

2 Maccabees

**The Defeat of Foreign Evil by the Power
of God.**

2 Maccabees

Parallels 1 Maccabees but presents a theological interpretation of history. (example Esther)

- Written: 1st century BCE, composed in Greek.
- An abridgment of a five volume history (now lost) written by Jason of Cyrene.
- Two letters to the Jews in Egypt giving direction concerning the celebration of the feasts of Booths and Hanukkah.
- The mighty deeds (*dabar*) of God defeat Seleucid oppression.
- Priests and “renegades” are complicit in dishonoring tradition.

2 Maccabees

Prologue ... this book presents ...

- The story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, and further the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator, and the appearances which came from heaven to those who strove zealously on behalf of Judaism, so that though few in number they seized the whole land and pursued the barbarian hordes, and recovered the temple famous throughout the world and freed the city and restored the laws that were about to be abolished, while the Lord with great kindness became gracious to them -- (2:19-22)

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Prologue

“ ... all this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book.” (2:23)

The Story

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The Story ... ~175 BCE

- Seleucus ... Seleucid King Onias III ... Chief Priest
- “While the holy city was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were very well observed because of the **piety of the high priest Onias** and his hatred of wickedness, it came about that the **kings themselves** honored the place and **glorified the temple** with the finest presents, so that even **Seleucus**, the king of Asia, **defrayed** from his own revenues all the **expenses connected with the service of the sacrifices.**” (3:1-3)

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- Simon, a Jew, told the governor that there was wealth in the Temple treasury ... that could belong to the king.
- A representative of the king (Heliodorus) arrives ... “The high priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans ...” (3:10)
- “... Heliodorus ... said that this money must in any case be confiscated for the king's treasury.” (3:13)
 - There was distress in the city. (3:14)
 - Priests prostrated themselves before the alter. (3:15)
 - Women girded themselves with sackcloth. (3:19)

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As Heliodorus approached the Temple Treasury ...

- “... **there appeared** ... a magnificent horse, with a rider ... and it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold.

Two young men also appeared ... remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed, who stood on each side of him and scourged him continuously, inflicting many blows on him.

... he suddenly fell to the ground ... **this man who had just entered the ... treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard but was now unable to help himself; and they recognized clearly **the sovereign power of God.** (3:25-28)**

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As Heliodorus lay helpless ...

- “... some of Heliodorus' friends asked Onias to **call upon the Most High** and to grant life to one who was lying quite at his last breath.

... While the high priest was making the offering of atonement ... young men appeared again to Heliodorus ... and said, ‘Be very grateful to Onias the high priest, since for his sake **the Lord has granted you your life.**

And **see that you, who have been scourged by heaven, report to all men the majestic power of God.**’ Having said this they vanished. (3:31-34)

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- **“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. And **he bore testimony to all men of the deeds of the supreme God**, which he had seen with his own eyes.” (3:35-36)

When Heliodorus returns to the king ...

- "If you have any enemy or plotter against your government, send him there, for you will get him back thoroughly scourged, if he escapes at all, **for there certainly is about the place some power of God**. 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.**” (3:38-39)

Hellenization Begins

- Seleucus dies ... Antiochus IV becomes king.
 - Forced Hellenization begins ...
- Onias, the chief priest, strongly resists this Hellenization.

Hellenization Begins

Jason (Joshua) offers Antiochus IV money for high priesthood.

(4:7-9)

- Successfully bought the office of high priest ... “Jason came to office, he at once **shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life.**” (4:10)
- Established a gymnasium in Jerusalem. (4:12)
- “... the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar. **Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices,** they hastened to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena ... **disdaining the honors prized by their fathers** and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of prestige.” (4:14-15)
- Sends money ... for sacrifices for Hercules. (4:19)

“For it is no light thing to show irreverence to the divine laws -- a fact which later events will make clear.” (4:17)

Background To Conflict

- Three years later, Menelaus buys the priesthood.
 - Steals Temple vessels to pay for bribe. (4:27-32)
- When Onias protests these actions, he is assassinated. (4:33-38)
- Pietist Jews, Hellenized Jews, and Greeks are appalled by this action. (4:35)
- Jews appeal to Antiochus ... he is outraged ... and has the murderer put to death.
 - “... Antiochus was grieved at heart and filled with pity, and wept because of the moderation and good conduct of the deceased ...” (4:37)

Background To Conflict

- “The Lord thus repaid him with the punishment he deserved.” (4:38)

A rumor arose that Antiochus was killed in a battle with the Egyptians. (5:5)

- Jason and Menalaus in a civil war ...
- Antiochus believes the Jews are in revolt and moves on Jerusalem.

Background To Conflict

“And he commanded his soldiers to cut down ... every one they met ... Then there was killing of young and old, destruction of boys, women, and children, and slaughter of virgins and infants.

Within the total of three days eighty thousand were destroyed ... and as many were sold into slavery as were slain.

Not content with this, Antiochus dared to enter the most holy temple in all the world, guided by Menelaus, who had become a traitor both to the laws and to his country.

He took the holy vessels with his polluted hands, and swept away with profane hands the votive offerings which other kings had made to enhance the glory and honor of the place.” (5:12-16)

Temple Desecrated

Religious Persecution

Even under Menelaus, Antiochus does not feel that Hellenization is proceeding quickly enough.

Governors are put in place to afflict the people.

Sanctions are imposed and a Seleucid garrison is placed in Jerusalem. (6:1-11)

- Altar to Zeus placed in temple. (6:2)
- Sabbath outlawed. (6:6)

Violations punishable by death.

Religious Persecution

“A man could neither keep the Sabbath, nor observe the feasts of his fathers, nor so much as confess himself to be a Jew. (6:6)

“... two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. These women they publicly paraded about the city, with their babies hung at their breasts, then hurled them down headlong from the wall. (6:10)

“Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but **to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people.**” (6:12)

“Renegade Jews”

Wanted to eliminate the difference between Jew and Gentile in order to enjoy the benefits of the dominant Greek culture.

- “In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles ... for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us.’” (1:11)
- “They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.” (1:14-15)
- “Many even from Israel gladly ... sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath.” (1:43)
- Supported Jason and Menalaus ...

The Pious

Story continues

- Eleazar ... a mother ... seven sons ...
 - “Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh.”
 - Mother ... Hannah
 - Sons ...

This is the story of 4 Maccabees

The Rebellion

- “... Judas, who was also called Maccabeus, and his companions secretly entered the villages and summoned their kinsmen and enlisted those who had **continued in the Jewish faith**, and so they gathered about six thousand men.

They besought the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all, and **to have pity on the temple** which had been profaned by ungodly men,

and to have mercy on the city which was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground, and to hearken to the blood that cried out to him,

and to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the **blasphemies committed against his name**, and to show his hatred of evil.

As soon as Maccabeus got his army organized, the Gentiles could not withstand him, **for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy.**

(8:1-5)

The Rebellion

- He appoints his brothers generals ... each with 1500 men ... (8:22)
- “And 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.

After the Sabbath they **gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans ...** When they had done this, they made common supplication and **besought the merciful Lord to be wholly reconciled with his servants.**” (8:27-29)

The Rebellion

- Nicanor ... the Seleucid general ...
“... he who had undertaken to secure tribute ... 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.” (8:38)
- Antiochus ...
 - “... I will make Jerusalem a cemetery of Jews.” (9:4)
 - “But the **all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel**, struck him an incurable and unseen blow ... with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief and with sharp internal tortures...” (9:5)

The Rebellion

- “Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence... and so it came about that he fell out of his chariot ... so hard as to torture every limb of his body.
Thus he who had just been thinking that he could command the waves of the sea, in his superhuman arrogance, and imagining 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.**
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 his stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.
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 ...**
And when he could not endure his own stench, he uttered these words: **‘It is right to be subject to God, and no mortal should think that he is equal to God.’**” (9:7-12)

The Rebellion

- “Then the abominable fellow **made a vow to the Lord, who would no longer have mercy on him**, stating that the holy city ... he was now declaring to be free ...
and the holy sanctuary, which he had formerly plundered, he would adorn with the finest offerings; and the holy vessels he would give back ...
and the expenses incurred for the sacrifices he would provide from his own revenues;
and in addition to all this **he also would become a Jew and would visit every inhabited place to proclaim the power of God.**
But when his sufferings did not in any way abate, for **the judgment of God had justly come upon him ...**” (9:13-18)
- “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 ...” (9:28)

Success - Rededication

- “Now Maccabeus and his followers, **the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city ...**
“They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice ... after a lapse of two years ... **and set out the bread of the Presence.**
And when they had done this, **they fell prostrate and besought 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.
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.**
And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of booths ...” (10:1-6)

Success - Rededication

- But ... the struggle continues ...
- “Lysias, the king's guardian and kinsman, who was in charge of the government ... gathered about eighty thousand men and all his cavalry and came against the Jews. He intended ... to levy tribute on the temple as he did on the sacred places of the other nations, and to put up the high priesthood for sale every year.” (11:1-3)
- “... the Hebrews were invincible because the mighty God fought on their side.” (11:13)
- “... Menelaus the lawbreaker died, without even burial in the earth.” (13:7)

The Last Battle

- Judas “... cheered them all by relating a dream, a sort of vision, which was worthy of belief.

What he saw was this: **Onias**, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence, **was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews.**

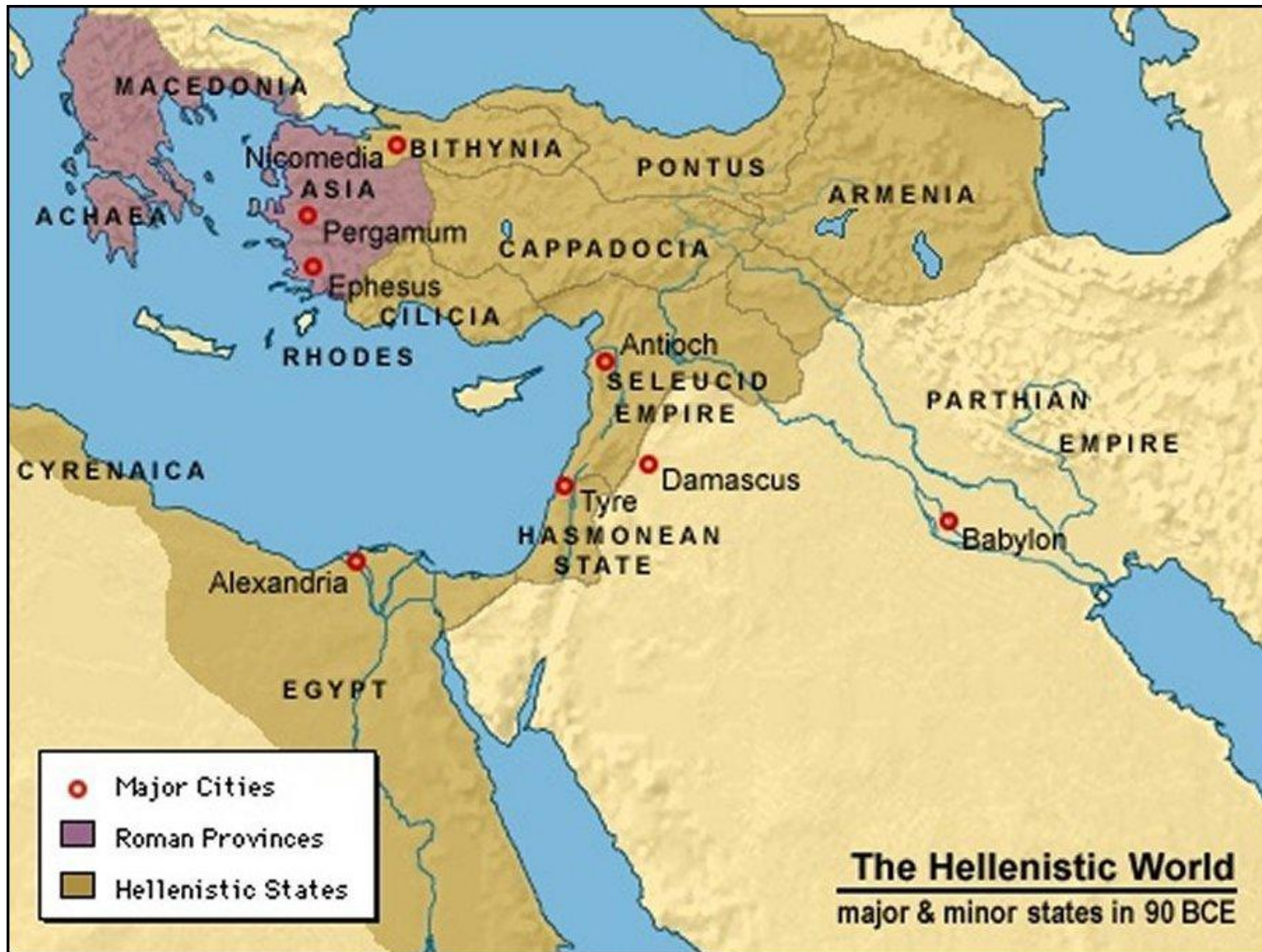
Then likewise a man appeared, distinguished by his gray hair and dignity, and of marvelous majesty and authority.

And Onias spoke, saying, ‘**This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah, the prophet of God.**’

Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judas a **golden sword**, and as he gave it he addressed him thus:

‘**Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries.**’” (15:11-16)

The Hellenistic World



Judea Under the Hasmoneans



Summary – 2 Maccabees

- Unique document in that it is described as an abridgement of a larger historical work.
- Questionable direct relationship to 1 Maccabees.
 - Doesn't mention Mattathais.
 - Treats ~ 15 of the 40 years covered in 1 Maccabees.
 - Very little about Judas' brothers.
 - Dating ... uses a Seleucid scheme.
- Even the heathen gentiles recognize the God of Israel ... for a moment.
- God is the hero.
 - Maccabee's are the tools of God.

Summary – The Books

1 Maccabees

- The Hasmonean family as God’s chosen and legitimate agents.
- Internal “renegades” ... enemies of the covenant.
- But ... much opposition even in Judea.
 - Hasmoneans not rightful priests ... or kings.
 - Rise of pietists ... Essenes

• 2 Maccabees

- The message of Deuteronomy
 - Fidelity to the covenant ensures peace.
 - Sin against the covenant brings punishment.
 - Repentance and a renewal of obedience lead to restoration.

2 Maccabees

Begins with two letters ... an appendix.

- A letter to the Jews in Egypt (1:1-9) ~124 BCE.
 - “And now see that you keep the feast of booths in the month of Chislev ...”
- A letter to Aristobulus (1:10-36) ~ 163 BCE.
 - We were in distress ... but called upon the Lord.
 - But ... “Having been **saved by God** out of grave dangers we thank him greatly for taking our side against the king.” (1:11)
 - “**Since on the twenty-fifth day of Chislev we shall celebrate the purification of the temple, we thought it necessary to notify you, in order that you also may celebrate ...**” (1:18)

Prayer

- The Prayer ... in honor of the Temple's rededication.
 - “O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, who art awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, who alone art King and art kind, who alone art bountiful, who alone art just and almighty and eternal, who dost rescue Israel from every evil, who didst choose the fathers and consecrate them, accept this sacrifice on behalf of all thy people Israel and preserve thy portion and make it holy.

Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look upon those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that thou art our God.
Afflict those who oppress and are insolent with pride.
Plant thy people in thy holy place ...” (1:24-29)

Hanukkah

- 1 Maccabees
 - “Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.”
- 2 Maccabees
 - “Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; and they tore down the altars which had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice ...”
 - “They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.”

The Message

- Dissuading Jews from converting to an “alien way of life.”
- Fidelity to covenant insures peace ... sin against the covenant brings punishment ... repentance and renewal leads to restoration.
- God’s chastisement of the nation is collective rather than individual.
 - The righteous consider themselves to suffer justly even though they have not sinned against God as individuals.
- The deaths of those who struggle are somehow efficacious on behalf of the nation.
 - The heroes’ death contributes something essential to the establishment of religious and political independence.
- Victory is dependent upon God.