

FIRST BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

1) -1:1-9 -- Probably written by a Palestinian Jew in Hebrew between 135-100 BC, dealing with the period 175-135 BC. At this time the Jewish state was as independent as in the days of Saul and David, with a colossal catastrophe approaching as in the days of Jeremiah.

1:1 Philip of Macedonia had seized control of all Greece in 338 BC, after the grand culture of the Greeks in the 5th and 6th centuries had declined. He was assassinated in 336, bringing Alexander III ("The Great") to the throne. (Alexander's tutor was Aristotle, a student of Plato.)

1:2-4 Alexander defeated a weak Persian Empire under Darius III in 333 BC. Also in 332 he took Jerusalem and Egypt without a fight and established Alexandria. Went on to Babylon and defeated the Persians in a third great battle. Went on to conquer India, then wept because there were no more worlds to conquer.

1:5-9 Alexander died in 323 at age 33, probably in Ecbatana, now Afghanistan. His generals fought for mastery for 20 years, none succeeded, so in 301 the empire was divided four ways: **Egypt:** Ptolemy, whose descendants would reign for three centuries. **Western Asia:** (Syria, Babylon, etc): Seleucus, whose descendants would reign for about 150 years. **Macedonia:** Cassander. **Thrace and Asia Minor:** Lysimachus.

2) --1:10 The writer now skips over 150 years of history. The descendants of Ptolemy were all called Ptolemy. The descendants of Seleucus were called Seleucus or Antiochus. Antiochus III in 223-187 BC first restored the Seleucid Empire (including returning Egypt and Judea from Greek to Seleucid control), but then misjudged his power and was badly defeated by a growing Roman power in 189 BC. At the same time, Parthia (Afghanistan) broke away, reducing the Seleucid Empire to Syria and Babylonia. He sent his son Antiochus as hostage to Rome. Antiochus II was assassinated in 187 BC, succeeded by his oldest son Seleucus IV, who was assassinated in 175. Antiochus returned from captivity in Rome and became Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Greek: "God manifest") (Dating: Seleucus I had begun the practice of counting the years from a victory he gained in 312 BC in Babylon. This remained the manner of counting years until the Roman era, which in turn gave way to the Christian era count.)

3)1:14-15 Alexander the Great introduced Greek culture to the east and it was very attractive and widely adopted, even by many Jews. The writer stands aghast at the gymnasias because athletes performed in the nude. To hide their circumcisions, the Jews wore false foreskins. The majority of Jews regarded Hellenism as nature worship.

4) 2:1 – The revolt began in 167 BC when Antiochus IV rededicated the temple in Jerusalem to Zeus. (See footnote 2X and intro to 1 Maccabees.) Mattathias was a priest at Modein, 17 miles NW of Jerusalem. He died in 166 BC. He had five sons. The order in which they died:

Eleazar Avaran -- killed in 163, crushed by a Syrian elephant in battle. (6:43-46)

Judas Maccabeus (the hammer) -- killed in battle in 162. (9:18)

John Gaddi -- killed in battle in 159 (9:36-42)

Jonathan Apphus -- assassinated in 142 after becoming the first priest in the Hasmonean Line, forming a strong opposition party to descendants of Aaron. (10:21, 12:48)

Simon Thassi -- second Hasmonean priest, assassinated in 135 (16:16) He was succeeded by his son John, who later was known as Hyrcanus I, who remained high priest in Jerusalem until 104 (31 years). He consolidated and extended

Jewish control over Samaria and Idumea (ancient Edom) and forced them to become Jews by religion. (King Herod of Jesus' day was Idumean and a Jew by religion.) He (Hyrchanus) became a Sadducee in spirit -- upper class, conservative, worldly, agnostic, and urbane. "The Revolution had become the Establishment."

Origin of the term "Hasmonean": Mattathias's great grandfather was Asamoniaios, so the historian Josephus gave the name Hasmonean to the dynasty descended from the Maccabees. /// In 164, Judas Maccabeus sent a delegation to Rome, asking for help against the Syrians, marking the first step in Rome's takeover of Judea (Ch. 8)

- 5) 2:26 -- See 1 Kings 16:8-16. Zimri was king of Israel for seven days in 888 BC, after killing Elah. Zimri was killed and the rule of Omri began. This Phinehas **cannot** be the grandson of Aaron in Ex 6:23-25.
- 6) 2:42 -- The Hassadim are the forerunners of the Pharisees, who were more interested in religious freedom than political victory.
- 7) 4:54 -- Three and a half years after the desecration -- see Dan 9:26-27, where the destruction and rededication is predicted.
- 8) 5:3 -- The Nabatean Arabs had forced the people of Idumaea (ancient Edom) into what had been southern Judah in the days of David. So the Jews may have justified the conquest as being a retaking of what was their own. But they then enforced Judaism on the Idumeans, doing what they would not be done by.
- 9) 5:14 -- Galilee was the northernmost section of what had once been Israel. It was settled during the time of the judges by the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, and never firmly held by the Israelites (e.g. the battle against Sisera, Judges 4:6ff). First called Galilee after the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom. The turning point comes in Isaiah 9:1 where the area is described in both pre- and post-Assyrian terms. /// Origin of the term "gentile": gens in Latin means tribe or clan: "one of the tribe."
- 10) 6:32 -- Judas withdrew from his **siege** of the Seleucid garrison within the citadel.
- 11) 7:1 -- He had been a hostage there and had to escape.
- 12) 11:20 -- Demetrius II Nicator ("conqueror") ruled over only a tiny remnant of what had been the Seleucid Empire for 150 years.
- 13) 11:34 -- Ophrah of Joshua 18:23, 1 Samuel 13:17. Ephron of 2 Cron 13:19, Ephraim of John 11:54 The town to which Jesus probably fled when the Sanhedrin met to condemn him to death after he raised Lazarus (John 11:54).
- 14) 12:2-23 -- An alliance with Sparta was worthless at this time. After its defeat by Thebes in 371, it declined rapidly and even refused to join Alexander in his conquest of Persia.
- 15) 12:49 -- He was seized after 18 years of rule, but was not killed at this time. See 13:23
- 16) 13:41 -- This year, 142 BC, was called the First Year of the Maccabees, and followed 25 years of revolt. Simon became the leader, but never called himself "King of the Jews."
- 17) 14:2 -- Arsaces was the throne name of Mithradites I, who had come to the throne at the time of Antiochus IV, and now had been king of Persia for over 30 years. He had taken Babylonia from the Seleucids in 147 BC.
- 18) 15:11 -- This was Antiochus VII, the last vigorous Seleucid monarch. See Epilogue, # 17.
- 19) 16:24 -- Epilogue. Simon's son John, known as Hyrchanus, fought Ptolemy from the hills as a guerilla. Ptolemy called in Antiochus VII, who in 133 BC invaded Judea, took Jerusalem, but accepted a large tribute and left. In 130 he overplayed his hand, invaded Persia, and in 129 was beaten and killed by the Parthians under Phraates II, son of

Mithradites I. This effectively killed the Seleucid Empire. Judea now entered a half century of prosperity and glory. John Hyrcanus reigned until 104 BC, when his son took over and founded the dynasty strong enough to deserve a king, the first one since the First Temple was destroyed five centuries earlier -- but not of the line of David.