

Introduction to the Apocrypha

Torah in Motion

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Class 5: 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees

1. 1 Maccabees: A Straightforward (albeit biased) History, late second century BCE

1:41–53: Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt-offerings and sacrifices and drink-offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, ‘And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.’ In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

2:27–48: Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: ‘Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!’ Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town. 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 people.

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.’ Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law... 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.

4:36–59: 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 and 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 worshipped 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.

7:1–50: In the one hundred and fifty-first year Demetrius son of Seleucus set out from Rome, sailed with a few men to a town by the sea, and there began to reign. ²As he was entering the royal palace of his ancestors, the army seized Antiochus and Lysias to bring them to him. ³But when this act became known to him, he said, ‘Do not let me see their faces!’ ⁴So the army killed them, and Demetrius took his seat on the throne of his kingdom. Then there came to him all the renegade and godless men of Israel; they were led by Alcimus, who wanted to be high priest. ⁶They brought to the king this accusation against the people: ‘Judas and his brothers have destroyed all your Friends, and have driven us out of our land. ⁷Now then, send a man whom you trust; let him go and see all the ruin that Judas has brought on us and on the land of the king, and let him punish them and all who help them.’

So the king chose Bacchides, one of the king’s Friends, governor of the province Beyond the River; he was a great man in the kingdom and was faithful to the king. ⁹He sent him, and with him he sent the ungodly Alcimus, whom he made high priest; and he commanded him to take vengeance on the Israelites. ¹⁰So they marched away and came with a large force into the land of Judah; and he sent messengers to Judas and his brothers with peaceable but treacherous words. ¹¹But they paid no attention to their words, for they saw that they had come with a large force. Then a group of scribes appeared in a body before Alcimus and Bacchides to ask for just terms. ¹³The Hasideans were first among the Israelites to seek peace from them, ¹⁴for they said, ‘A priest of the line of Aaron has come with the army, and he will not harm us.’ ¹⁵Alcimus spoke peaceable words to them and swore this oath to them, ‘We will not seek to injure you or your friends.’ ¹⁶So they trusted him; but he seized sixty of them and killed them in one day, in accordance with the word that was written, ‘The flesh of your faithful ones and their blood they poured out all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.’ ¹⁸Then the fear and dread of them fell on all the people, for they said, ‘There is no truth or justice in them, for they have violated the agreement and the oath that they swore.’

Then Bacchides withdrew from Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-zaiton. And he sent and seized many of the men who had deserted to him, and some of the people, and killed them and threw them into a great pit. ²⁰He placed Alcimus in charge of the country and left with him a force to help him; then Bacchides went back to the king. Alcimus struggled to maintain his high-priesthood, ²²and all who were troubling their people joined him. They gained control of the land of Judah and did great damage in Israel. ²³And Judas saw all the wrongs that Alcimus and those with him had done among the Israelites; it was more than the Gentiles had done. ²⁴So Judas went out into all the surrounding parts of Judea, taking vengeance on those who had deserted and preventing those in the city from going out into the country. ²⁵When Alcimus saw that Judas and those with him had grown strong, and realized that he could not withstand them, he returned to the king and brought malicious charges against them.

²⁶ Then the king sent Nicanor, one of his honoured princes, who hated and detested Israel, and he commanded him to destroy the people. ²⁷So Nicanor came to Jerusalem with a large force, and treacherously sent to Judas and his brothers this peaceable message, ²⁸'Let there be no fighting between you and me; I shall come with a few men to see you face to face in peace.' So he came to Judas, and they greeted one another peaceably; but the enemy were preparing to kidnap Judas. ³⁰It became known to Judas that Nicanor had come to him with treacherous intent, and he was afraid of him and would not meet him again. ³¹When Nicanor learned that his plan had been disclosed, he went out to meet Judas in battle near Capharsalama. ³²About five hundred of the army of Nicanor fell, and the rest fled into the city of David.

³³ After these events Nicanor went up to Mount Zion. Some of the priests from the sanctuary and some of the elders of the people came out to greet him peaceably and to show him the burnt-offering that was being offered for the king. ³⁴But he mocked them and derided them and defiled them and spoke arrogantly, ³⁵and in anger he swore this oath, 'Unless Judas and his army are delivered into my hands this time, then if I return safely I will burn up this house.' And he went out in great anger. ³⁶At this the priests went in and stood before the altar and the temple; they wept and said, 'You chose this house to be called by your name, and to be for your people a house of prayer and supplication. Take vengeance on this man and on his army, and let them fall by the sword; remember their blasphemies, and let them live no longer.' Now Nicanor went out from Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-horon, and the Syrian army joined him. ⁴⁰Judas encamped in Adasa with three thousand men. Then Judas prayed and said, ⁴¹'When the messengers from the king spoke blasphemy, your angel went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians. ⁴²So also crush this army before us today; let the rest learn that Nicanor has spoken wickedly against the sanctuary, and judge him according to this wickedness.'

⁴³ So the armies met in battle on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. The army of Nicanor was crushed, and he himself was the first to fall in the battle. ⁴⁴When his army saw that Nicanor had fallen, they threw down their arms and fled. ⁴⁵The Jews pursued them a day's journey, from Adasa as far as Gazara, and as they followed they kept sounding the battle-call on the trumpets. ⁴⁶People came out of all the surrounding villages of Judea, and they outflanked the enemy and drove them back to their pursuers, so that they all fell by the sword; not even one of them was left. ⁴⁷Then the Jews seized the spoils and the plunder; they cut off Nicanor's head and the right hand that he had so arrogantly stretched out, and brought them and displayed them just outside Jerusalem. ⁴⁸The people rejoiced greatly and celebrated that day as a day of great gladness. ⁴⁹They decreed that this day should be celebrated each year on the thirteenth day of Adar. ⁵⁰So the land of Judah had rest for a few days.

2. 2 Maccabees: A Hellenized History, late second century BCE

2:19-3:40: The story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, ²⁰and further the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator, ²¹and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism, so that though few in number they seized the whole land and pursued the barbarian hordes, ²²and regained possession of the temple famous

throughout the world, and liberated the city, and re-established the laws that were about to be abolished, while the Lord with great kindness became gracious to them—²³all this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book. ²⁴For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material, ²⁵we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers. ²⁶For us who have undertaken the toil of abbreviating, it is no light matter but calls for sweat and loss of sleep,²⁷just as it is not easy for one who prepares a banquet and seeks the benefit of others. Nevertheless, to secure the gratitude of many we will gladly endure the uncomfortable toil, ²⁸leaving the responsibility for exact details to the compiler, while devoting our effort to arriving at the outlines of the condensation. ²⁹For as the master builder of a new house must be concerned with the whole construction, while the one who undertakes its painting and decoration has to consider only what is suitable for its adornment, such in my judgement is the case with us. ³⁰It is the duty of the original historian to occupy the ground, to discuss matters from every side, and to take trouble with details, ³¹but the one who recasts the narrative should be allowed to strive for brevity of expression and to forego exhaustive treatment. ³²At this point therefore let us begin our narrative, without adding any more to what has already been said; for it would be foolish to lengthen the preface while cutting short the history itself.

³While the holy city was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were strictly observed because of the piety of the high priest Onias and his hatred of wickedness, ²it came about that the kings themselves honoured the place and glorified the temple with the finest presents, ³even to the extent that King Seleucus of Asia defrayed from his own revenues all the expenses connected with the service of the sacrifices.

⁴ But a man named Simon, of the tribe of Benjamin, who had been made captain of the temple, had a disagreement with the high priest about the administration of the city market. ⁵Since he could not prevail over Onias, he went to Apollonius of Tarsus, who at that time was governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, ⁶and reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices, but that it was possible for them to fall under the control of the king. ⁷When Apollonius met the king, he told him of the money about which he had been informed. The king chose Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, and sent him with commands to effect the removal of the reported wealth. ⁸Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, ostensibly to make a tour of inspection of the cities of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, but in fact to carry out the king's purpose.

⁹ When he had arrived at Jerusalem and had been kindly welcomed by the high priest of the city, he told about the disclosure that had been made and stated why he had come, and he inquired whether this really was the situation. ¹⁰The high priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans, ¹¹and also some money of Hyrcanus son of Tobias, a man of very prominent position, and that it totalled in all four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold. To such an extent the impious Simon had misrepresented the facts. ¹²And he said that it was utterly impossible that wrong should be done to those people who had trusted in the holiness of the place and in the sanctity and inviolability of the temple that is honoured throughout the whole world. But Heliodorus, because of the orders he had from the king, said that this money must in any case be confiscated for the king's treasury. ¹⁴So he set a day and went in to direct the inspection of these funds.

There was no little distress throughout the whole city. ¹⁵The priests prostrated themselves before the altar in their priestly vestments and called towards heaven upon him who had given the law about deposits, that he should keep them safe for those who had deposited them. ¹⁶To see the appearance of the high priest was to be wounded at heart, for his face and the change in his colour disclosed the anguish of his soul. ¹⁷For terror and bodily trembling had come over the man, which plainly showed to those who looked at him the pain lodged in his heart. ¹⁸People also hurried out of their houses in crowds to make a general supplication because the holy place was about to be brought into dishonour. ¹⁹Women, girded with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. Some of the young women who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of the windows. ²⁰And holding up their hands to heaven, they all made

supplication. ²¹There was something pitiable in the prostration of the whole populace and the anxiety of the high priest in his great anguish.

22 While they were calling upon the Almighty Lord that he would keep what had been entrusted safe and secure for those who had entrusted it, ²³Heliodorus went on with what had been decided. ²⁴But when he arrived at the treasury with his bodyguard, then and there the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused so great a manifestation that all who had been so bold as to accompany him were astounded by the power of God, and became faint with terror. ²⁵For there appeared to them a magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien; it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armour and weapons of gold. ²⁶Two young men also appeared to him, remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed, who stood on either side of him and flogged him continuously, inflicting many blows on him. ²⁷When he suddenly fell to the ground and deep darkness came over him, his men took him up, put him on a stretcher, ²⁸and carried him away—this man who had just entered the aforesaid treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard but was now unable to help himself. They recognized clearly the sovereign power of God.

29 While he lay prostrate, speechless because of the divine intervention and deprived of any hope of recovery, ³⁰they praised the Lord who had acted marvellously for his own place. And the temple, which a little while before was full of fear and disturbance, was filled with joy and gladness, now that the Almighty Lord had appeared. Some of Heliodorus's friends quickly begged Onias to call upon the Most High to grant life to one who was lying quite at his last breath. ³²So the high priest, fearing that the king might get the notion that some foul play had been perpetrated by the Jews with regard to Heliodorus, offered sacrifice for the man's recovery. ³³While the high priest was making an atonement, the same young men appeared again to Heliodorus dressed in the same clothing, and they stood and said, 'Be very grateful to the high priest Onias, since for his sake the Lord has granted you your life. ³⁴And see that you, who have been flogged by heaven, report to all people the majestic power of God.' Having said this they vanished.

35 Then Heliodorus offered sacrifice to the Lord and made very great vows to the Saviour of his life, and having bidden Onias farewell, he marched off with his forces to the king. ³⁶He bore testimony to all concerning the deeds of the supreme God, which he had seen with his own eyes. ³⁷When the king asked Heliodorus what sort of person would be suitable to send on another mission to Jerusalem, he replied, ³⁸'If you have any enemy or plotter against your government, send him there, for you will get him back thoroughly flogged, if he survives at all; for there is certainly some power of God about the place. ³⁹For 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.' ⁴⁰This was the outcome of the episode of Heliodorus and the protection of the treasury.

6-7: Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God; ²also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as did the people who lived in that place. Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. ⁴For the temple was filled with debauchery and revelling by the Gentiles, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. ⁵The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. ⁶People could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.

7 On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when a festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and to walk in the procession in honour of Dionysus. ⁸At the suggestion of the people of Ptolemais a decree was issued to the neighbouring Greek cities that they should adopt the same policy towards the Jews and make them partake of the sacrifices, ⁹and should kill those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them. ¹⁰For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. They publicly paraded them around the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then hurled them down headlong from the wall. ¹¹Others who had

assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day.

12 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. ¹³In fact, it is a sign of great kindness not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately. ¹⁴For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, ¹⁵in order that he should not take vengeance on us afterwards when our sins have reached their height. ¹⁶Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people.

¹⁷Let what we have said serve as a reminder; we must go on briefly with the story. 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. ¹⁹But he, welcoming death with honour rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh,²⁰as all ought to do who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life. Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, ²²so that by doing this he might be saved from death, and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them.²³But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the grey hairs that he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades.

24 'Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life,' he said, 'for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion, ²⁵and through my pretence, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age. ²⁶Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty. ²⁷Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age ²⁸and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.' When he had said this, he went at once to the rack. ²⁹Those who a little before had acted towards him with goodwill now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness.³⁰When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: 'It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him.' So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation.

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. ²One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, 'What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.'

³ The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and cauldrons heated. ⁴These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. ⁵When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, ⁶'The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, "And he will have compassion on his servants."'

7 After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, ‘Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?’⁸ He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, ‘No.’ Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done.⁹ And when he was at his last breath, he said, ‘You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.’

10 After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands,¹¹ and said nobly, ‘I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.’¹² As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man’s spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way.¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, ‘One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!’

15 Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him.¹⁶ But he looked at the king, and said, ‘Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people.¹⁷ Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!’ After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, ‘Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened.¹⁹ But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!’

20 The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord.²¹ She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman’s reasoning with a man’s courage, and said to them, 22I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you.²³ Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.’

24 Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs.²⁵ Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself.²⁶ After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son.²⁷ But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native language as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: ‘My son, have pity on me. I carried you for nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you.²⁸ I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being.²⁹ Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.’

30 While she was still speaking, the young man said, ‘What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through Moses.³¹ But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God.³² For we are suffering because of our own sins.³³ And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.³⁴ But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven.³⁵ You have not yet escaped the judgement of the almighty, all-seeing God.³⁶ For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life, under God’s

covenant; but you, by the judgement of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. ³⁷I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, ³⁸and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.⁷

³⁹The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. ⁴⁰So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord. Last of all, the mother died, after her sons. Let this be enough, then, about the eating of sacrifices and the extreme tortures.

10:1–9 Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; they tore down the altars that 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; 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. 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. 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. 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. Such then was the end of Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes.¹

Epilogue: Other Historical Sources about the Rebellion and Holiday Commemorating It

1. 2 Maccabees 1:1–1:9; c. 124 BCE

The Jews in Jerusalem and those in the land of Judea, To their Jewish kindred in Egypt, Greetings and true peace. May God do good to you, and may he remember his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, his faithful servants. ³May he give you all a heart to worship him and to do his will with a strong heart and a willing spirit. ⁴May he open your heart to his law and his commandments, and may he bring peace. ⁵May he hear your prayers and be reconciled to you, and may he not forsake you in time of evil. ⁶We are now praying for you here.

In the reign of Demetrius, in the one hundred and sixty-ninth year, we Jews wrote to you, in the critical distress that came upon us in those years after Jason and his company revolted from the holy land and the kingdom ⁸and burned the gate and shed innocent blood. We prayed to the Lord and were heard, and we offered sacrifice and grain-offering, and we lit the lamps and set out the loaves. ⁹And now see that you keep the festival of booths in the month of Chislev, in the one hundred and eighty-eighth year.

2. 2 Maccabees 1:10–2:18; c. 103 or 102 BCE

The people of Jerusalem and of Judea and the senate and Judas, To Aristobulus, who is of the family of the anointed priests, teacher of King Ptolemy, and to the Jews in Egypt, Greetings and good health.

¹¹Having been saved by God out of grave dangers we thank him greatly for taking our side against the king, ¹²for he drove out those who fought against the holy city. ¹³When the leader reached Persia with a force that seemed irresistible, they were cut to pieces in the temple of Nanea by a deception employed by the priests of the goddess Nanea. ¹⁴On the pretext of intending to marry her, Antiochus came to the place

¹ Trans. NRSV.

together with his Friends, to secure most of its treasures as a dowry. ¹⁵When the priests of the temple of Nanea had set out the treasures and Antiochus had come with a few men inside the wall of the sacred precinct, they closed the temple as soon as he entered it. ¹⁶Opening a secret door in the ceiling, they threw stones and struck down the leader and his men; they dismembered them and cut off their heads and threw them to the people outside. ¹⁷Blessed in every way be our God, who has brought judgement on those who have behaved impiously.

18 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 the festival of booths and the festival of the fire given when Nehemiah, who built the temple and the altar, offered sacrifices. For when our ancestors were being led captive to Persia, the pious priests of that time took some of the fire of the altar and secretly hid it in the hollow of a dry cistern, where they took such precautions that the place was unknown to anyone. ²⁰But after many years had passed, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having been commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to get it. And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but only a thick liquid, he ordered them to dip it out and bring it. ²¹When the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and on the things laid upon it. ²²When this had been done and some time had passed, and when the sun, which had been clouded over, shone out, a great fire blazed up, so that all marvelled. ²³And while the sacrifice was being consumed, the priests offered prayer—the priests and everyone. Jonathan led, and the rest responded, as did Nehemiah. ²⁴The prayer was to this effect:

‘O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, you alone are king and are kind, ²⁵you alone are bountiful, you alone are just and almighty and eternal. You rescue Israel from every evil; you chose the ancestors and consecrated them. ²⁶Accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel and preserve your portion and make it holy. ²⁷Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look on those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that you are our God. ²⁸Punish those who oppress and are insolent with pride. ²⁹Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses promised.’

30 Then the priests sang the hymns. ³¹After the materials of the sacrifice had been consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the liquid that was left should be poured on large stones. ³²When this was done, a flame blazed up; but when the light from the altar shone back, it went out. ³³When this matter became known, and it was reported to the king of the Persians that, in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire, the liquid had appeared with which Nehemiah and his associates had burned the materials of the sacrifice, ³⁴the king investigated the matter, and enclosed the place and made it sacred. ³⁵And with those persons whom the king favoured he exchanged many excellent gifts. ³⁶Nehemiah and his associates called this ‘nephthar’, which means purification, but by most people it is called naphtha.

One finds in the records that the prophet Jeremiah ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned,²and that the prophet, after giving them the law, instructed those who were being deported not to forget the commandments of the Lord, or to be led astray in their thoughts on seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornment. ³And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts.

⁴ It was also in the same document that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. ⁵Jeremiah came and found a cave-dwelling, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense; then he sealed up the entrance. ⁶Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. ⁷When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: ‘The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. ⁸Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated.’

9 It was also made clear that being possessed of wisdom Solomon offered sacrifice for the dedication and completion of the temple. ¹⁰Just as Moses prayed to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, so also Solomon prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the whole burnt-offerings. ¹¹And Moses said, 'They were consumed because the sin-offering had not been eaten.' ¹²Likewise, Solomon also kept the eight days.

13 The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings. ¹⁴In the same way Judas also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war that had come upon us, and they are in our possession. ¹⁵So if you have need of them, send people to get them for you. Since, therefore, we are about to celebrate the purification, we write to you. Will you therefore please keep the days? ¹⁷It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, ¹⁸as he promised through the law. We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils and has purified the place.

3. Josephus Flavius, late 1st century CE

The Jewish War, I.1.3–6

Now Judas, supposing that Antiochus would not lie still, gathered an army out of his own countrymen, and was the first that made a league of friendship with the Romans, and drove Epiphanes out of the country when he had made a second expedition into it, and this by giving him a great defeat there; and when he was warmed by this great success, he made an assault upon the garrison that was in the city, for it had not been cut off hitherto; so he ejected them out of the upper city, and drove the soldiers into the lower, which part of the city was called the Citadel. He then got the temple under his power, and cleansed the whole place, and walled it round about, and made new vessels for sacred ministrations, and brought them into the temple, because the former vessels had been profaned. He also built another altar, and began to offer the sacrifices; and when the city had already received its sacred constitution again, Antiochus died; whose son Antiochus succeeded him in the kingdom, and in his hatred to the Jews also.

So this Antiochus got together fifty thousand footmen, and five thousand horsemen, and fourscore elephants, and marched through Judea into the mountainous parts. He then took Bethsura, which was a small city; but at a place called Bethzacharis, where the passage was narrow, Judas met him with his army. However, before the forces joined battle, Judas's brother Eleazar, seeing the very highest of the elephants adorned with a large tower, and with military trappings of gold to guard him, and supposing that Antiochus himself was upon him, he ran a great way before his own army, and cutting his way through the enemy's troops, he got up to the elephant; yet could he not reach him who seemed to be the king, by reason of his being so high; but still he ran his weapon into the belly of the beast, and brought him down upon himself, and was crushed to death, having done no more than attempted great things, and showed that he preferred glory before life. Now he that governed the elephant was but a private man; and had he proved to be Antiochus, Eleazar had performed nothing more by this bold stroke than that it might appear he chose to die, when he had the bare hope of thereby doing a glorious action; nay, this disappointment proved an omen to his brother [Judas] how the entire battle would end. It is true that the Jews fought it out bravely for a long time, but the king's forces, being superior in number, and having fortune on their side, obtained the victory. And when a great many of his men were slain, Judas took the rest with him, and fled to the toparchy of [Gophna](#)... Now, after the king was departed, Judas...gave battle again to Antiochus's generals at a village called Adasa; and being too hard for his enemies in the battle, and killing a great number of them, he was at last himself slain also. Nor was it many days afterward that his brother John had a plot laid against him by Antiochus's party, and was slain by them.

Antiquities of the Jews, 12.7.7

Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon; but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored God, and delighted them by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival. Judas also rebuilt the walls round about the city, and reared towers of great height against the incursions of enemies, and set guards therein. He also fortified the city Bethsura, that it might serve as a citadel against any distresses that might come from our enemies. ²

4. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sabbath 21b, c. 6th century

What is [the reason of] Hanukkah? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonian dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.³

5. Liturgy of Shemoneh Esrei, c. 9th century

In the days of Mattathias the son of Jochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonian, and his sons, when the wicked kingdom of Greece stood against your nation Israel, to force them to abandon your Torah and to remove them from the statutes of Your will, and you in Your great mercy stood in their defense at the time of their troubles, you fought their battle, you judged their judgment, you avenged their avengement, you placed the strong into the hand of the weak, and the many into the hand of the few, and the impure into the hand of the sanctified, and the wicked into the hand of the righteous, and the sinners into the hand of those who busy themselves with Your Torah, and You made for yourself a great and holy name in Your world, and You made a great victory and salvation for your nation Israel on this day. And afterwards your sons came to the holy part of Your house, and they cleansed Your dwelling-place, and they purified Your sanctuary, and they lit candles in the courtyards of Your holy [place], and they established these eight days of Hannukah, to give thanks and praise before Your great Name.

6. Pesikta Rabbati 2, c. 9th century

Why do we kindle lights on Hanukah? Because when the sons of the Hasmonians, the High Priest, defeated the Hellenists, they entered the Temple and found there eight iron spears. They stuck candles on them and lit them.

7. Gregory of Nazianzus, c. 329–290

Oration 15: In Praise of the Maccabees

The festival today is indeed in their [the Maccabees'] honor, though not many recognize them because their martyrdom antedates Christ. Yet they deserve universal recognition for their unswerving devotion to the ways

² Trans. W. Whiston.

³ Trans. Soncino.

of their fathers. Consider what they, whose martyrdom preceded Christ's passion, would have achieved if they had been persecuted after the time of Christ and were able to emulate his death on our behalf...Not one of those who attained perfection before the coming of Christ accomplished his goal without faith in Christ. While this statement is both arcane and even to a certain extent mystic, I for one consider it very persuasive, as do all who love Christ. For although the Logos was later openly proclaimed in his own era, he was made known even before to the pure of mind, as is evident from the large number of persons who achieved honor before his day. Such noble figures, then, are not to be overlooked because they lived before the time of the cross, but should rather be acclaimed for having lived in accordance with the cross...

Here is an act to be held in no less esteem than the trials of Daniel, who was consigned as prey to lions and who vanquished the beasts by spreading his hands. Here is an act in no way second to that of the young men in Assyria whom an angel refreshed in the midst of the fire when they refused to violate the law of their fathers by eating profane and desecrated food. Here is an act not less generous than that of those who later sacrificed themselves for Christ. They...imitated Christ's shedding of his blood, and it was God who blazed the trail for such prizes with his own so great and so marvelous offering on our behalf. The Maccabees, on the other hand, could not point to many, or such, demonstrations of virtue.⁴

8. John Chrysostom, c. 347-407

Homilies on the Maccabean Martyrs; On Eleazar and the Seven Boys, section 5

For I don't hesitate to count them [the mother and her seven sons] with the other martyrs, to the extent that I declare that they are even more brilliant. For they competed at a time when the bronze gates had not yet been shattered, nor the iron bar removed, when sin still ruled and the curse flourished and the Devil's citadel stood and the path of this kind of virtue was as yet untrodden.

⁴ *St. Gregory of Nazianus: Select Orations*. Trans. Martha Vinson. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994.