victory with God!” and then launches a secret night attack (13:15a). Two thousand in the enemy camp are killed, including the death of the leading elephant (13:15b). This operation succeeds in creating panic throughout the enemy camp, with the Epitomist recognizing how the Maccabees had received help from the Lord (13:16-17).

It is indicated that the king “had a taste of Jewish daring” (13:18a), and so he had to alter his tactics, specifically by “probing their positions” (13:18b). Antiochus Eupator advances on Bethsura, a strong fort, first being repulsed and then being defeated (13:19). Judah Maccabee sends supplies to the garrison (13:20), but while this is happening, a Jewish soldier named Rhodocus is caught passing secret information to the enemy, for which he is executed (13:21). Antiochus then engages with Judah Maccabee’s force directly, “but had the worse of it” (13:22). Furthermore, he must quickly return back to the capitol at Antioch, as Philip, who was administrating the empire, was trying to fully gain the reigns of power (13:23a). Being concerned about his throne, “In consternation the king summoned the Jews, agreed to their terms, and took an oath to respect all their rights. After reaching this settlement he offered a sacrifice, paid honour to the sanctuary and its precincts, and received Maccabaeus in a friendly manner” (13:23b-24). Hegemonides is left as the governor of the region (13:25a), and Antiochus must quickly retreat for Antioch (13:25b-26).

The Epitomist narrates that after three years, Judah Maccabee and his company hear that Demetrius son of Seleucus had taken over the country, with a large fleet arriving at Tripolis with a powerful army (14:1-2). A certain Alcimus, who had once been high priest, and who is said to have “willingly submitted to defilement at the time of the revolt” (14:3a), takes advantage of Demetrius’ arrival as an opportunity. He goes to King Demetrius, along with a gold crown and palm, and special olive branches from the Temple (14:3b-4). Meeting with Demetrius, Alcimus hatches his scheme (14:5), informing him that “Those Jews called Hasidaeans who are led by Judas Maccabaeus are keeping the war alive and fomenting sedition; they refuse to let the kingdom have peace. Thus, although I have been deprived of my reditary dignity, by which I mean the high-priesthood, I have two motives in coming here today” (14:6-7). What Alcimus intends to do is stated to King Demetrius:

“[F]irst, I have a genuine concern for the king’s interests; and secondly, a regard for my fellow-citizens, since our whole race is suffering considerable hardship as a result of the senseless conduct of those people I have mentioned. My advice to your majesty is to get to know the details of these matters and then, as befits your universal kindness and goodwill, make provision for our country and our beleaguered nation” (14:8-9).

Alcimus’ opportunism can easily be seen by his word, “For as long as Judas remains alive there can be no peace for the state” (14:10). Saying this, other members of the order of king’s Friends spoke up, adding “fresh fuel to Demetrius’s anger” (14:11). King Demetrius selects Nicanor, a commander of the elephant guard, and makes him the governor of Judea (14:12). Nicanor is granted a commission to rout out the Maccabean forces, and see that Alcimus is installed as high priest (14:13). Any of the Gentiles in the region, having suffered by the military actions of Judah Maccabee, joined to support Nicanor, “supposing that defeat and misfortune for the Jews would spell prosperity for them” (14:14).

The Epitomist is still quite concerned about the religious piety of the Maccabees, speaking of how “When the Jews heard of Nicanor’s offensive and the onset of the Gentiles, they sprinkled dust over themselves and prayed to him who has established his people for ever, who never fails to manifest himself and afford help when his chosen are in need” (14:15). Having appealed to God for help, the Maccabean force moves out and meets the enemy at Adasa (14:16). Simon, Judah’s

brother, had fought with Nicanor, but was deterred (14:17). Interestingly enough, even though he had a large military force, the Epitomist can record: "In spite of this, when Nicanor learnt how brave Judas and his troops were and how courageously they fought for their country, he shrank from deciding the issue by the sword" (14:18). Emissaries are sent to negotiate a peace agreement (14:19).

Hearing the proposals, Judah and his men have a favorable disposition to accepting them (14:20). When the day comes to finalize the agreement, special seats are placed in the middle of the two armies (14:21). Judah was sure to place "armed men at strategic points ready to deal with any sudden treachery on the enemy's part" (14:22a), but the Epitomist instead observes how "The discussion between the two leaders was harmonious. Nicanor stayed some time in Jerusalem and behaved correctly. Dismissing the crowds that had flocked from round about, he kept Judas close to himself at all times, for he had developed a real affection for him" (14:22b-24). The Epitomist even says how Nicanor "urged him to marry and have children; so Judas married and settled down to the quiet life of an ordinary citizen" (14:25). Some kind of peace between the Jewish nation and their Seleucid Greek neighbors was able to be concluded.

Alcimus, the one who convinced King Demetrius that the Maccabees were a threat to him, gets a copy of the peace settlement (14:26a). He goes to King Demetrius "and claimed that Nicanor was pursuing a policy detrimental to the interests of the state by appointing Judas, a man guilty of conspiracy, as king's Friend designate" (14:26b). King Demetrius, infuriated, sends Nicanor an order that Judah Maccabee is to be arrested and sent to the capitol at Antioch (14:27). The Epitomist relays how "The instructions dismayed Nicanor, and he took it hard that he should have to go back on his agreement when the man had committed no offence" (14:28). Yet, we find the old axiom "orders are orders" at work, because "since there was no gainsaying with the king, he watched for an opportunity of carrying out the order by some stratagem" (14:29). Judah Maccabee notices that Nicanor's original friendly disposition toward him had waned, and so he goes into hiding (14:30).

What can Nicanor do in enacting the royal order? "Recognizing that he had been outmanoeuvred by the resolute action of Judas, Nicanor appeared before the great and holy temple at the time when the priests were offering the regular sacrifices, and ordered them to surrender Judas" (14:31). The priests swear that they do not know where he is (14:32), but that is not good enough. "Nicanor stretched out his right hand towards the shrine and swore this oath: 'Unless you surrender Judas to me in chains, I shall level this sanctuary of God to the ground and destroy the altar; on this spot I shall build a temple to Dionysus for all the world to see' (14:33). Hearing this severe threat, and knowing that only shortly before the Temple had been cleansed of defilement, the priests call out to the Almighty:

"Lord, you have no need of anything in the world, yet it was your pleasure that among us there should be a shrine for your dwelling-place; now, holy Lord from whom all holiness comes, keep this house, so recently purified, free from defilement for ever" (14:35-36).

In order to demonstrate how serious Nicanor is about Judah Maccabee being found, he makes an example of a Jewish man named Razis. He is a distinguished Jewish leader, for whom the Epitomist issues some high words: "He was a patriot and very highly spoken of, one who for his loyalty was known as Father of the Jews. In the early days of the revolt he had stood trial for practicing the Jewish religion, and with no hesitation had risked life and limb for that cause" (14:37b-38). So severe did Nicanor want to make an example of him, five hundred troops are sent to arrest Razis (14:39), with the intention of this being "a severe blow to the Jews" (14:40). Troops pressed against his home compound, with calls even to burn it down (14:41). Razis prepares to actually fall on a sword, rather than being captured, as it was better "to die nobly rather than fall into the hands of evil men and be subjected to gross humiliation" (14:42). With things happening quickly, though, Nicanor's troops then poured into his house. Razis decides on a whim to run up to the wall around the house, and then throw himself down into the crowd (14:43-44).

When Razis is found "He was still breathing and still ablaze with courage; streaming with blood and severely wounded as he was, he picked himself up and dashed through the crowd"

(14:45a-b). Apparently, the fall had not killed him as he intended, and the Epitomist records a very gruesome scene indeed: “Finally, standing on a sheer rock, and now completely drained of blood, he tore out his entrails and with both hands flung them at the crowd” (14:45c-46a). To the Epitomist, Razis died a godly death, “invoking him who disposes of life and breath to give them back to him again” (14:16b). Certainly, while Razis’ self-martyrdom is something that we can respect, as he by no means gave up his faith in God or loyalty to the Torah, it is safe to say that it asks more questions than it answers as Razis died of causes he created.

The Book of 2 Maccabees ends, as we should expect it to, on a high note, with one last victory accomplished. Nicanor receives a report that Judah Maccabee is in the vicinity of Samaria, and so he plans to attack him on the Sabbath (15:1). The Epitomist relays how “Those Jews who were forced to accompany his army begged him not to carry out so savage and barbaric a massacre” (15:2a). They cry, “Have regard for the day singled out and made holy by the all-seeing One” (15:2b). Nicanor has no respect for the Jewish religion, taunting back, “Is there some ruler in the sky who has ordered the sabbath-day observance?” (15:3). The Jews he pressed into service respond, “The living Lord himself is ruler in the sky, and he commanded the seventh day to be kept holy” (15:4).¹⁶ Nicanor’s arrogance prevents him from considering their claim: “And I am ruler on earth...I order you to take up arms and do your duty to the king” (15:5a). For the Epitomist, though, “he did not succeed in carrying out this outrage he had planned” (15:5b).

Nicanor’s plan was to actually “erect a public trophy from the spoils taken from Judas’s army” (15:6). Yet would he be able to do this? The Epitomist issues a great laud for Judah Maccabee, both his piety and tenacity, in standing up to God-less aggression:

“But Maccabaeus’s confidence never wavered, and he had not the least doubt that he would obtain help from the Lord. He urged his men to have no fear of the gentile attack, but to bear in mind the aid they had received from Heaven in the past and look with confidence to the Almighty for the victory he would send them on this occasion also. He drew encouragement for them from the law and the prophets and, by reminding them of the struggles they had already come through, filled them with a fresh ardour. When he had roused their courage, he issued his orders, reminding them at the same time of the Gentiles’ broken faith and perjury. He armed each one of them, not so much with shield and spear for protection, as with brave and reassuring words; and he cheered them all by recounting a dream he had had, a waking vision worthy of belief” (15:7-11).

The Epitomist details how Judah Maccabee had seen a motivating vision, by which Divine approval was given to the Maccabees’ cause in fighting the Seleucid Greeks:

“What he had seen was this: there had appeared to him the former high priest Onias, a good and noble man of modest bearing and mild disposition, a ready and apt speaker, an exemplar from childhood of every virtue; with uplifted hands Onias was praying for the whole Jewish community. Next there appeared in the same attitude a figure of great age and dignity, whose wonderful air of authority marked him as a man of the utmost distinction. Onias then spoke: ‘This is God’s prophet Jeremiah,’ he said, ‘one who loves his fellow-Jews and constantly offers prayers for the people and for the Holy City.’ Extending his right hand Jeremiah presented a golden sword to Judas, saying as he did so, ‘Take this holy sword, a gift from God, and with it shatter the enemy’” (15:12-16).

Judah Maccabee’s words had a significant influence on his troops, especially with the Prophet Jeremiah, a devoutly righteous man, appearing in his dream. Boys were able to be as courageous as men (15:17a). They would all fight decisively, not in a long campaign, but “by fighting in close combat with all their courage. This they did because Jerusalem, their religion, and the temple were in peril” (15:17b-c). The fear that the Maccabean soldiers demonstrated was not for their wives and children, or even their fellow brothers, but for the sanctity of the Temple (15:18)—in spite of how those bunkered down in Jerusalem “were anxious about the outcome of a battle on open ground” (15:19).

¹⁶ Is this an indication that these Jews thought that the Sabbath was only something for Israel, or something that had wider implications for all people?

You can definitely tell that the Epitomist crafts the battle with Nicanor as a fitting conclusion to his work. He builds up the intensity, as “All were awaiting the decisive struggle which lay ahead. The enemy had already concentrated his forces: his army drawn up in battle order, the elephants strategically positioned, and the cavalry ranged on the flanks. Maccabaeus observed the deployment of the troops, the variety of their weapons, and the ferocity of the elephants” (15:20-21a). All Judah Maccabee can do is what he has done in previous conflicts: **call out to the Lord**. He appeals to God’s previous intervention, especially as He assisted King Hezekiah of Judah in fighting the Assyrian Sennacherib (15:21b-22; cf. 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). Judah appeals, “Now, Ruler of heaven, send a good angel once again to go before us spreading fear and panic. May these blasphemers who are coming to attack your holy people be struck down by your strong arm!” (15:23-24).

Somewhat more than the previous battles, the Epitomist invokes that this is as much a spiritual fight, as it is a physical fight. “Nicanor and his forces advanced to the sound of trumpets and war-songs, but Judas and his men engaged the enemy with invocations and prayers on their lips. Praying to God in their hearts and greatly cheered by his care, they killed no fewer than thirty-five thousand in hand-to-hand fighting” (12:25-27). Of course, the results of the battle, include not only a significant number of the enemy dead, but Nicanor himself is discovered “lying dead in full armour” (12:28). The Maccabees rejoice in Hebrew praises (12:29). Judah Maccabee orders that Nicanor’s head and arm be severed, and taken to Jerusalem for display (12:30-31). This is specifically done because of “the hand which the bragging blasphemer had stretched out against the Almighty’s holy temple” (12:32). Nicanor’s tongue is cut out, and Judah orders that evidence of what he had done be hung up adjacent to the Temple (12:33).

Great praise is issued to the Lord in the defeat of Nicanor (12:34-35), so much so that a decree was issued that this day would go remembered with a commemoration occurring in the 13th of Adar (12:36). All the Epitomist can say is, “Such then, was the fate of Nicanor, and from that time Jerusalem has remained in the possession of the Hebrews” (12:37), an obvious indication that he is compiling his work during a time of a significant Jewish presence in Jerusalem.

The Book of 2 Maccabees then comes to an abrupt close, indicating that the events it recounts stop just short of the record of Judah Maccabee’s death (1 Maccabees 9:1-22). The Epitomist tells his audience, “If [my work] is found to be well written and aptly composed, that is what I myself aimed at; if superficial and mediocre, it was the best I could do” (15:38). He actually compares his summarization work to being like wine mixed with water, something he considers to be “a pleasant and delightful taste” (15:39b), perhaps a reflection of how in his mind, Jason of Cyrene’s original work was either too potent, or too dull. His closing remark is, “so too variety of style in a literary work charms the ear of the reader. Let this, then, be my final word” (15:39c).

Similar to the Epitomist of 2 Maccabees, I have done my best *to summarize* his work, narrating it in a way that will help you appreciate what 2 Maccabees communicates not only to us as Bible students—but more specifically Messianic Believers who see importance in remembering the Festival of Dedication, *Chanukah*. Do you think his Egyptian Jewish readership would have been convinced that honoring the Festival of Dedication was a good thing, reflective of not only Jewish nationalism, but more importantly of holiness and piety toward God? Were the Maccabees people that should have been honored, fighting for the right of the Jewish nation to survive? Should we remember how God intervened, or should we treat these things as legends to be discounted?

The Epitomist of 2 Maccabees is undeniably an artful writer, and he is more concerned with the spiritual and social dynamics of the war with the Seleucids than the author of 1 Maccabees. But no different than 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees too records the hard realities of war. The licentious nature of the sacrilege committed in the Temple is explained in more detail than 1 Maccabees. Most importantly, the religious zeal of the Maccabean forces is lauded, as opposed to the Maccabees just being an army trying to repel invaders from their homeland.

As you read and compare 2 Maccabees with 1 Maccabees, there are certainly historical issues to be considered. The accounts detailed in both books are given from different vantage

points. 2 Maccabees is more of a literary work than an historical piece, and we do have to be reminded that we no longer have Jason of Cyrene's original five-volume work for comparison. More than anything else, although there may be some issues to examine here or there—somewhat critically perhaps—2 Maccabees did affect the worldview of the Jewish people in the First Century C.E. The terrible hardships and martyrdoms that the Maccabees endured, influenced how the Jewish people of Yeshua and the Apostles' time interacted with outsiders. The Maccabean martyrs fought and died for God's Torah, and would have rather given up their lives than eat pork. **How did this sentiment affect the spread of the gospel among the nations in the First Century?**

The long-lasting ramifications of 2 Maccabees cannot be overlooked for their impact on the Jewish social scene as witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures.¹⁷

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *Revised English Bible* (REB), © 1992, Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Consult Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 1259-1276, for a summary of the date, composition, etc. of 1&2 Maccabees.