

Introduction to the Apocrypha – 2 Maccabees

Session Four – Judas Maccabeus



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's (1794-1872) depiction of Judas and his army preparing to cleanse the temple.

Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

The Cleansing of the Temple

The Maccabean Revolt

The Second Book of Maccabees (8:1 – 10:38)

The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

The event is dated by 1 Macc. 4:52 to the 25th day of the 9th month, Chislev, in the 148th year. On the Seleucid Babylonian era calculated from spring 312 BCE, this gives December 165 BCE; on the same era calculated from spring 311 BCE, December 164 BCE. On this latter date, it is unlikely that Antiochus IV could have heard of the event before his death (1 Macc. 6:5 – 8) and Bringmann (K. Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judaa*, 1983) argues strongly for the earlier date of 165 BCE. This would mean that the priests restored the sanctuary in autumn 165 BCE, while negotiations were beginning between Antiochus IV and the Jews, which seems likely.

– edited from 1 Maccabees by John R. Bartlett, Bloomsbury Publishing, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, England, 1998

An Alternative View on Dating of the Rededication of the Temple

The rededication of the Jerusalem temple (4:52 – 55) took place on December 14 of 164 B.C., three years to the day from when it had been defiled to make way for the new cult of Baal Shamen. The celebration of the first Hanukkah (4:56 – 59) lasted eight days, as did earlier consecrations of the Jerusalem temple under Solomon and Hezekiah. There was great rejoicing because “the disgrace brought by the Gentiles”

(4:58) had been removed. Therefore, Judas and his supporters decreed that Hanukkah should be an annual observance to last for eight days from the 25th of Chislev. They also fortified Mount Zion to protect against further attacks from the citadel, and Beth-zur to prevent more invasions of Judea from the south.

Antiochus IV died (6:16) in October or November of 164 B.C., shortly before the rededication of the Jerusalem temple. But news of his death may not have reached Judas and his supporters before the dedication. The author of 1 Maccabees, by placing his death after 4:36 – 61 (in December 164) and Judas' spectacular military successes in 5:1 – 68 (in 163) has him die with full knowledge of these setbacks.

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

The Maccabean Revolt

The expression “Maccabean revolt” refers to a series of events in the mid-second century B.C. by which one Jewish family, known as the Maccabees, gained political, military, and religious power in Judea. The adjective “Maccabean” derives from the nickname (usually interpreted as “the hammer”) given to Judas in 1 Maccabees 2:4.

The primary sources for the Maccabean revolt are the two books known as 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees. First Maccabees covers the period from roughly 175 to 134 B.C., and it reports the exploits and achievements of three generations of the Maccabee family; the priest Mattathias; his sons Judas, Jonathan, and Simon; and Simon's son John Hyrcanus. Second Maccabees provides important background information about the intrigues surrounding the Jewish high priesthood before the revolt started in earnest and takes the story of the revolt up to 161 B.C., shortly before the death of Judas. The focus of its interest is God's concern for and defense of the Jerusalem temple through the agency of Judas Maccabeus.

The book of Daniel seems to have been composed in 165 B.C., around the time of the events described in the early chapters of 1 and 2 Maccabees. Thus, it is a precious resource for understanding the circumstances leading up to the Maccabean revolt. Whereas the book of Daniel looks for imminent divine intervention to put Israel's enemies to flight and establish God's kingdom, 1 Maccabees presents the Maccabee dynasty as bringing about Israel's salvation. Whereas 2 Maccabees focuses on Judas in his role as savior of the Jerusalem temple, 1 Maccabees considers three generations of the Maccabee family and attends to their military exploits as well as their ability to deal in the political arena.

The historical consequences of the Maccabean revolt have been great. From being a small and insignificant client people in the Seleucid Empire, the Jews of Judea moved toward political independence with their own native rulers and with Rome as a powerful ally. From being on the edge of cultural and religious extinction, the Jews of Judea moved toward a form of religious life that was both traditional to their

heritage and adaptable to the realities of the Greco-Roman world. In the crisis period under the high priests Jason and Menelaus (175 to 162 B.C.) the fate of Judaism (and with it Christianity and Islam) was uncertain. The result of the Maccabean revolt was a renewed Judaism that had both clarity and flexibility. The revolt established the Torah and the Jerusalem temple as the central features in Second Temple Judaism.

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

Second Maccabees – Chapters Eight, Nine & Ten

Chapter 8

¹ Meanwhile Judas, who was also called Maccabeus, and his companions secretly entered the villages and summoned their kindred and enlisted those who had continued in the Jewish faith, and so they gathered about six thousand. ² They implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the godless, ³ to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground, to hearken to the blood that cried out to him, ⁴ to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name, and to show his hatred of evil.

⁵ As soon as Maccabeus got his army organized, the nations could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy. ⁶ Coming without warning, he would set fire to towns and villages. He captured strategic positions and put to flight not a few of the enemy. ⁷ He found the nights most advantageous for such attacks. And talk of his valor spread everywhere.

⁸ When Philip saw that the man was gaining ground little by little and that he was pushing ahead with more frequent successes, he wrote to Ptolemy, the governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, to come to the aid of the king's government. ⁹ Then Ptolemy promptly appointed Nicanor son of Patroclus, one of the king's First Friends, and sent him, in command of no fewer than twenty thousand men of various nations, to wipe out the entire people of Judea. He associated with him Gorgias, a general and a man of experience in military service. ¹⁰ Nicanor determined to make up for the king the tribute due to the Romans, two thousand talents, by selling the captured Jews into slavery. ¹¹ So he immediately sent to the towns on the seacoast, inviting them to buy Jewish slaves and promising to hand over ninety slaves for a talent, not expecting the judgment from the Almighty that was about to overtake him.

¹² Word came to Judas concerning Nicanor's invasion, and when he told his companions of the arrival of the army, ¹³ those who were cowardly and distrustful of God's justice ran off and got away. ¹⁴ Others sold all their remaining property and at

the same time implored the Lord to rescue those who had been sold by the ungodly Nicanor before he ever met them, ¹⁵ if not for their own sake, then for the sake of the covenants made with their ancestors and because he had called them by his holy and glorious name. ¹⁶ But Maccabeus gathered his forces together, to the number six thousand, and exhorted them not to be frightened by the enemy and not to fear the great multitude of nations who were wickedly coming against them but to fight nobly, ¹⁷ keeping before their eyes the lawless outrage that the nations had committed against the holy place and the torture of the derided city, as well as the overthrow of their ancestral way of life. ¹⁸ “For they trust to arms and acts of daring,” he said, “but we trust in the Almighty God, who is able with a single nod to strike down those who are coming against us, and even, if necessary, the whole world.”

¹⁹ Moreover, he told them of the occasions when help came to their ancestors, how, in the time of Sennacherib, when one hundred eighty-five thousand perished, ²⁰ and the time of the battle against the Galatians that took place in Babylonia, when eight thousand Jews fought along with four thousand Macedonians; yet when the Macedonians were hard pressed, the eight thousand, by the help that came to them from heaven, destroyed one hundred twenty thousand Galatians and took a great amount of plunder.

²¹ With these words he filled them with courage and made them ready to die for their laws and their country; then he divided his army into four parts. ²² He appointed his brothers also, Simon and Joseph and Jonathan, each to command a division, putting fifteen hundred men under each. ²³ Besides, he appointed Eleazar to read aloud from the holy book and gave the watchword, “The help of God; then, leading the first division himself, he joined battle with Nicanor.

²⁴ With the Almighty as their ally, they killed more than nine thousand of the enemy and wounded and disabled most of Nicanor’s army and forced them all to flee. ²⁵ They captured the money of those who had come to buy them as slaves. After pursuing them for some distance, they were obliged to return because the hour was late. ²⁶ It was the day before the Sabbath, and for that reason they did not continue their pursuit. ²⁷ When they had collected the arms of the enemy and stripped them of their spoils, they kept the Sabbath, giving great praise and thanks to the Lord, who had preserved them for that day and allotted it to them as the beginning of mercy. ²⁸ After the Sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans and distributed the rest among themselves and their children. ²⁹ When they had done this, they made common supplication and implored the merciful Lord to be wholly reconciled with his servants.

³⁰ In encounters with the forces of Timothy and Bacchides they killed more than twenty thousand of them and got possession of some exceedingly high strongholds, and they divided a very large amount of plunder, giving to those who had been tortured and to the orphans and widows and also to the aged, shares equal to their own. ³¹ They collected the arms of the enemy and carefully stored all of them in

strategic places; the rest of the spoils they carried to Jerusalem.³² They killed the commander of Timothy's forces, a most wicked man, and one who had greatly troubled the Jews. ³³ While they were celebrating the victory in the city of their ancestors, they burned those who had set fire to the sacred gates, Callisthenes and some others, who had fled into one little house, so these received the proper reward for their impiety.

³⁴ The thrice-accursed Nicanor, who had brought the thousand merchants to buy the Jews, ³⁵ having been humbled with the help of the Lord by opponents whom he regarded as of the least account, took off his splendid uniform and made his way alone like a runaway slave across the country until he reached Antioch, having succeeded chiefly in the destruction of his own army! ³⁶ So he who had undertaken to secure tribute for the Romans by the capture of the people of Jerusalem proclaimed that the Jews had a Defender and that therefore the Jews were invulnerable because they followed the laws ordained by him.

Chapter 9

¹ About that time, as it happened, Antiochus had retreated in disorder from the region of Persia. ² He had entered the city called Persepolis and attempted to rob the temples and control the city. Therefore the people rushed to the rescue with arms, and Antiochus and his army were defeated with the result that Antiochus was put to flight by the inhabitants and beat a shameful retreat. ³ While he was in Ecbatana, news came to him of what had happened to Nicanor and the forces of Timothy. ⁴ Transported with rage, he conceived the idea of turning upon the Jews the injury done by those who had put him to flight, so he ordered his charioteer to drive without stopping until he completed the journey. But the judgment of heaven rode with him! For in his arrogance he said, "When I get there I will make Jerusalem a cemetery of Jews."

⁵ But the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him with an incurable and invisible blow. As soon as he stopped speaking, he was seized with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief and with sharp internal tortures— ⁶ and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. ⁷ Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews and giving orders to drive even faster. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body. ⁸ Thus he, who only a little while before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea and had imagined that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance, was brought down to earth and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all. ⁹ And so the ungodly man's body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of the stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay. ¹⁰ Because of his intolerable stench no one was able to carry the man who a little while before had thought that he could touch

the stars of heaven. ¹¹ Then it was that, broken in spirit, he began to lose much of his arrogance and to come to his senses under the scourge of God, for he was tortured with pain every moment. ¹² And when he could not endure his own stench, he uttered these words, "It is right to be subject to God; mortals should not think that they are equal to God."

¹³ Then the abominable fellow made a vow to the Lord, who would no longer have mercy on him, stating ¹⁴ that the holy city, which he was hurrying to level to the ground and to make a cemetery, he was now declaring to be free, ¹⁵ and the Jews, whom he had not considered worth burying but had planned to throw out with their children for the wild animals and for the birds to eat, he would make, all of them, equal to citizens of Athens, ¹⁶ and the holy sanctuary, which he had formerly plundered, he would adorn with the finest offerings, and all the holy vessels he would give back many times over, and the expenses incurred for the sacrifices he would provide from his own revenues,¹⁷ and in addition to all this he also would become a Jew and would visit every inhabited place to proclaim the power of God. ¹⁸ But when his sufferings did not in any way abate, for the judgment of God had justly come upon him, he gave up all hope for himself and wrote to the Jews the following letter, in the form of a supplication. This was its content:

¹⁹ "To his worthy Jewish citizens, Antiochus their king and general sends hearty greetings and good wishes for their health and prosperity.²⁰ If you and your children are well and your affairs are as you wish, I am glad as my hope is in heaven. ²¹ Now I was feeling weak, and so I was remembering with affection your esteem and goodwill. On my way back from the region of Persia I suffered an annoying illness, and I have deemed it necessary to take thought for the general security of all. ²² I do not despair of my condition, for I have good hope of recovering from my illness, ²³ but I observed that my father, on the occasions when he made expeditions into the upper country, appointed his successor, ²⁴ so that, if anything unexpected happened or any unwelcome news came, the people throughout the realm would not be troubled, for they would know to whom the government was left. ²⁵ Moreover, I understand how the princes along the borders and the neighbors of my kingdom keep watching for opportunities and waiting to see what will happen. So I have appointed my son Antiochus to be king, whom I have often entrusted and commended to most of you when I hurried off to the upper provinces, and I have written to him the appended letter. ²⁶ I therefore urge and beg you to remember the public and private services rendered to you and to maintain your present goodwill, each of you, toward me and my son. ²⁷ For I am sure that he will follow my policy and will treat you with moderation and kindness."

²⁸ So the murderer and blasphemer, having endured the more intense suffering such as he had inflicted on others, came to the end of his life by a most pitiable fate, among the mountains in a strange land. ²⁹ And Philip, one of his courtiers, took his body home; then, fearing the son of Antiochus, he withdrew to Ptolemy Philometor in Egypt.

Chapter 10 (Note: In session four, we only read the first 8 verses)

10 Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; ² they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners and also destroyed the sacred precincts. ³ They purified the sanctuary and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. ⁴ When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. ⁵ It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. ⁶ They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the Festival of Booths, remembering how not long before, during the Festival of Booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. ⁷ Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also palm fronds, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. ⁸ They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.

⁹ Such then was the end of Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes.

¹⁰ Now we will tell what took place under Antiochus Eupator, who was the son of that ungodly man, and will give a brief summary of the principal calamities of the wars. ¹¹ This man, when he succeeded to the kingdom, appointed one Lysias to have charge of the government and Protarchos to be governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia. ¹² Ptolemy, who was called Macron, took the lead in showing justice to the Jews because of the wrong that had been done to them and attempted to maintain peaceful relations with them. ¹³ As a result he was accused before Eupator by the king's Friends. He heard himself called a traitor at every turn because he had abandoned Cyprus, which Philometor had entrusted to him, and had gone over to Antiochus Epiphanes. Unable to command the respect due his office, he took poison and ended his life.

¹⁴ When Gorgias became governor of the region, he maintained a force of mercenaries and at every turn kept attacking the Jews. ¹⁵ Besides this, the Idumeans, who had control of important strongholds, were harassing the Jews; they received those who were banished from Jerusalem and endeavored to keep up the war. ¹⁶ But Maccabeus and his forces, after making solemn supplication and imploring God to fight on their side, rushed to the strongholds of the Idumeans. ¹⁷ Attacking them vigorously, they gained possession of the places and drove back all who fought upon the wall and slaughtered those whom they encountered, killing no fewer than twenty thousand.

¹⁸ When at least nine thousand took refuge in two very strong towers well equipped to withstand a siege, ¹⁹ Maccabeus left Simon and Joseph, and also Zacchaeus and his troops, a force sufficient to besiege them, and he himself set off for places where he was more urgently needed. ²⁰ But those with Simon, who were money-hungry, were bribed by some of those who were in the towers and on receiving seventy thousand drachmas let some of them slip away. ²¹ When word of what had happened came to Maccabeus, he gathered the leaders of the people and accused these men of having sold their kindred for money by setting their enemies free to fight against them. ²² Then he killed these men who had turned traitor and immediately captured the two towers. ²³ Having success at arms in everything he undertook, he destroyed more than twenty thousand in the two strongholds.

²⁴ Now Timothy, who had been defeated by the Jews before, gathered a tremendous force of mercenaries and collected the cavalry from Asia in no small number. He came on, intending to take Judea by storm. ²⁵ As he drew near, Maccabeus and his men sprinkled dust on their heads and girded their loins with sackcloth, in supplication to God. ²⁶ Falling upon the steps before the altar, they implored him to be gracious to them and to be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries, as the law declares. ²⁷ And rising from their prayer they took up their arms and advanced a considerable distance from the city, and when they came near the enemy they halted. ²⁸ Just as dawn was breaking, the two armies joined battle, the one having as pledge of success and victory not only their valor but also their reliance on the Lord, while the other made rage their leader in the fight.

²⁹ When the battle became fierce, there appeared to the enemy from heaven five resplendent men on horses with golden bridles, and they were leading the Jews. ³⁰ Two of them took Maccabeus between them and, shielding him with their own armor and weapons, they kept him from being wounded. They showered arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy so that, confused and blinded, they were thrown into disorder and cut to pieces. ³¹ Twenty thousand five hundred were slaughtered, besides six hundred cavalry.

³² Timothy himself fled to a stronghold called Gazara, especially well garrisoned, where Chaereas was commander. ³³ Then Maccabeus and his men were glad, and they besieged the fort for four days. ³⁴ The men within, relying on the strength of the place, kept blaspheming terribly and uttering wicked words. ³⁵ But at dawn of the fifth day, twenty young men in the army of Maccabeus, fired with anger because of the blasphemies, bravely stormed the wall and with savage fury cut down everyone they met. ³⁶ During the distraction, others came up in the same way, wheeled around against the defenders, and set fire to the towers; they kindled fires and burned the blasphemers alive. Others broke open the gates and let in the rest of the force, and they occupied the city. ³⁷ They killed Timothy, who was hiding in a cistern, and his brother Chaereas, and Apollophanes. ³⁸ When they had accomplished these things, with hymns and thanksgivings they blessed the Lord, who shows great kindness to Israel and gives them the victory.

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

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