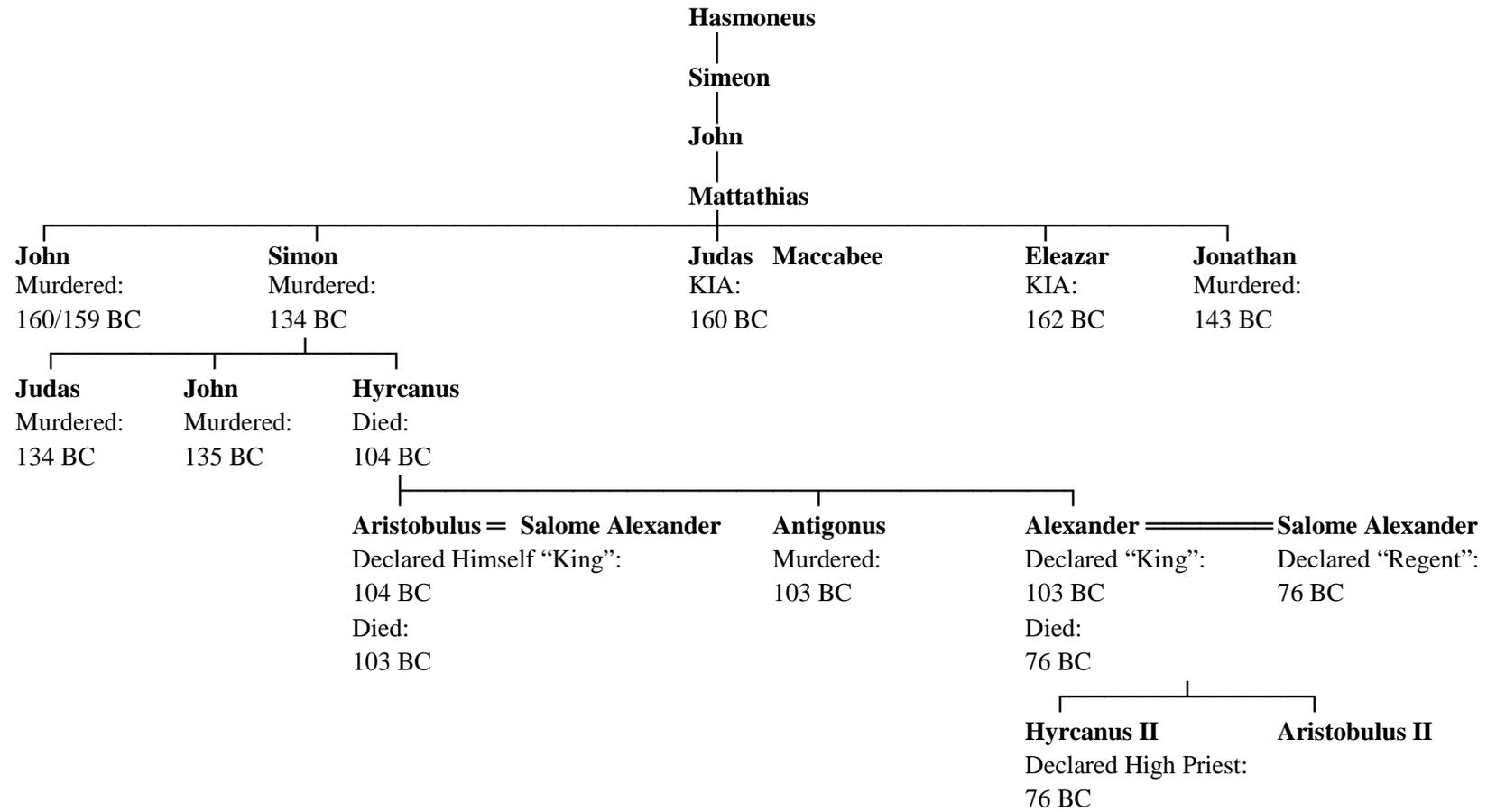


THE "HASMONEAN" FAMILY TREE



## THE “HASMONEAN” DYNASTY OF SIMON THE HIGH PRIEST

**142 BC** Simon, the last of the sons of Mattathias, was declared High Priest & “Ethnarch” (ruler of one’s own ethnic group) of the Jews by Demetrius II, King of the Seleucid Empire.

**138 BC** After Demetrius II was captured by the Parthians, his brother, Antiochus VII, affirmed Simon’s High Priesthood & requested assistance in dealing with Trypho, a usurper of the Seleucid throne.

“King Antiochus to Simon the high priest and ethnarch and to the nation of the Jews, greetings.

“Whereas certain scoundrels have gained control of the kingdom of our ancestors, and I intend to lay claim to the kingdom so that I may restore it as it formerly was, and have recruited a host of mercenary troops and have equipped warships, and intend to make a landing in the country so that I may proceed against those who have destroyed our country and those who have devastated many cities in my kingdom, now therefore I confirm to you all the tax remissions that the kings before me have granted you, and a release from all the other payments from which they have released you. I permit you to mint your own coinage as money for your country, and I grant freedom to Jerusalem and the sanctuary. All the weapons that you have prepared and the strongholds that you have built and now hold shall remain yours. Every debt you owe to the royal treasury and any such future debts shall be canceled for you from henceforth and for all time. When we gain control of our kingdom, we will bestow great honor on you and your nation and the temple, so that your glory will become manifest in all the earth.””

1 Maccabees 15:2-9

However, once Antiochus VII realized he was about to defeat Trypho on his own, without any assistance from the Jewish troops, he rescinded his promises & threatened Simon instead.

“You hold control of Joppa and Gazara and the citadel in Jerusalem; they are cities of my kingdom. You have devastated their territory, you have done great damage in the land, and you have taken possession of many places in my kingdom. Now then, hand over the cities that you have seized and the tribute money of the places that you have conquered outside the borders of Judea; or else pay me five hundred talents of silver for the destruction that you have caused and five hundred talents more for the tribute money of the cities. Otherwise we will come and make war on you.”

1 Maccabees 15:28-31

**137 BC?** Despite Simon’s attempt to reach some agreement with Antiochus VII, the Seleucid king ordered an attack upon Judea. Being pretty old now, Simon gave his two oldest sons – Judas & John – the responsibility for defending Judea, which they accomplished with excellence. (1 Maccabees 16:1-10)

**134 BC** **11\*? [JAN/FEB] of the 177<sup>th</sup> Seleucid Year [Spring 135 BC – Spring 134 BC]** One of Simon’s daughters was married to Ptolemy Bar Abubus, who governed the plain of Jericho. Ptolemy evidently wanted more power, since he invited his in-laws to a special banquet during which he had Simon killed & his wife and their two eldest sons, Judas & John, taken hostage. Ptolemy then contacted Antiochus VII in order to make a deal that would secure him control over all of Judea. He also dispatched agents to track down and kill another of Simon’s son, Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus was able to escape Ptolemy’s men & went to Jerusalem where the people hailed him as the new High Priest & Ethnarch.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Maccabees ends with the story of Hyrcanus’ escape. There is a final reference to a “chronicle” of his priesthood (16:23-24), but this resource is no longer extant. We will now depend heavily upon the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD Jewish historian, Josephus, who apparently had access to this and other records of the Hasmonean dynasty.

**134 BC** [Late Winter/Early Spring] Hyrcanus immediately besieged Ptolemy in his fortress at Dagon, but hesitated when Ptolemy brought his mother & brothers out on the wall and began torturing them, threatening to throw them down.

“However, his mother spread out her hands, and begged of him that he would not grow remiss on her account, but indulge his indignation so much the more, and that he would do his utmost to take the place quickly, in order to get their enemy under his power, and then to avenge upon him what he had done to those that were dearest to himself; for that death would be to her sweet, though with torment, if that enemy of theirs might but be brought to punishment for his wicked dealings to them.”

Josephus’ Antiquities 13.8.1

So encouraged by his mother, Hyrcanus resumed his attacks. Keeping his threat, Ptolemy killed his hostages. Then, since he doubted his ability to hold out under Hyrcanus’ siege (due to dwindling supplies<sup>2</sup>), he slipped out of the fortress and escaped the country.

**131 BC** [Probably Spring] Antiochus VII invaded Judea during the 4<sup>th</sup> Year of Hyrcanus, besieging Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

[Beginning of MAY] The Jews were nearly out of water when a miraculous rainstorm replenished their supplies.

**Feast of Tabernacles [Late SEP]** Hyrcanus secured a holiday truce with Antiochus VII, who was very deferent toward other religions. Antiochus VII even sent sacrificial animals into the Temple to be offered on his behalf, earning him the Jewish nickname “Antiochus the Pious.” Hyrcanus took the opportunity of this truce & Antiochus VII’s “piety” in order to work out a more permanent treaty, agreeing to pay Antiochus VII a large sum of silver & sending him many hostages.

**130/129 BC** After King Antiochus VII died in battle with the Parthians, Hyrcanus took advantage of the power vacuum in order to assert his own power beyond Judea (Antiquities 13.9.1-2), north into Samaria, east into Perea and south into Idumea. These actions had long-standing & far-reaching impact.

- He renewed Judea’s mutual assistance treaty with Rome, in direct opposition to the Seleucid Empire. This strengthened Rome’s growing interest in the region & Judea’s growing dependence upon Rome.
- He destroyed the 200-year old Samaritan Temple on Mt. Gerizim. This heightened the animosity between the Samaritans & Jews.
- He forcibly converted the Idumeans (Edomites living in southern Judea) to the traditions of Judaism – circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, kosher diet, the festivals, etc. This insured that Herod, an Idumean (and a close friend of Rome), would later be considered a prime candidate as “King of the Jews.”

Hyrcanus enjoyed a significant period of peace due to continuous infighting among the various claimants to the throne of the Seleucid Empire to his north. He also benefited from the pro-Jewish attitude of Queen Cleopatra III of Egypt to his south. Cleopatra III [who reigned alongside her husband (142-116 BC) & then alongside two sons (116-101 BC)] depended heavily upon the advice of two Jewish generals/advisors, the sons of a Jewish priest who had built a replica of the Jewish Temple at Heliopolis around the beginning of the Antiochus IV’s persecution of Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fall 136 BC – Fall 135 BC had been a Jewish Sabbatical Year. At the time of the siege, Ptolemy was dependent upon what remained of 136 BC, since the next harvest would take place after Passover in 134 BC.

<sup>3</sup> According to Josephus (Antiquities 13.8.2), this invasion took place in the 162<sup>nd</sup> Olympiad, the first year of which began in the summer of 132 BC.

<sup>4</sup> Antiquities 13.10.4 & 13.3.1.

c. 126 BC Alexander Janaeus born.<sup>5</sup>

**SOMETIME LATER** Hyrcanus switched his philosophical loyalty from the Pharisees to the Sadducees.

“5. (288) However, this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus; but they that were the worst disposed to him were the Pharisees, who are one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are presently believed. (289) Now Hyrcanus was a disciple of theirs, and greatly beloved by them.

“And when he once invited them to a feast, and entertained them very kindly, when he saw them in a good humor, he began to say to them, that they knew he was desirous to be a righteous man, and to do all things whereby he might please God, which was the profession of the Pharisees also. (290) However, he desired, that if they observed him offending in any point, and going out of the right way, they would call him back and correct him.

“On which occasion they attested to his being entirely virtuous; with which commendation he was well pleased; but still there was one of his guests there, whose name was Eleazar, (291) a man of an ill temper, and delighting in seditious practices. This man said, “Since thou desirest to know the truth, if thou wilt be righteous in earnest, lay down the high priesthood, and content thyself with the civil government of the people.” (292) And when he desired to know for what cause he ought to lay down the high priesthood, the other replied, “We have heard it from old men, that thy mother had been a captive under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.”<sup>6</sup> This story was false, and Hyrcanus was provoked against him; and all the Pharisees had a very great indignation against him.

“6. (293) Now there was one Jonathan, a very great friend of Hyrcanus, but of the sect of the Sadducees, whose notions are quite contrary to those of the Pharisees. He told Hyrcanus that Eleazar had cast such a reproach upon him, according to the common sentiments of all the Pharisees, and that this would be made manifest if he would but ask him the question, What punishment they thought this man deserved? (294) for that he might depend upon it, that the reproach was now laid on him with their approbation, if they were for punishing him as his crime deserved. So the Pharisees made answer, that he deserved stripes and bonds; but that it did not seem right to punish reproaches with death; and indeed the Pharisees, even upon other occasions, are not apt to be severe in punishments.

“(295) At this gentle sentence Hyrcanus was very angry, and thought that this man reproached him by their approbation. It was this Jonathan who chiefly irritated him, and influenced him so far, (296) that he made him leave the party of the Pharisees, and abolish the decrees they had imposed on the people, and punish those that observed them. From this source arose that hatred which he and his sons met with from the multitude; (297) but of these matters we shall speak hereafter.

“What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; (298) and concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude of their side; but about these two sects, and that of the Essenes, I have treated accurately in the second book of Jewish affairs.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 13.12.1) this son was banished to Galilee shortly after birth because his father was irritated that God had indicated in a dream that he would reign after him, rather than one of the two older sons.

<sup>6</sup> The insinuation of Eleazar seems to be that Hyrcanus' mother had been used sexually while in captivity & therefore she was not a virgin when Hyrcanus' father married her. This would have disqualified Simon as High Priest (Leviticus 21:10-15), making Hyrcanus' own claim to the High Priesthood completely invalid as well.

<sup>7</sup> *Antiquities* 13.10.5-6

**104 BC** Upon his death, Hyrcanus had intended for his wife to administer Judea. Instead, his eldest son, Aristolulus, immediately put on the royal diadem, effectively declaring himself the first “King of the Jews” since their return from Babylonian Captivity. He also imprisoned his three youngest brothers; however, he treated his second brother, Antigonus, his favorite, as an equal. When his mother objected to his actions, Aristobulus had her imprisoned, eventually starving her to death.

Under Aristobulus, Galilee & Iturea (located north of the Sea of Galilee) were added to the growing Hasmonean Kingdom. Like other conquered Gentiles before them, the Itureans were forced to adopt Jewish customs as their own.

**103 BC Feast of Tabernacles (Mid-OCT)** Being very ill, Aristobulus was tricked by his closest companions & his wife, Salome Alexandra, into believing that his brother was plotting to kill him; he has Antigonus murdered.

Not long afterward, Aristobulus also died. His widow, Salome Alexandra, released the three brothers from custody, declaring that the eldest of them, Alexander Jannaeus, should be king. She then became his wife.

**103-101 BC** Alexander immediately began expanding the Hasmonean Kingdom even further, depending heavily upon the support of Cleopatra III of Egypt. This resulted in the deaths of many Jews.

The majority of the Jewish people (especially those in support of the Pharisee sect) were not very pleased with Alexander’s reign.

“5. (372) As to Alexander, his own people were seditious against him; for at a festival which was then celebrated, when he stood upon the altar, and was going to sacrifice, the nation rose upon him and pelted him with citrons<sup>8</sup> [which they then had in their hands, because] the laws of the Jews required that at the feast of tabernacles everyone should have branches of the palm tree and citron tree; which thing we have elsewhere related. They also reviled him, as derived from a captive,<sup>9</sup> and so unworthy of his dignity and of sacrificing. (373) At this he was in rage, and slew of them about six thousand. He also built a partition wall of wood round the altar and the temple, as far as that partition within which it was only lawful for the priest to enter; and by this means he obstructed the multitude from coming at him.”<sup>10</sup>

This animosity grew even more during a six-year civil war, in which “he slew no fewer than fifty thousand of them; and when he desired that they would desist from their ill will to him, they hated him so much the more, on account of what had already happened; and when he had asked them what he ought to do, they all cried out, that he ought to kill himself.”<sup>11</sup>

On a later occasion, he punished the rebellious people of one Jewish city by bringing the survivors “to Jerusalem, and did one of the most barbarous actions in the world to them; for as he was feasting with his concubines, in the sight of all the city, he ordered about eight hundred of them to be crucified; and while they were living, he ordered the throats of their children and wives to be cut before their eyes.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A different Jewish source attributes the anger of the Feast of Tabernacles crowd to Alexander failing to perform the traditional water ceremony of the Pharisees, since he was a Sadducee.

<sup>9</sup> This indicates the persistence of the rumor that his family’s High Priesthood was totally illegitimate due to his grandmother not having been a virgin when his grandfather (Simon) married her.

<sup>10</sup> Antiquities 13.13.5.

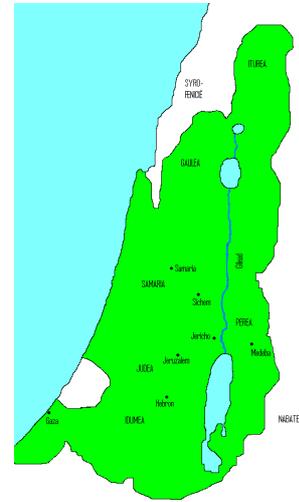
<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Antiquities 13.14.2.

**76 BC** By the end of his 27-year reign, due simply to his cruel, militaristic bent, Alexander Jannaeus had expanded the Hasmonean Kingdom to its farthest extent.

According to Josephus<sup>13</sup> he spent the last three years of his life fighting a persistent & intermittent fever. His heavy drinking had taken an obvious toll on his health. Yet, he insisted on participating in his military campaigns, which brought him to his deathbed far from Jerusalem.

Alexandra came weeping to his bedside, worried about their family's future, thanks to his alienation of the Jewish people. "To whom dost thou thus leave me and my children, who are destitute of all other supports, and this when thou knowest how much ill will thy nation bears thee?"



His final advice before dying (at age 49) was that she should conceal his death from the public until she had met with the Pharisees at Jerusalem, offering to share power with them.<sup>14</sup>

"Do thou therefore," said he, "when thou art come to Jerusalem send for the leading men among them, and show them my body, and with great appearance of sincerity, give them leave to use it as they themselves please, whether they will dishonor the dead body by refusing it burial, as having severely suffered by my means, or whether in their anger they will offer any other injury to that body. Promise them also, that thou wilt do nothing without them in the affairs of the kingdom.

"If thou dost but say this to them, I shall have the honor of a more glorious funeral from them than thou couldst have made for me: and when it is in their power to abuse my dead body, they will do it no injury at all, and thou wilt rule in safety."

His political instincts were correct. Since their influence on the kingdom would now eclipse that of the Sadducees, the Pharisees were more than willing to support Alexandra as Queen & provided a splendid state funeral for her dead husband.

"Alexander left behind him two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, but committed the kingdom to Alexandra. Now, as to these two sons, Hyrcanus was indeed unable to manage public affairs, and delighted rather in a quiet life; but the younger, Aristobulus, was an active and a bold man; and for this woman herself, Alexandra, she was loved by the multitude, because she seemed displeased at the offenses her husband had been guilty of.

"So she made Hyrcanus high priest because he was the elder, but much more because he cared not to meddle with politics, and permitted the Pharisees to do everything; to whom also she ordered the multitude to be obedient. She also restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated.

"So she had indeed the name of the Regent; but the Pharisees had the authority; for it was they who restored such as had been banished, and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and, to say all at once, they differed in nothing from lords."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Antiquities 13.15.5.

<sup>14</sup> Other Jewish sources claim that Alexandra was the sister of Simeon, the Nasi (Leader) of the Sanhedrin & a leading Pharisee.

<sup>15</sup> Antiquities 13.16.1-2.