

THE MACCABEAN WAR TO REDEDICATE THE TEMPLE

“And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder.”

Daniel 11:31a-33 (ESV)

“Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.”

Daniel 12:10 (ESV)

167/66 PROBABLY DURING THE WINTER When the authorities began to track down Jewish fugitives from Antiochus’ Hellenization decree, strict Jewish adherence to Sabbath traditions resulted in disaster. Thankfully, Mattathias understood that self-defense was not a form of “work” prohibited by Yahweh on the Sabbath.

“At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there, they, their sons, their wives, and their livestock, because troubles pressed heavily upon them.

“And it was reported to the king’s officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that those who had rejected the king’s command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. They said to them, “Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live.”

“But they said, “We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day.”

“Then the enemy quickly attacked them. But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, for they said, “Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly.” So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons.

“When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. And all said to their neighbors: “If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth.” So they made this decision that day: “Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places.” 1 Maccabees 2:29-41

166 PROBABLY BEGINNING IN THE SPRING Mattathias also understood that a strategy of self-defense alone would eventually result in defeat. Therefore, they began to go on the offensive.

“Then there united with them a company of Hasideans,¹ mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law. And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. And Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars; they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands. They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.” 1 Maccabees 2:42-48

¹ The Hasidim (“The Good Ones”) were Jews already devoted to staying true to the covenant.

166 SOMETIME DURING THE YEAR Mattathias, sensing that his death was near, encouraged his sons to keep up the fight.

“Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: “Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors. Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

“And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendor will turn into dung and worms. Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished.

“My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor. Here is your brother Simeon who, I know, is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law.”

Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year² and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.” 1 Maccabees 2:49-70

The role of military leader was taken up by Mattathias’ son Judas, whose nickname – Maccabee (“Hammer”) – became synonymous with this era of Jewish revolution against Hellenization.

“Then his son Judas, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. All his brothers and all who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel. He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he bound on his armor of war and waged battles, protecting the camp by his sword. He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people. Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him; all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed forever. He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing.” 1 Maccabees 3:1-9

² The Jews counted the 146th Seleucid Year as Spring 166 BC to Spring 165 BC.

166- Judas prayerfully waged a successful guerilla war against the Hellenists.
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“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. 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; 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; 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. 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. He found the nights most advantageous for such attacks. And talk of his valor spread everywhere. 2 Maccabees 8:1-7

Judas, by faith, miraculously defeated all the large armies sent out to attack his relatively small force.

“Apollonius now gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he defeated and killed him. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled. Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle the rest of his life.

“When Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful soldiers who stayed with him and went out to battle, he said, “I will make a name for myself and win honor in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king’s command.” Once again a strong army of godless men went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the Israelites.

“When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, “How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and so strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today.”

“Judas replied, “It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few. It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws. He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them.”

“When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. They pursued them down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled into the land of the Philistines. Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell on the Gentiles all around them. His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas.” 1 Maccabees 3:10-26

165 Antiochus IV was hurt economically by the Judean rebellion & felt he had to personally go to the wealthy region of Persia and collect the taxes. Before departing with half his army, he left orders that the Jewish rebels & their supporters were to be annihilated.

“When King Antiochus heard these reports, he was greatly angered; and he sent and gathered all the forces of his kingdom, a very strong army. He opened his coffers and gave a year’s pay to his forces, and ordered them to be ready for any need. Then he saw that the money in the treasury was exhausted, and that the revenues from the country were small because of the dissension and disaster that he had caused in the land by abolishing the laws that had existed from the earliest days. He feared that he might not have such funds as he had before for his expenses and for the gifts that he used to give more lavishly than preceding kings. He was greatly perplexed in mind; then he determined to go to Persia and collect the revenues from those regions and raise a large fund.

“He left Lysias, a distinguished man of royal lineage, in charge of the king’s affairs from the river Euphrates to the borders of Egypt. Lysias was also to take care of his son Antiochus until he returned. And he turned over to Lysias half of his forces and the elephants, and gave him orders about all that he wanted done. As for the residents of Judea and Jerusalem, Lysias was to send a force against them to wipe out and destroy the strength of Israel and the remnant of Jerusalem; he was to banish the memory of them from the place, settle aliens in all their territory, and distribute their land by lot.

“Then the king took the remaining half of his forces and left Antioch his capital in the one hundred and forty-seventh year.³ He crossed the Euphrates river and went through the upper provinces.” 1 Maccabees 3:27-37

Lysias immediately carried out Antiochus wishes, sending an overwhelming force to Judea.

“Lysias chose Ptolemy son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor and Gorgias, able men among the Friends of the king, and sent with them forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to go into the land of Judah and destroy it, as the king had commanded. So they set out with their entire force, and when they arrived they encamped near Emmaus in the plain.

“When the traders of the region heard what was said to them,⁴ they took silver and gold in immense amounts, and fetters, and went to the camp to get the Israelites for slaves. And forces from Syria and the land of the Philistines joined with them.” 1 Maccabees 3:38-41

1 Maccabees 3:42-4:23 & 2 Maccabees 8:12-29 report that Judas mustered his troops according to the Mosaic Law; had the Law read aloud to his troops by the High Priest; he then encouraged to remember that God would fight for them; and finally engaged the enemy. They miraculously routed the opposing forces and afterward plundered their corpses & the abandoned camp.

“On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven—“For he is good, for his mercy endures forever.” Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.” 1 Maccabees 4:24-25

³ The Jews counted the 147th Seleucid Year as Spring 165 BC to Spring 164 BC.

⁴ “Nicanor determined to make up for the king the tribute due to the Romans, two thousand talents, by selling the captured Jews into slavery. 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.” 2 Maccabees 8:10-11

164 Taking into consideration the previous year's disaster, Lysias sent an even larger force into Judea in order to annihilate the Jewish rebels. But once again he was unprepared to fight an army trusting in Yahweh Tsabaoth.

"But the next year he mustered sixty thousand picked infantry and five thousand cavalry to subdue them. They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men.

"When he saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, "Blessed are you, O Savior of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns."

"Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action. When Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness that inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he withdrew to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries in order to invade Judea again with an even larger army." 1 Maccabees 4:28-35

These additional forces fared no better than the previous.

"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. 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. They killed the commander of Timothy's forces, a most wicked man, and one who had greatly troubled the Jews. 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.

"The thrice-accursed Nicanor, who had brought the thousand merchants to buy the Jews, 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! 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." 2 Maccabees 8:30-36

164 [DECEMBER] Judas knew that the time had now arrived to rededicate the Temple.⁵

“Then Judas and his brothers said, “See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.” So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

“Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one.

“They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

“Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them.

“So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

“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 joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.”⁶ 1 Maccabees 4:36-59

⁵ This timing filled the prophecies of Daniel 12:7, 11.

DAY 1 = Pentecost (Sunday, 4 June) of 167, when Antiochus IV stopped Temple sacrifices.

DAY 197 = 9*25 (Sunday, 17 December) of 167, when the Abomination of Desolation desecrated the Temple.

DAY 1,291 = 9*25 (Monday, 14 December) of 164, when the Temple was rededicated after 1,290 days.

DAY 1,335 = 11*10 (Wednesday, 27 January) of 163, probably represented the date of Antiochus IV's death.

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. Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.” 2 Maccabees 10:6-8