

Introduction to the Apocrypha – 2 Maccabees Session Two – Priests and the Temple



Onias III from Hartmann Schedel's Nuremberg Chronicles (1493)- Wikipedia

Structure and Contents of 2 Maccabees; Books of the Apocrypha – Different Denominations; Chronology of Seleucid Rulers; Chronology; The Second Book of Maccabees (3:1 – 4:50)

Structure and Contents of 2 Maccabees

The body of the work (chapters 4 – 15) deals with Judean history from King Antiochus IV Epiphanes' ascent to the Seleucid throne in 175 b.c.e. to Judas Maccabeus's victory over the Seleucid general Nicanor in 161 b.c.e. It is prefaced by Palestinian letters urging the Jews of Egypt to celebrate the festival of Hanukkah, which commemorates Judas' purification and rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem in 164 b.c.e., by the abridger's introduction, and a story (chapter 3) about the way the Temple was miraculously preserved from desecration in the days of Antiochus's predecessor, an episode that in its present context serves as something of an idyllic prologue to the book's main story.

Chapter four begins a story that with the introduction of Hellenized institutions into Jerusalem, which according to the author, engendered sinful neglect of true Judaism. God, in response, "disregarded". (5:17) Jerusalem, i.e., suspended his providential care for it and thus allowed terrible things to happen.

– from the New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha – New Revised Standard Version

The Books of the Apocrypha
The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Canons of the Old Testament

	Roman Catholic	Greek Orthodox	(Russian Orthodox)	Latin Vulgate Appendix	Greek Appendix	Protestant Anglican Apocrypha
Tobit	*	*	*			*
Judith	*	*	*			*
Additions to Esther	*	*	*			*
Wisdom of Solomon	*	*	*			*
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)	*	*	*			*
Baruch	*	*	*			*
Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch Ch. 6)	*	*	*			*
Additions to Daniel	*	*	*			*
1 Maccabees	*	*	*			*
2 Maccabees	*	*	*			*
1 Esdras		*	*	*		*
Prayer of Manasseh		*	*	*		*
Psalms 151		*	*			
3 Maccabees		*	*			
2 Esdras			*	*		*
4 Maccabees					*	

- from the *New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha - New Revised Standard Version*

Chronological Table of Seleucid Rulers

223 – 187: Antiochus III
 187 – 175: Seleucus IV Philopator
 175 – 164: Antiochus IV Epiphanes
 164 – 162: Antiochus V Eupator (and Lysias)
 162 – 150: Demetrius I Soter
 150 – 145: Alexander I Balas
 145 – 139: Demetrius II Nicator
 139 – 142: Antiochus VI (and Trypho)
 138 – 129: Antiochus VII Sidetes

- from *First and Second Maccabees* by Daniel J. Harrington

Chronology

970 – 931 b.c.e.	Reign of Solomon	Assyrian Dominance
722	Fall of Samaria (Israel – the Northern Kingdom)	
612	Babylonians conquer Nineveh	Egypt in Ascendancy Assyria in decline
605	Battle of Carchemish – Babylon/Media/Persia defeat Assyria and Egypt	
597	Babylon attacks Judah – Jehoiakim dies during siege Jeconiah captured and exiled	
587 – 586	Jerusalem under siege – city and Temple destroyed Many more Jews taken to Exile in Babylon	
539	Cyrus the Great (Persia) defeats Babylon	
538	Some Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem	
520 – 515	Second temple is built under supervision of Haggi & Zechariah	
450	Ezra first reads from the Torah at the Watergate	
334	Alexander the Great (Conquered the Persian Empire – 334)	
323	Death of Alexander – Empire is ultimately divided four ways: Cassander – Lysimachus – Seleucus – Ptolemy (310)	
	The Ptolemies (Egypt) dominate Judah - Jerusalem	
198 b.c.e.	The Seleucids defeat the Ptolemies & control of Israel (Antiochus III)	
175	Antiochus IV Epiphanes becomes Seleucid ruler; Jason is the Jewish high priest	
172	Menelaus as Jewish high priest	
169	Antiochus IV's first Egyptian campaign; plunder of the Jerusalem temple	
168	Antiochus IV's second Egyptian campaign; founding of the Jerusalem citadel	
167	Desecration of the temple; persecution of Judeans	
165	Death of Mattathias; Judas leads the revolt	
164	Rededication of the temple; death of Antiochus IV	
162	Alcimus as Jewish high priest	
161	Judas' victory over Nicanor; alliance with Rome; death of Judas; accession of Jonathan	
159	Death of Alcimus	
152	Jonathan as Jewish high priest	
142	Death of Jonathan; accession of Simon	
141	Conquest of the citadel	
134	Death of Simon; accession of John Hyrcanus	
104	Death of John Hyrcanus	
104 – 37	Succession of Hasmonean priests (Aristobulus I, Alexander Jannaeus, Salome Alexandra, Hyrcanus II, Aristobulus II, Antigonus)	
**63	Pompey conquers Jerusalem for Rome 63 b.c.e.	

- 37 – 4 Herod (the Great) appointed king of Judah by the Roman Senate in 40 b.c.e. With an army, Herod captured Jerusalem in 37 and sent Antigonus to Marc Antony for execution.
**This ended the line of Hasmonean (Maccabean) rulers in Judea. Herod was the son of Antipater the Idumaean, an advisor to Hyrcanus II. Antipater was perhaps the real power in Judea between 63 and 40 under control of the Romans.*
- 31 Octavius (Augustus) defeats Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium. Augustus was emperor from 31 b.c.e. – 14 c.e.
- 4 b.c.e. Birth of Jesus
- 70 c.e. Rome destroys Jerusalem including the Temple

Second Maccabees – Chapters Three and Four

Chapter 3

¹ While the holy city was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were strictly observed because of the piety of the high priest Onias and his hatred of wickedness, ² it came about that the kings themselves honored the place and glorified the temple with the finest presents, ³ even to the extent that King Seleucus of Asia defrayed from his own revenues all the expenses connected with the service of the sacrifices.

⁴ But a man named Simon, of the tribe of Balgea, who had been made captain of the temple, had a disagreement with the high priest about the administration of the city market. ⁵ Since he could not prevail over Onias, he went to Apollonius of Tarsus, who at that time was governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, ⁶ and reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices but that it was possible for them to fall under the control of the king. ⁷ When Apollonius met the king, he told him of the money about which he had been informed. The king chose Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, and sent him with commands to effect the removal of the reported wealth.⁸ Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, ostensibly to make a tour of inspection of the cities of Coelesyria and Phoenicia but in fact to carry out the king's purpose.

⁹ When he had arrived at Jerusalem and had been kindly welcomed by the high priest of the city, he told about the disclosure that had been made and stated why he had come, and he inquired whether this really was the situation. ¹⁰ The high priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans ¹¹ and also some money of Hyrcanus son of Tobias, a man of very prominent position, and that it totaled in all four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold. To such an extent the impious Simon had misrepresented the facts. ¹² And he said that it was utterly impossible that wrong should be done to those people who had trusted in

the holiness of the place and in the sanctity and inviolability of the temple that is honored throughout the whole world.

¹³ But Heliodorus, because of the orders he had from the king, said that this money must in any case be confiscated for the king's treasury. ¹⁴ So he set a day and went in to direct the inspection of these funds.

There was no little distress throughout the whole city. ¹⁵ The priests prostrated themselves before the altar in their priestly vestments and called toward heaven upon him who had given the law about deposits, that he should keep them safe for those who had deposited them. ¹⁶ To see the appearance of the high priest was to be wounded at heart, for his face and the change in his color disclosed the anguish of his soul. ¹⁷ For terror and bodily trembling had come over the man, which plainly showed to those who looked at him the pain lodged in his heart. ¹⁸ People also hurried out of their houses in crowds to make a general supplication because the holy place was about to be brought into dishonor. ¹⁹ Women girded with sackcloth under their breasts thronged the streets. Some of the young women who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of the windows. ²⁰ And holding up their hands to heaven, they all made supplication. ²¹ There was something pitiable in the prostration of the whole populace and the anxiety of the high priest in his great anguish.

²² While they were calling upon the Almighty Lord that he would keep what had been entrusted safe and secure for those who had entrusted it, ²³ Heliodorus went on with what had been decided. ²⁴ But when he arrived at the treasury with his bodyguard, then and there the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused so great a manifestation that all who had been so bold as to accompany him were astounded by the power of God and became faint with terror. ²⁵ For there appeared to them a magnificently adorned horse, with a rider of frightening appearance; it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold. ²⁶ Two young men also appeared to him, remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed, who stood on either side of him and flogged him continuously, inflicting many blows on him. ²⁷ When he suddenly fell to the ground and deep darkness came over him, his men took him up, put him on a stretcher, ²⁸ and carried him away—this man who had just entered the aforesaid treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard but was now unable to help himself with all his weapons. He recognized clearly the sovereign power of God.

²⁹ While he lay prostrate, speechless because of the divine intervention and deprived of any hope of recovery, ³⁰ they praised the Lord who had acted marvelously for his own place. And the temple, which a little while before was full of fear and disturbance, was filled with joy and gladness, now that the Almighty Lord had appeared.

³¹ Some of Heliodorus's friends quickly begged Onias to call upon the Most High to grant life to one who was lying quite at his last breath. ³² So the high priest, fearing

that the king might get the notion that some foul play had been perpetrated by the Jews with regard to Heliodorus, offered sacrifice for the man's recovery.³³ While the high priest was making the atonement, the same young men appeared again to Heliodorus dressed in the same clothing, and they stood and said, "Be very grateful to the high priest Onias, since for his sake the Lord has granted you your life.³⁴ And see that you, who have been flogged by heaven, report to all people the majestic power of God." Having said this, they vanished.

³⁵ Then Heliodorus offered sacrifice to the Lord and made very great vows to the Savior of his life, and having bidden Onias farewell, he marched off with his forces to the king. ³⁶ He bore testimony to all concerning the deeds of the supreme God, which he had seen with his own eyes. ³⁷ When the king asked Heliodorus what sort of person would be suitable to send on another mission to Jerusalem, he replied, ³⁸ "If you have any enemy or plotter against your government, send him there, for you will get him back thoroughly flogged, if he survives at all, for there is certainly some power of God about the place. ³⁹ For he who has his dwelling in heaven watches over that place himself and brings it aid, and he strikes and destroys those who come to do it injury." ⁴⁰ This was the outcome of the episode of Heliodorus and the protection of the treasury.

Chapter 4

¹ The previously mentioned Simon, who had informed about the money against his own country, slandered Onias, saying that it was he who had incited Heliodorus and had been the real cause of the misfortune. ² He dared to designate as a plotter against the government the man who was the benefactor of the city, the protector of his compatriots, and a zealot for the laws. ³ When his hatred progressed to such a degree that even murders were committed by one of Simon's approved agents, ⁴ Onias recognized that the rivalry was serious and that Apollonius son of Menestheus and governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, was intensifying the malice of Simon. ⁵ So he appealed to the king, not accusing his compatriots but having in view the welfare, both public and private, of all the people. ⁶ For he saw that, without the king's attention, public affairs could not again reach a peaceful settlement and that Simon would not stop his folly.

⁷ When Seleucus died and Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the kingdom, Jason the brother of Onias obtained the high priesthood by corruption, ⁸ promising the king through a petition three hundred sixty talents of silver and from another source of revenue eighty talents. ⁹ In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it and to enroll the people of

Jerusalem as the Antiochenes in Jerusalem.¹⁰ When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life.

¹¹ He set aside the existing royal concessions to the Jews, secured through John the father of Eupolemus, who went on the mission to establish friendship and alliance with the Romans, and he destroyed the lawful ways of living and introduced new customs contrary to the law. ¹² He took delight in establishing a gymnasium right under the citadel, and he induced the noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat. ¹³ There was such an extreme of Hellenization and increase in the adoption of foreign ways because of the surpassing wickedness of Jason, who was ungodly and no true high priest, ¹⁴ that the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar. Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hurried to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena after the signal for the discus throwing, ¹⁵ disdaining the honors prized by their ancestors and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of prestige. ¹⁶ For this reason heavy disaster overtook them, and those whose ways of living they admired and wished to imitate completely became their enemies and punished them. ¹⁷ It is no light thing to show irreverence to the divine laws, a fact that later events will make clear.

¹⁸ When the quadrennial games were being held at Tyre and the king was present, ¹⁹ the vile Jason sent envoys, chosen as being Antiochenes from Jerusalem, to carry three hundred silver drachmas for the sacrifice to Hercules. Those who carried the money, however, thought best not to use it for sacrifice, because that was inappropriate, but to expend it for another purpose. ²⁰ So this money was intended by the sender for the sacrifice to Hercules, but by the decision of its carriers it was applied to the construction of triremes.

²¹ When Apollonius son of Menestheus was sent to Egypt for the coronation^[e] of Philometor as king, Antiochus learned that Philometo had become hostile to his government, and he took measures for his own security. Therefore upon arriving at Joppa he proceeded to Jerusalem. ²² He was welcomed magnificently by Jason and the city and ushered in with a blaze of torches and with shouts. Then he marched his army into Phoenicia.

²³ After a period of three years, Jason sent Menelaus, the brother of the previously mentioned Simon, to carry the money to the king and to complete the records of essential business. ²⁴ But he, when presented to the king, extolled him with an air of authority and secured the high priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver. ²⁵ After receiving the king's orders, he returned, possessing no qualification for the high priesthood but having the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage wild beast. ²⁶ So Jason, who after supplanting his own brother was supplanted by another man, was driven as a fugitive into the land of Ammon. ²⁷ Although Menelaus continued to hold the office, he did not pay regularly any of the money promised to the king. ²⁸ When Sostratus the captain of the citadel kept requesting payment—for the collection of the revenue was his responsibility—the two of them were summoned by the king on account of this

issue. ²⁹ Menelaus left his own brother Lysimachus as deputy in the high priesthood, while Sostratus left Crates, the commander of the Cyprian troops.

³⁰ While such was the state of affairs, it happened that the people of Tarsus and of Mallus revolted because their cities had been given as a present to Antiochis, the king's concubine. ³¹ So the king went hurriedly to settle the trouble, leaving Andronicus, a man of high rank, to act as his deputy. ³² But Menelaus, thinking he had obtained a suitable opportunity, stole some of the gold vessels of the temple and gave them to Andronicus; other vessels, as it happened, he had sold to Tyre and the neighboring cities. ³³ When Onias became fully aware of these acts, he publicly exposed them, having first withdrawn to a place of sanctuary at Daphne near Antioch. ³⁴ Therefore Menelaus, taking Andronicus aside, urged him to kill Onias. Andronicus came to Onias and, resorting to treachery, offered him sworn pledges and gave him his right hand; he persuaded him, in spite of his suspicions, to come out from the place of sanctuary; then, with no regard for justice, he immediately put him out of the way.

³⁵ For this reason not only Jews but many also of other nations were grieved and displeased at the unjust murder of the man. ³⁶ When the king returned from the region of Cilicia, the Jews in the city appealed to him with regard to the unreasonable murder of Onias, and the Greeks shared their hatred of the crime. ³⁷ Therefore Antiochus was grieved at heart and filled with pity and wept because of the moderation and good conduct of the deceased. ³⁸ Inflamed with anger, he immediately stripped the purple robe from Andronicus, tore off his clothes, and led him around the whole city to that very place where he had committed the outrage against Onias, and there he dispatched the bloodthirsty fellow. The Lord thus repaid him with the punishment he deserved.

³⁹ When many acts of sacrilege had been committed in the city by Lysimachus with the connivance of Menelaus, and when report of them had spread abroad, the populace gathered against Lysimachus, because many of the gold vessels had already been stolen. ⁴⁰ Since the crowds were becoming aroused and filled with anger, Lysimachus armed about three thousand men and launched an unjust attack, under the leadership of a certain Auranus, a man advanced in years and no less advanced in folly. ⁴¹ But when the Jews became aware that Lysimachus was attacking them, some picked up stones, some blocks of wood, and others took handfuls of the ashes that were lying around and threw them in wild confusion at Lysimachus and his men. ⁴² As a result, they wounded many of them and killed some and put all the rest to flight; the temple robber himself they killed close by the treasury.

⁴³ Charges were brought against Menelaus about this incident. ⁴⁴ When the king came to Tyre, three men sent by the senate presented the case before him. ⁴⁵ But Menelaus, already as good as beaten, promised a substantial bribe to Ptolemy son of Dorymenes to win over the king. ⁴⁶ Therefore Ptolemy, taking the king aside into a colonnade as if for refreshment, induced the king to change his mind. ⁴⁷ Menelaus,

the cause of all the trouble, he acquitted of the charges against him, while he sentenced to death those unfortunate men who would have been freed uncondemned if they had pleaded even before Scythians. ⁴⁸ And so those who had spoken for the city and the villages and the holy vessels quickly suffered the unjust penalty. ⁴⁹ Therefore even the Tyrians, showing their hatred of the crime, provided magnificently for their funeral. ⁵⁰ But Menelaus, because of the greed of those in power, remained in office, growing in wickedness, having become the chief plotter against his compatriots.

The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha, New Revised Standard Version – Fully Revised Fourth Edition, Michael D. Coogan, Editor, John R. Bartlett, Contributor, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2010

First and Second Maccabees by Daniel J. Harrington, New Collegeville Bible Commentary, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2012

The First and Second Books of the Maccabees, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, by John R. Bartlett, Cambridge at the University Press, New York, Cambridge, UK, 1973