



After Ezra and Nehemiah the Judean province, at the extreme end of the Persian empire, lived on the fringes of history for three centuries. Those with greater initiative dedicated themselves to trading and left their country to settle in all the urban centers around the Mediterranean. Yet, one hundred years after Nehemiah, in 333 B.C., Alexander the Great began to chart the Middle East countries, defeating all the enemy armies and overthrowing the kings. Although he died when he was thirty years old, his triumphs opened the way for the spread of Greek culture with its longing for growth, its confidence in human potential and its open spirit which surpassed national individualism.

Alexander's generals parceled out his huge empire among themselves. The Ptolemies, who dominated Egypt and Palestine, were understanding and did not disturb the Jews for the sake of their religion and customs. But when the Antiochians of Syria defeated the Egyptians in 197 and took Palestine away from them, they began to impose their pagan religion on the Jews.

This fierce persecution caused the uprising of the Jews headed by the

Maccabean family. The first book of Maccabees – acknowledged as one of the most perfect books of ancient history – relates the events in the war and the deeds of the five Maccabean brothers, from the year 170 to 130 B.C.

Holy War, Liberation War

The book of Maccabees shows us a people who desire to live but for whom faith is more valuable than even life itself. When all have become accustomed to living without conflicts, persecution begins. Many are convinced they can do nothing against such a great power and that the risks are too great to overcome. Then the Spirit of God engenders new heroes through whom people recover their sense of dignity, fighting for those rights that make them fully human and true believers.

The Jewish people found themselves alone against their oppressors, and their Roman allies were not much help. They relied on their own strength and God helped them in their efforts.

The Maccabean wars are models of holy wars. They also proved that holy wars do not solve everything. Caught up in military problems and in political games, the Maccabees' descendants soon became materialistic and were despised or opposed by true believers.

Alexander

1 • ¹ Everything began with the conquests of Alexander the first, son of Philip, the Macedonian. Setting out from Greece, he killed Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes. Being already King of Greece, he took the throne of Darius. ² After fighting many battles, conquering strongholds and putting to death the kings of those nations, ³ he reached the ends of the earth and plundered several nations. And when the world became quiet and subject to his power, he became proud. ⁴ He gathered a strong army, ruled over provinces and nations, and rulers paid him taxes. ⁵ But he fell sick, and knowing he was going to die, ⁶ he summoned his generals and the noblemen who had been brought up with him from his youth; and while still alive, he divided his kingdom among them. ⁷ Alexander had reigned for twelve years when he died.

⁸ His generals assumed power, each one in the region assigned to him. ⁹ And immediately after Alexander's death, they made themselves kings and their sons after them, filling the earth with evil for many years. ¹⁰ From their descendants there came a godless offshoot, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus, who had been held as hostage in Rome. He became king in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the Greek era (175 B.C.).

¹¹ It was then that some rebels emerged from Israel, who succeeded in winning over many people. They said, "Let us renew contact with the peoples around us for we had endured many misfortunes since we separated from them."

¹² This proposal was well-received ¹³ and some eagerly went to the king. The king authorized them to adopt the customs of the pagan nations. ¹⁴ With his permission, they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem in the pagan style. ¹⁵ And as they wanted to be like the pagans in everything, they made artificial foreskins for themselves and abandoned the Holy Covenant, sinning as they pleased.

Antiochus despoils the Temple

¹⁶ When Antiochus felt confident of his power, he decided to seize Egypt and rule over the two nations. ¹⁷ He entered Egypt with a strong army, with chariots of war, elephants, horses and a great fleet ¹⁸ and attacked Ptolemy, king of Egypt. Ptolemy had

to retreat and was defeated, and many of his men died. ¹⁹ The victors seized the fortified cities of Egypt and plundered the land. ²⁰ In the year one hundred and forty-three (169 B.C.), when Antiochus returned after defeating Egypt, he passed through Israel and went up to Jerusalem with a strong army.

²¹ He arrogantly broke into the sanctuary and removed the golden altar, the lampstand for the light with all its accessories, ²² the table for the bread of offering, the libation vessels, the cups, the golden censers, the curtains and the crowns, and stripped away all the decorations, the golden moldings that used to cover the Temple entrance. ²³ He also took possession of the silver, gold, valuable objects and all the hidden treasures he could find. ²⁴ He took everything with him and left for his country, after shedding much blood and making arrogant statements.

²⁵ There was great mourning throughout the land of Israel: ²⁶ *The leaders and the elders groaned, young men and maidens lost courage, and women grew pale;* ²⁷ *bridegrooms sang lamentations, and the young bride wept in her marriage-bed.* ²⁸ *The earth quaked, in sorrow for its inhabitants, and all the people of Jacob were humiliated.*

²⁹ After two years, the king sent to the cities of Judah the chief tax collector and he came to Jerusalem with a strong army. ³⁰ He spoke to the people with words of peace in order to deceive them. But when he had gained their confidence, he suddenly fell on the city and dealt it a terrible blow, killing many Israelites. ³¹ He plundered the city, burning and destroying the palaces and the surrounding walls.

³² He took women and children captive and seized the livestock. ³³ Then they rebuilt the city of David with a high and solid wall protected by strong towers, and this became their fortress. ³⁴ There they set evil men and apostates who defended it. ³⁵ They stored up weapons and provisions, and everything they looted in the city, posing a constant threat. ³⁶ It became an ambush for the sanctuary, a grave and constant threat to Israel. ³⁷ They shed innocent blood around the sanctuary and defiled the sanctuary itself.

³⁸ The inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them. She became a colony of strangers, and was a stranger to her children who abandoned her. ³⁹ Her sanctuary became empty as the desert, her feasts became

• **1.1** This first paragraph summarizes the period of history from Alexander until Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria. Note the passage 1:11-15 where the beginning of the moral crisis in Judah is emphasized.

Two things characterize the Greek civilization of the Syrians:

– Art and the multiplicity of statues which, however beautiful they may have been, were used in pagan worship.

– Physical education: stadiums, sports, swimming pools. Sports were practiced in the nude, which scandalized the Jews. This explains why those who were ashamed to be known as Jews

2Mac
4:71:34
10:611Cor
7:182Mac
5:11
Dn
11:25-
282Mac
5:212Mac
5:24-
26

days of mourning, her Sabbaths were ridiculed, and her fame became an object of contempt. ⁴⁰ As her glory had been great, so now was her dishonor, for her greatness was turned into grief.

Religious persecution

^{2Mac} ⁶ • ⁴¹ Antiochus issued a decree to his whole kingdom. ⁴² All the peoples of his empire had to renounce their particular customs and become one people. ⁴³ All the pagan nations obeyed and respected the king's decree, and even in Israel many accepted the imposed cult. They offered sacrifices to idols and no longer respected the Sabbath. ⁴⁴ The King sent messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judea to carry the decree which imposed strange customs. ⁴⁵ In accordance with it, burnt offerings, sacrifices and other offerings in the sanctuary were suppressed. It also ordered that Sabbaths and sacred feasts be like ordinary days. ⁴⁶ The sanctuary and its ministers were no longer to be regarded sacred, ⁴⁷ instead, altars, sacred enclosures and temples were to be dedicated to idols. They were to offer pigs and unclean animals in sacrifice, ⁴⁸ and not perform on their sons the rite of circumcision. To sum up, they were to defile themselves by all kinds of impurity and profanity ⁴⁹ in order to forget the Law and

^{2Mac}
^{6:2}
^{Dn}
^{11:38}

change all their customs. ⁵⁰ The decree finally declared: "Anyone who does not fulfill the king's order shall die."

⁵¹ The king published this obligation throughout the province and inspectors appointed by him went around the land of Judea. They saw to it that sacrifices were offered in all cities. ⁵² Many Israelites joined them, abandoned the Law and committed countless evils ⁵³ obliging the true Israelites to find places of refuge to hide themselves.

⁵⁴ On the fifteenth day of the month of Chislev, in the year one hundred and forty-five, Antiochus erected the "abominable idol of the invaders" on the altar of the temple. Pagan altars were built throughout the whole land of Judea; ⁵⁵ incense was offered at the doors of their houses and in the squares. ⁵⁶ There wicked men tore up the books of the Law they found and burned them. ⁵⁷ They killed anyone they caught in possession of the book of the Covenant and who fulfilled the precepts of the Law, as the royal decree had ordered. ⁵⁸ And being men in power, they pursued the Israelite rebels they found month after month in the cities. ⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of every month, they offered their sacrifices on the new altar they had built upon the altar of the Temple.

^{Dn}
^{11:30}
^{12:4}

^{Dn}
^{9:27}
^{11:31}
^{12:11}
^{Mt}
^{24:15}

had to have their missing foreskins – after circumcision – replaced through a surgical procedure.

• 41. This chapter presents two aspects of the crisis:

1) A moral crisis. The Jews were in contact with a more advanced, though pagan, civilization. Could one adapt to and take advantage of this culture without giving up one's faith?

At that time the Jews were about to pay for the error they had made in keeping apart from the cultural progress of neighboring nations. For three centuries they emphasized that all the laws and customs of Israel came directly from God and could not be revised. So, when modern currents emerged, the most open among them went through a conscience crisis: could they perhaps change the customs without betraying God? It was very difficult to open up to Greek civilization without being seen as a renegade, that those who wanted to be modern, not only

changed their life style, but also abandoned their religion. Think about what happens today when young people, educated in super-conservative schools or parishes, discover revolutionary currents which inspire them.

2) Then came organized persecution. The powerful kings wanted to unite all the groups within their empire. They said that religion was divisive. Freedom of conscience seemed dangerous to them. The kings struggled against those who wanted to serve God and to follow their consciences.

The people were worried: up to what point can one endure the undermining and the making fun of one's religious practices?

In 1:54, there is mention of the "abominable idol of the invaders," which is also mentioned in Daniel 9:27. This is the way they refer to a pagan altar built on the site of the ancient altar of the Temple. Jesus will give a new meaning to this expression in Mark 13:14.

^{2Mac} 6:10 ⁶⁰The women who, in defiance of the decree, had the rite of circumcision performed on their children, were put to death with their babies hung around their necks. ⁶¹Their families and all who had taken part in the circumcision were also put to death.

⁶²But in spite of all this, many Israelites still remained firm and determined not to eat unclean food. ⁶³They preferred to die rather than to make themselves unclean with those foods (prohibited by the Law) that violated the Holy Covenant. ⁶⁴And Israel suffered a very great trial.

Mattathias unleashes the Holy War

^{1Chr} 24:7 **2** • ¹In those days Mattathias, son of Simon, a priest of the family of Yoarib, left Jerusalem and went to settle in Modein. ²He had five sons: John, known as Gaddi, ³Simon called Thassi, ⁴Judas called Maccabeus, ⁵Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

⁶Mattathias saw the blasphemies committed in Judah and Jerusalem, ⁷so he said: “Alas! Was I born just to witness the ruin of my people and the destruction of the holy city? Shall I sit by while she is in the hands of her enemies and her sanctuary in the power of foreigners?”

⁸Her temple has become like a dishonored man, ⁹the precious objects that were her glory have been carried off as booty, her babies have been murdered in the squares, and her young men killed by the sword of the enemy. ¹⁰What nation has not received part of her treasures and taken possession of her spoils? ¹¹She has been stripped of all her adornments and from the free-

dom that was hers, she has gone into slavery. ¹²Our beautiful sanctuary that was our pride has been laid waste and profaned by pagans. ¹³What is there to live for?”

¹⁴Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth and went into deep mourning. ¹⁵In the meantime, the king’s representatives, who were forcing the Jews to give up their religion came to Modein to organize a sacred gathering.

¹⁶While many Israelites went to them, Mattathias and his sons drew apart.

¹⁷The representatives of the king addressed Mattathias, and said to him: “You are one of the leaders of this city, an important and well-known man, and your many children and relatives follow you. ¹⁸Come now and be the first to fulfill the king’s order, as the men of Judah have already done, and the survivors in Jerusalem as well. You and your sons will be named Friends of the King and the king will send you gold, silver and many other gifts.”

¹⁹But Mattathias answered in a loud voice: “Even if all the nations included in the kingdom should abandon the religion of their ancestors and submit to the order of King Antiochus, ²⁰I, my sons and my family will remain faithful to the Covenant of our ancestors. ²¹May God preserve us from abandoning the Law and its precepts. ²²We will not obey the orders of the king nor turn aside from our religion either to the right or to the left.”

²³When he finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of everyone to offer incense on the altar that was built in Modein according to

• **2.1** The entire book will deal with the war under the leadership of the Maccabean family, namely, Mattathias’ sons. Here we have the story of the rebellion of Mattathias, the priest who suddenly becomes the leader of the persecuted.

I, my sons and my family will remain faithful to the Covenant. Their motive is religious and

national at the same time: Mattathias risks everything against a totalitarian power. Once again, God shows his kindness toward his people, by making the needed leader emerge, a man who, like Moses, sides totally with the people, when he could have easily obtained the favor of the powerful.

the king's decree. ²⁴When Mattathias saw him, he was fired with zeal, his heart was stirred, and giving vent to his righteous anger, he threw himself on the Jew and cut the man's throat on the altar. ²⁵At the same time, he killed the king's representative who was forcing the people to offer sacrifice, and then tore down the altar. ²⁶In doing this he showed his zeal for the Law, as Phinehas had done with Zimri, son of Salu.

Num
25:6-
15

²⁷Mattathias then began to proclaim loudly in the city: "Everyone who is zealous for the Law and supports the Covenant, come out and follow me!"

2Mac
5:27
Mk
13:14
Lk
1:65

²⁸Immediately he and his sons fled to the mountains and left behind all they had in the city.

• ²⁹Many Jews who looked for justice and wanted to be faithful to the Law went into the desert; ³⁰they took with them their children, wives and livestock because life had become unbearable for them.

³¹Then the king's representatives and the authority in the city of David, in Jerusalem, were informed that some men had disobeyed the king's order and had gone to hide in the caves in the desert.

³²A strong force of the king pursued and overtook them. They surrounded them and prepared themselves for an attack. It was the day of the Sabbath. ³³And they said to the Jews: "Enough of this! Come out and obey the king's order if you wish to save your lives." ³⁴But they answered: "We will neither come out nor obey the king's order to violate the day of the Sabbath."

³⁵So they attacked them at once,

³⁶but the Jews did not defend themselves, nor did they try to close the entrance of their place of refuge. ³⁷They said: "We shall die with a clear conscience but heaven and earth will remember that we were murdered." ³⁸The king's men attacked them on that Sabbath, and they all died – men, women and children – a total of more than a thousand, not counting the livestock.

³⁹When Mattathias and his friends came to know what happened, they went into deep mourning. ⁴⁰They said to one another: "We cannot do as our brothers and sisters have done; we shall fight against the pagans to defend our life and our customs; otherwise, they will quickly destroy us." ⁴¹On that day, they resolved to defend themselves against anyone who attacked them on the day of the Sabbath, and not let themselves be killed, as had happened with their people in the hiding place.

⁴²At that time, a group of Hasideans (the Devout), valiant Israelites who devoted themselves sincerely to the Law, joined them. ⁴³All those who wanted to escape from oppression joined them, and in this way they grew strong. ⁴⁴They succeeded in forming an army; then they began to pour their anger and indignation onto the sinners and renegades. These men had to flee to other lands for safety. ⁴⁵Mattathias and his friends made expeditions during which they destroyed the altars, ⁴⁶imposed by force the rite of circumcision on the children they found uncircumcised, ⁴⁷and pursued all the arrogant. The un-

7:13
2Mac
14:6

• 29. Two opposite attitudes on the part of believers are seen in this text.

Some decide only on the basis of God's Law, or rather, the interpretation of the Sabbath law; it was forbidden to fight on that day dedicated to God. They let themselves be killed heroically. Others use their heads and their consciences and choose to defend themselves.

The book does not condemn anyone. However, it becomes obvious that believers cannot

act only by looking at books and the past. We always find ourselves in new situations which demand new reflection: "We were not made for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). In verse 42, we hear of the *Hasideans*. This movement for spiritual renewal, from which the Pharisees and the Essenes will later emerge, existed before Mattathias' rebellion. They joined him, but later they separated when Mattathias' sons, the Maccabees, got lost in politics.

dertaking prospered in their hands. ⁴⁸They defended the Law against foreigners and their kings, and subdued the renegades.

Mattathias' death

⁴⁹When Mattathias neared his death, he said to his sons: "Now the insolent and the violent are in power; it is a time of upheaval in which God releases his anger. ⁵⁰So, my sons, be zealous for the Law and risk your lives defending the Covenant of our ancestors. ⁵¹Remember the deeds our ancestors fulfilled in their time, that you too may have fame and glory.

⁵²Remember Abraham who proved himself faithful in the hour of trial, and how God held him to be a righteous man. ⁵³Joseph, at the time of his misfortune observed the commandment of God and so became the lord of Egypt. ⁵⁴Phinehas, our ancestors, because of his great zeal received the priesthood for himself and for his sons forever. ⁵⁵Joshua became head of Israel because he carried out God's command. ⁵⁶Caleb received his inheritance in this land because he had proclaimed the truth before the assembly. ⁵⁷And David was given a lasting kingdom because of his devotion. ⁵⁸Elijah because of his zeal for the Law was taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹Hananiah, Dn 3 Azariah and Mishael were saved from the flames because of their faith. ⁶⁰Daniel was Dn 6 rescued from the lion's mouth because of his righteousness. ⁶¹Consider, then, that in any generation those who trust in God are never defeated.

⁶²Do not fear the threats of an impious man, for his glory shall end in dung and worms. ⁶³Today he is exalted, but tomorrow he shall perish; he shall return to dust from where he came, and nothing shall remain of his plans. ⁶⁴Have courage, my sons, and remain steadfast in the Law for in this you will receive glory.

⁶⁵I know that among you, Simon is a man of sound judgment; listen to him and he shall take your father's place. ⁶⁶Judas Maccabeus has been valiant from his youth: let him be your general and conduct the war against foreigners.

• **3.1** After the death of Mattathias, his son Judas heads the resistance.

For three centuries the attention of the believers had been exclusively focused on worship activities. Priests and Levites appeared as the only models of faith. Now, because of circumstances, there is a change. Suddenly the Jewish people are looking again at the days of the Judges or of David. For many of them, the model believer becomes the armed fighter who risks his life to liberate his people.

Actually the brutal persecution brought them

⁶⁷Now, call all those who fulfill the Law to join you and defend our people. ⁶⁸Retaliate against the pagans and fulfill the ordinance of the Law."

⁶⁹Mattathias blessed them and then went to join his fathers. ⁷⁰He died in the year one hundred and forty-six and they buried him in the tomb of his fathers at Modein; and all Israel mourned him deeply.

Judas Maccabeus

3 • ¹Mattathias' son, Judas Maccabeus, succeeded him. ²His brothers and all who had followed his father gave him their support and they continued the war with determination.

³*Judas made the name of his people more famous. He put on his breastplate and girded himself with the armor of war like a giant; he fought many battles and protected his camp with his sword.*

⁴*He was like a lion when he attacked, like a lion's whelp roaring over its prey.*

⁵*He pursued the renegades in their secret places and consigned to the flames those who troubled his people.*

⁶*All the renegades feared him, all evildoers were confounded, and liberation was accomplished through him.*

⁷*Many kings feared him, while the people of Israel rejoiced in his deeds.*

His memory shall be blessed forever. ⁸He went through the cities of Judah utterly destroying the impious and saved Israel in their trial.

⁹*His fame resounded to the ends of the earth for having gathered those about to perish.*

First successes

• ¹⁰Apollonius also gathered together men from the pagans and a good number of Samaritans to fight Israel. ¹¹When Judas learned of this, he went out to meet him in battle; he defeated and killed him. Many of the enemy fell and the rest fled. ¹²They seized the plunder and Judas took the sword

to the point where refraining from fighting meant renouncing everything which had made the Jewish people different from all others.

Before the unequal struggle, we have Judas' profession of faith: God can give victory to a few fighting a multitude. This is how David spoke when he faced Goliath (1 S 14:6 and 17:47).

• 10. The books of Maccabees repeatedly stress that the Jews fought, above all, to defend their Holy Place. This Temple was the symbol of the whole Law, that is, of their whole religion.

of Apollonius, and from then on he always used it in battle.

¹³Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, learned that Judas had gathered many men and that the whole community of believers was at his side.

¹⁴He thought: "This is now the opportunity for me to make myself famous and become an important man in the kingdom. I will go to fight Judas and his men who do not obey the king's order."

¹⁵So he did, and a strong army of pagans went up with him to help him take vengeance on the children of Israel.

^{Jos 10:10} ¹⁶As Seron approached the slope of Beth-horon, Judas went out to confront him with a small company of warriors.

¹⁷But on seeing the enemy advancing against them, Judas' men said to him, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so many? And besides, we feel weak for we have not eaten anything today."

^{1S 14:6} ¹⁸But Judas declared: "A multitude shall easily fall into the hands of a few, for Heaven can win over equally well with the help of many or of few. ¹⁹Victory does not depend on the number of those who fight, but on Heaven which gives us strength. ²⁰They come against us, moved by their pride and lawlessness, to seize us and take possession of our wives and children and to take everything away from us. ²¹But we are fighting for our lives and our laws. ²²God will crush them before us; so do not be afraid."

²³As soon as he finished speaking, he suddenly rushed against the enemies. Seron and his army were defeated. ²⁴They pursued them down the

slope of Beth-horon to the plain. And about eight hundred of Seron's men fell and the rest escaped to the land of the Philistines.

²⁵With this, fright and fear of Judas and his brothers seized the pagans who lived around them. ²⁶The fame of his name reached the king, and the pagan nations recounted his battles.

Antiochus prepares for war

²⁷When this news reached King Antiochus, he was furious, so he ordered all the forces of his kingdom to assemble, for he had a powerful army. ²⁸He opened his treasury and paid the troops a year's salary, ordering them to be prepared for any eventuality. ²⁹But he found that the money in the treasury had run short, for the taxes of the provinces had decreased due to dissension and disaster, which he himself had caused in the land by changing the laws that were in force from the earliest days. ³⁰He feared that, as before, he would not have enough funds for his expenses and for the gifts he used to give more lavishly than preceding kings. ³¹So great was his need that he decided to go to Persia to collect the taxes from those provinces and raise considerable funds.

³²Then he left Lysias, a nobleman from the royal family, in charge of the affairs of government, from the river Euphrates to the Egyptian frontier, ³³and with the responsibility of educating the king's son, Antiochus, until his return. ³⁴And he turned over to Lysias half of his troops with the elephants and gave him instructions about his policies. On matters dealing with the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem, ³⁵Lysias was to send an army to destroy and crush the defenders of Israel and all who remained in Jerusalem and to wipe out even the memory of them. ³⁶Then he was to have foreigners settle throughout the Jewish territory and distribute the land to them by lot.

³⁷The king took with him the remaining half of the army and set out from Antioch, the capital of the kingdom, in the year one hundred and forty-seven. He crossed the river Euphrates and went through the upper provinces.

We must all fight for the things that give meaning to our lives and without which a secure future would be meaningless. For the Jews of those days, to give up their customs and their worship was like renouncing their faith, since they were entrusted with the divine promises. Though the Temple itself was no more than stones and wood, with some precious metal, they could not abandon it without losing their human dignity and their vocation as believers.

The Maccabees were not very different from those who, today, dare to remind us of the rights of the poor, and to demand the participation of all in modern societies oftentimes founded on injustice. They are arrested, tortured and they die to demand political change, but in so doing, they defend their own faith, because if they kept quiet, they would have lost their human dignity and they have renounced the spirit of justice and freedom (Gal 5:11-12).

^{2Mac 8:8-15} ³⁸ Lysias chose from among the Friends of the King, Ptolemy the son of Dorymenes, Nicanor and Gorgias – all influential men. ³⁹ With them, he dispatched forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to the Judean province to destroy it as the king had ordered. ⁴⁰ They marched out with their troops and encamped on the plain near Emmaus. ⁴¹ The merchants of the region heard of their arrival, so they went to the camp with large amounts of silver, gold and fetters, proposing to buy the Israelites as slaves. The Syrian army and those from the province of the Philistines also joined the troops.

⁴² Judas and his brothers understood that the situation was becoming worse, because the enemy had encamped in their territory. So when they learned of the king's order to destroy and crush the people, ⁴³ they said, "Let us uplift our people from their miserable situation and fight for them and for the Holy Place!"

⁴⁴ The whole community assembled to prepare for war, and they prayed and asked God for mercy and compassion.

⁴⁵ *Like a desert, Jerusalem was left without inhabitants. None of her children went in or out. The temple was profaned, and foreigners lived in the city which had become a dwelling place for the pagans. There was no more rejoicing for Jacob, no flute or zither was heard.*

The Jews gather at Mizpah

^{2Mac 8:16-23} ⁴⁶ So they gathered and went to Mizpah opposite Jerusalem because Mizpah had been a place of prayer for Israel. ⁴⁷ They fasted that day, put on sackcloth, sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their garments. ⁴⁸ They opened the Book of the Law to look for an answer to their questions, just as the pagans consulted the images of their idols. ⁴⁹ They brought the vestments of the priests, the first-fruits and the tithes, and they brought in the Nazirites who had completed the days of their consecration; ⁵⁰ they cried aloud to Heaven and said: "What shall we do with this people, and where shall we take them?" ⁵¹ For your sanctuary has been trampled on and profaned, your priests are in mourning and are humiliated. ⁵² And now the pagans have gathered together to destroy us. You know

what they are plotting against us. ⁵³ How can we resist them, if you do not come to help us?" ⁵⁴ Then they sounded the trumpets and made a great outcry.

⁵⁵ After this, Judas appointed officials to lead his people: leaders of a thousand men, leaders of a hundred, of fifty, and of ten. ⁵⁶ Then he told those who were building houses, those about to marry, those who were planting vineyards, and those who were afraid, to return to their homes, as the Law allowed. ⁵⁷ Next the army marched out and encamped to the south of Emmaus. ⁵⁸ Judas told them: "Prepare your weapons; be valiant and be ready to fight in the morning against those foreigners who have joined forces to crush us and remove our Holy Place from this land. ⁵⁹ It is better to die fighting than to live and see the misery of our nation and of the Holy Place. ⁶⁰ May Heaven's will be done in everything."

Battle of Emmaus

4 • ¹ Gorgias took with him five thousand infantry and a thousand picked cavalry, and moved out by night ² to fall upon the Jews and take them by surprise. He had asked men from the Citadel to guide his troops. ³ But Judas learned of this, so he went out with his men to attack the king's army in Emmaus ⁴ while the enemy troops were still dispersed outside the camp. ⁵ Gorgias arrived at the camp of the Jews by night but found no one there. He then began to search for them in the mountains, for he thought: "They are running away from us."

⁶ But at daybreak, Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men who had not the armor or swords they would have liked. ⁷ They saw the camp of the pagans with its strong fortifications and the calvary surrounding it – all trained men in war. ⁸ Judas said to his men: "Do not fear the number of the enemy or be afraid of their attack. ⁹ Remember

• **4.1** They sent Apollonius, a colonel, against Judas: Judas killed him. They sent a general, Seron: Judas defeated the general. This time, king Antiochus sends a tremendous army with two generals against the Jews. Judas is victorious at Emmaus.

Note Judas' words: *God is faithful.*

For three centuries, the Jews had been taught their own history as a series of God's marvelous

interventions (see the books of Chronicles). They insisted so much on God's help that human courage seemed useless. Judas knows that people must act without waiting for a miracle or a revelation. After the victory, everyone realizes that God is the one who saved them. To ask God for peace, food, justice, without removing oppressive structures, would be hypocrisy.

Ex
18:21

Jdg
7:3

2Mac
8:23-29

how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea when Pharaoh's army pursued them. ¹⁰Cry out to God, for if he so wishes he will remember his Covenant and destroy that army before us this very day. ¹¹And all the nations will know that Someone saves and liberates Israel."

¹²The pagans looked up and saw the Jews coming down against them, ¹³so they came out of their camp to face them in battle. Judas had the trumpets sounded ¹⁴and his men attacked. The pagans were defeated and fled to the plain, ¹⁵but all the rear guard fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, to the plains of Idumea, of Azot and Jamnia and killed about three thousand of the enemy.

¹⁶When Judas and his army stopped chasing them, ¹⁷he said to the men with him: "Do not think of the booty now, for another battle awaits us. ¹⁸Gorgias with his army is in the hills close by. Remain ready to fight them, and afterwards you can gather the plunder with nothing to worry about." ¹⁹He had barely finished speaking when an army detachment appeared on the hillside. ²⁰These men saw that their own troops had fled and their camp had been destroyed, for the smoke that rose up from the camp was enough to tell them this. ²¹So they were terrified. And when they saw the army of Judas drawn up on the plain ready for battle, ²²they fled to the land of the Philistines.

²³So Judas and his men returned to plunder the camp. They carried off valuable booty. ²⁴And on their return, ^{Ps 118:1-4} they sang and praised heaven: *For he is good, and his mercy is eternal.*

²⁵That day was a great victory for Israel. ²⁶The pagans who had escaped

went to Lysias and told him what had happened. ²⁷When he heard this, he was dismayed and depressed because things in Israel had not gone as expected, and he had not carried out the king's command.

²⁸The following year, he organized ^{2Mac 11:1} an army of sixty thousand men and five thousand cavalry to confront the Jews. ²⁹They advanced into Idumea and encamped at Bethzur. Judas came out with ten thousand men to meet them in battle. ³⁰When he saw their military strength, he prayed, "Blessed are you, ^{1S 17:4} Savior of Israel, who broke the warrior's strength by the hand of your servant David, and handed over the camp of the Philistines to the power of Jonathan, son of Saul, and to his armor-bearer.

³¹In the same way, give this army ^{1S 14:1-23} into the hands of your people Israel, and let the confidence they place in their power and in their horses be destroyed. ³²Fill them with fear; shatter their confidence in their own strength. May they be defeated and recover no more. ³³Deliver them to the sword of your faithful people so that all who know you may praise your name."

³⁴Both sides attacked, and five thousand men from the army of Lysias fell dead. ³⁵Lysias saw that his army was disheartened, while Judas and his men grew bolder and were ready to live or to die nobly. So he retreated to Antioch, where he recruited mercenaries to strengthen his army, for he planned to return to Judea.

Judas purifies the temple

• ³⁶Then Judas and his brothers said: "Our enemies are defeated, so let us go up and purify the Holy Place and

• 36. Because of Judas' victories, Antiochus Epiphanes IV signs a treaty by which he grants autonomy to the Jewish province (April 164 B.C.). The Jews are triumphant and their first concern is to purify the Temple which had been profaned by the pagans (December 167).

The Jews are aware of being different from other people. It is God who decides the future. In a given moment, they solve what is most urgent while waiting for a prophet to indicate to them what they must do as we see in verse 46. Yet, the situation is paradoxical. There were prophets at

consecrate it again.”³⁷ And all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion.³⁸ There they found the sanctuary abandoned, the altar profaned, the gates burned, bushes growing in the courtyard as in a forest or on a mountain, and the rooms destroyed.³⁹ They tore their garments and wept bitterly. Some sprinkled ashes on their heads,⁴⁰ while others prostrated themselves on the ground. They sounded the trumpets and cried aloud to Heaven.

⁴¹ Then Judas chose men to fight against the defenders of the Citadel until he had purified the temple.⁴² He chose blameless priests who showed great zeal for the Law⁴³ and had them purify the temple and bring the stones of the abominable altar of the pagans to an unclean place.

⁴⁴ They held a council to decide on what should be done with the altar of the holocausts which had been defiled.⁴⁵ And they decided to destroy it, so that shame brought about by the pagans might not remain with it.⁴⁶ They deposited the stones of the said altar in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should appear to settle the matter.

9:27
14:41

Ex
20:25

⁴⁷ Then they took uncut stones as the Law prescribed, and built a new altar like the former one.⁴⁸ They repaired the sanctuary, and the interior of the house, and consecrated the courts.

⁴⁹ They made new sacred vessels and brought in the lampstand, the altar of incense and the table.⁵⁰ They burned incense on the altar, and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these began to shine in the temple.⁵¹ They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains – bringing to completion all that had been decided.

other times when the Israelites refused to listen to them. Now that they want to hear a message, there are no prophets, and there will be no prophet until John the Baptist.

- 5.1 The Syrian generals reluctantly accept

⁵² On the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev, in the year one hundred and forty-eight (164 B.C.)⁵³ they arose at dawn and offered the sacrifice prescribed by the Law on the new altar of holocausts which they had built.⁵⁴ It was precisely at that same time and date that the pagans had profaned it before; but now they consecrated it with songs accompanied by zithers, harps and cymbals.⁵⁵ All the people fell prostrate and blessed Heaven that had given them happiness and success.

⁵⁶ They celebrated the consecration of the altar for eight days, joyfully offering holocausts and celebrating sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise.⁵⁷ The front of the temple was adorned with crowns of gold and shields; the gates and the rooms had been restored and fitted with doors.

1:22

⁵⁸ There was no end to the celebration among the people, and so the profanation of the temple by the pagans was forgotten.⁵⁹ Finally, Judas, his brothers and the whole assembly of Israel agreed to celebrate the anniversary of the consecration of the altar annually for eight days, from the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislev, in high festivity.

Jn
10:22

⁶⁰ At that time, they built around Mount Zion high walls and strong towers to prevent the pagans from coming in to occupy it as they had done before.⁶¹ Judas stationed a garrison there to defend it. He also fortified Bethzur so that the people might have a fortress against Idumea.

Judas goes to rescue the scattered Jews

5¹ When the pagans who lived around them learned that the altar had been rebuilt and the temple restored as before, they became very angry.² They determined to destroy the descendants of Jacob who lived among them; so they began killing and driving away the Jews.

2Mac
10:1-
23

³ That is why Judas declared war against the sons of Esau in Idumea and in the province of Akrabattene, for they surrounded Israel. He dealt them a mortal blow – he humbled them and looted them.⁴ Then he remembered the wickedness of the gangs of Baean who were a plague and a permanent

the treaty signed by the king. They encourage persecution of the Jews who live in neighboring territories, sometimes in very large groups. Then, Judas begins a campaign to save his threatened people and to bring them back to the province of Judah.

source of trouble for the Jews with their ambushes on the roads. ⁵ So Judas, after blockading and besieging them in their towers, took an oath to exterminate them; he then burned the towers with all who were inside.

^{2Mac} ^{12:2} ⁶ From there he crossed over to the land of the Ammonites where he encountered a large and well-organized army under the command of Timotheus. ⁷ He engaged them in many encounters, defeated them and crushed them. ⁸ He attacked and captured the city of Yazer with its neighboring villages and then returned to Judea.

⁹ The pagans of Gilead gathered together to destroy the Israelites who lived in their territory. But the Israelites took refuge in the fortress of Dathema, ¹⁰ and sent a letter to Judas and his brothers which said, "The pagans around us have joined forces to crush us ¹¹ and are now preparing to storm the fortress where we have taken refuge. Timothy is their leader. ¹² Come at once and rescue us from their hands since many among us have already died; ¹³ all our brothers living in the land of Tobias have been murdered, their women and children taken captives; about a thousand men have been killed."

¹⁴ They were reading this letter when other messengers arrived from Galilee tearing their garments as they gave this message: ¹⁵ "The people of Ptolemais, Tyre, Sidon and the whole of heathen Galilee have united to destroy us!"

¹⁶ When Judas and his men heard this news, they summoned a great assembly to determine what could be done for their brothers and sisters in distress who were fighting for their lives. ¹⁷ Judas said to his brother Simon: "Choose your men; go and free our brothers in Galilee; I and my brother Jonathan will go to Gilead."

¹⁸ He left the rest of the troops under the command of Joseph the son of Zechariah, and Azariah, a leader of the people, to defend the land of Judea, ¹⁹ and gave them this order: "Remain at the head of the people, but do not attack the pagans until we return."

²⁰ Three thousand men were assigned to Simon for the campaign in Galilee, and eight thousand men to Judas for Gilead. ²¹ Simon left for Galilee and defeated the pagans in many encounters, ²² and pursued them to the gates of Ptolemais. About three thousand of the pagans fell, and Simon seized their spoils. ²³ Then he took away with him the Jews who were in Galilee and Arbatta as well as their women and children, and all they had, and brought them into Judea with great rejoicing.

²⁴ Meanwhile, Judas Maccabeus and his brother Jonathan crossed the Jordan and journeyed through the desert for three days. ²⁵ There they encountered the Nabateans who received them in a friendly way and told

them all that had happened to their brothers in the region of Gilead. ²⁶ They gave them the news that many Jews were imprisoned in Alema, Chaspho, Maked and Carnaim, all large and fortified towns in the vicinity of Bozrah and Bosor. ²⁷ They also related that Jews were also blockaded in other cities of Gilead, and that the pagans had decided to attack their strongholds on the following day intending to destroy all of them in one day.

²⁸ Judas quickly turned off with his army by the desert road to Bozrah; he occupied the city, put all the men to the sword, seized the booty and then burned the city. ²⁹ He left the place at night and advanced until they reached the fortress. ³⁰ At dawn, the Jews looked up and saw an innumerable army carrying ladders and engines of war to attack and capture the fortress.

³¹ Judas saw that the attack had begun; from the city an uproar rose up to heaven with shouts and trumpet blast. ³² He said to his men: "Let us now fight for our brothers." ³³ Then he divided his troops into three groups, and attacked the enemy from behind, sounding the trumpets and praying out loud. ³⁴ When the army of Timothy recognized that it was Maccabeus, they began to escape, but Judas dealt them a heavy blow, and about five thousand of the enemy fell that day.

³⁵ From there, Judas went to Alema; he attacked and occupied the city, killed all the men and seized the booty, and then he burned the city. ³⁶ From there, he captured Chaspho, Maked and Bosor and the remaining towns of Gilead.

³⁷ After these events, Timothy gathered a new army and encamped opposite Raphon, at the other side of the stream. ³⁸ Judas sent men to explore the camp and they brought back the following information: "All the pagans of this region have joined forces under Timothy, forming a powerful army. ³⁹ They have also hired Arab mercenaries as auxiliaries, and they are now encamped at the other side of the stream, ready to attack you." So Judas set out to confront them in battle.

⁴⁰ Timothy saw that Judas was approaching the stream with his army, so he said to the captains of his troops, "If he crosses first and advances against us, he shall attack us with such great force that we will not be able to withstand him. ⁴¹ But if he hesitates and encamps at the other side of the river, then we shall cross over to attack and defeat him."

⁴² When Judas reached the banks of the stream, he assigned the officials of his men along the stream and ordered them: "Do not let anyone pitch his tent; all are to fight." ⁴³ Judas was the first to

Ne
6:18
2Mac
3:11

Is
8:23
Mt
4:15

2Mac
12:10-
31

1S
14:9-
10

Dt
20:5
Jos
1:10

cross to the enemy, and all his men followed. They defeated all the pagans who threw down their weapons and took refuge in the sacred enclosure of Carnaim. ⁴⁴But the Jews captured the city and burned the sacred enclosure with everyone inside. So Carnaim was crushed, and no one was able to withstand Judas.

⁴⁵Judas gathered together all the Israelites from the region of Gilead, small and great, their women and children and their belongings, an immense multitude, to take them into the land of Judea. ⁴⁶They reached Ephron, a strong and important town, situated by the road. It was impossible to go around it either to the right or to the left, so they were forced to go through it, ⁴⁷but the inhabitants entrenched themselves inside and blocked the entrance with stones. ⁴⁸Judas sent them a message of peace saying: "Allow us to go through your land as we go back to ours; we will simply walk through and none of us will do you any harm." But they refused to open the gates to him.

Num
20:17

⁴⁹So Judas gave orders to his army for everyone to take up his position where he was. ⁵⁰The men of war took up their positions, and Judas attacked the city all day and night until it fell into his hands. ⁵¹He put all the male inhabitants to the sword, razed the city and took its plunder. ⁵²Then they passed through the city over the bodies of the dead and came to the great plain after crossing the Jordan opposite Bethshan.

⁵³Throughout the journey Judas kept on encouraging his people and rallying those who fell behind, until they reached the land of Judah. ⁵⁴They went up to Mount Zion joyfully and well contented, and they offered holocausts be-

2Mac
12:31

cause they had returned safe and sound, without losing a single man.

Joseph and Azariah are defeated

• ⁵⁵While Judas and Jonathan were in the land of Gilead, and their brother Simon was encamped in Galilee opposite Ptolemais, ⁵⁶Zechariah's son Joseph and Azariah were in command of the army. When they heard of their exploits and how well they had done in battle, ⁵⁷they said, "We also have to win renown, so let us go and fight the pagans who live around us."

2Mac
12:32

⁵⁸So they gave orders to their army to march against Jamnia. ⁵⁹But Gorgias came out of the city with his men and attacked them. ⁶⁰Joseph and Azariah were defeated and pursued as far as the borders of Judea, and about two thousand Israelites fell that day. ⁶¹The people suffered this great defeat because the Jewish commanders did not listen to Judas and his brothers, thinking they themselves were capable of great deeds. ⁶²They did not belong to those to whom the deliverance of Israel had been entrusted.

⁶³The valiant Judas and his brothers were greatly honored in Israel and became famous among the foreigners who heard of them, ⁶⁴and many came to congratulate them.

⁶⁵Judas with his brothers went to the Negeb to fight the Edomites. He seized Hebron and its villages, demolished its walls and burned its defending towers. ⁶⁶Then he left for the land of the Philistines, passing through Marisa. ⁶⁷That day some priests who wanted to be valiant fell because they imprudently attacked the enemy. ⁶⁸From there Judas turned towards Azotus in the land of the Philistines. He destroyed their altars, burned the statues of their gods, plundered the city and then returned to Judah.

Last days of Antiochus Epiphanes

6 • ¹When King Antiochus was making his way through the upper regions of Persia, he received news about Elymais, a city renowned for its wealth in silver and gold.

2Mac
1:11-
17
9

• 55. The war continues with its victories and its defeats. Here, the Bible stresses the reasons for the reversal: many of the leaders are motivated by personal interest.

• 6.1 The end of Antiochus Epiphanes is presented as an example of how the persecutors die. We find another story, different from this, in 2 Mac 9.

²They kept in the wealthy temple of their city golden armor, breastplates and weapons left there by the Macedonian king, Alexander the son of Philip, the first sovereign of the Greeks. ³So Antiochus went there but the inhabitants came out armed against him when they learned of his intention, so his attempt to take the city failed. ⁴He had to turn back, and he returned much embittered to Babylon.

⁵While he was still in Persia, it was reported to him that the armies sent to Judea had been defeated. They told him ⁶that although Lysias had gone with a strong army, he had to flee before the Jews who had been strengthened with the weapons and the abundant booty taken from the neighboring armies. ⁷He heard too that the Jews had destroyed the abominable idol he had erected on the altar in Jerusalem, and had rebuilt the temple walls to the same height as before, and had also fortified the city of Beth-zur.

⁸When he received this news, he was terrified and deeply upset. He fell sick and became greatly depressed because things had not turned out the way he had planned. ⁹So he remained overcome by this terrible anguish for many days. He felt that he was dying, ¹⁰so he called his friends and said to them, "Sleep has fled from my eyes and I am greatly crushed by my anxieties. ¹¹And I keep on asking why such grief has come upon me – I who was generous and well-loved when in power – and now I am so discouraged.

¹²Now I remember the evils I did in Jerusalem, the vessels of gold and silver that I stole, the inhabitants of Judea I ordered to be killed for no reason at all. ¹³I now know that because of this, these misfortunes have come upon me, and I am dying of grief in a strange land." ¹⁴The king then summoned Philip, one of his friends, and appointed him administrator of his whole kingdom. ¹⁵When he had entrusted him with the crown, robe and signet ring, with the charge of educating his son Antiochus and preparing him for the throne, ¹⁶Antiochus died there in the year one hundred and forty-nine (163 B.C.). ¹⁷As soon as Lysias learned of the king's death, he proclaimed his son Antiochus as his successor, for he himself had trained him from childhood and had named him Eupator.

Expedition of Antiochus V

¹⁸The men from the Citadel were blockading the Israelites around the temple and did not let an opportunity pass of harming them on behalf of the pagans. ¹⁹Judas decided to

wipe them out, ²⁰so he gathered together all the people to besiege them. The troops assembled and laid siege to the Citadel in the year one hundred and fifty, building firing platforms and siege engines. ²¹But some of the besieged broke through the blockade and together with renegade Israelites ²²went to tell the king, "How much longer will you wait to do us justice and avenge our brothers? ²³We took the side of your father, we obeyed his orders and observed his laws. ²⁴The result is that the Citadel is now besieged by our own people and we are treated as foreigners. All of us who were caught have been killed and they have seized our property. ²⁵And they are fighting not only against us but in the neighboring lands as well.

²⁶Right now, they are encamped against the Citadel in Jerusalem to capture it, and they have fortified the temple and the city of Beth-zur. ²⁷If you do not take the lead now, they will do greater things and then you will not be able to control them."

²⁸The king was enraged when he heard this news, and he summoned all his friends, the generals of the army and the commanders of the cavalry. ²⁹From other kingdoms and islands of the sea, he recruited mercenary troops. ³⁰His forces numbered a hundred thousand infantry, twenty thousand horsemen and thirty-two elephants trained for battle. ³¹They came through Idumea, besieged Beth-zur and attacked for days, using engines of war. But the besieged made a sortie and burned their engines and bravely kept up the resistance.

Battle of Beth-zechariah

• ³²Then Judas ceased fighting at the Citadel and encamped at Beth-zechariah opposite the camp of the king. ³³Early in the morning the king rose and his army boldly advanced along the road to Beth-zechariah. The troops prepared for battle and sounded the trumpets.

³⁴They showed juice of grapes and mulberries to the elephants to arouse them for battle, ³⁵and distributed them among the battalions: one thousand men in coat of mail and bronze helmet lined up at the side of each elephant. ³⁶A cavalry of five hundred picked horsemen went before each elephant

• 32. Palestine is invaded once again and in the combat at Beth-zechariah, Judas' army, very inferior to the king's, must withdraw from

the enemy. Two years later, the king makes peace and confirms the religious freedom of the Jews.

^{2Mac}
^{13:2}

and accompanied it with the order not to separate from it.³⁷ A strong wooden tower was fixed to each elephant by means of leather straps, and four warriors including the driver were on the tower.

³⁸The rest of the cavalry were stationed on the right and left flanks of the army to harass the enemy and protect the battalions. ³⁹When the sun shone on the shields of gold and bronze, the mountains glittered and gleamed like flames of fire. ⁴⁰One part of the king's army was deployed up in the mountains and the other on the plain. All advanced confidently and in good order. ⁴¹The Jews trembled when they heard the great noise of this vast multitude, the marching of that mass and the clanking of their weapons. It was indeed an army extremely numerous and powerful.

⁴²Nevertheless Judas and his army advanced to give battle; and about six hundred men of the king's army fell. ⁴³Eleazar, called Avaran, saw one of the beasts protected with armor which excelled all the others, so he supposed that it must be the king's. ⁴⁴He then sacrificed himself to save his people and win eternal renown for himself. ⁴⁵He boldly charged towards the animal right into the midst of the battalion, killing men right and left, scattering the enemy before him on both sides. ⁴⁶He reached the elephant, darted in under it, and stabbed it in the belly. The elephant collapsed on top of him and he died on the spot.

^{2Mac}
^{13:15}

⁴⁷The Jews, however, aware of the tremendous force of the king's army and their bravery, retreated before them. ⁴⁸The king's troops went up to Jerusalem to overtake them, and the king encamped in Judea and around Mount Zion. ⁴⁹He made peace with the

people of Beth-zur who evacuated the city since they had no food to continue the resistance, for that year was a year of rest for the land. ⁵⁰The king seized Beth-zur and stationed a garrison there to guard it.

^{Lev}
^{25:1}

⁵¹He encamped before the temple for a long time and set up firing platforms, crossbows, engines, fire-throwers, catapults, scorpions to discharge arrows, and slingers. ⁵²The defenders also constructed engines as their attackers had done and they fought for a long time. ⁵³But they had no food in storage, as it was the seventh year and because the Israelites who came to Judea from the pagan lands had consumed the last of their reserves. ⁵⁴So, few men were left in the temple because of the famine; the others had dispersed.

The king grants religious freedom

• ⁵⁵Meanwhile Philip, to whom King Antiochus during his life had entrusted the education of his son Antiochus to prepare him for the throne, ⁵⁶had returned from Persia and Media with the army that had accompanied the king to those regions, and was planning to seize power. ⁵⁷This is why Lysias hastily gave orders to depart, saying to the king, the generals of the army and the soldiers, "We are losing strength every day, we are short of food and the place we are besieging is well fortified; we are moreover diverting our attention from the affairs of the kingdom. ⁵⁸Let us, then, offer the hand of friendship to these people, and make peace with them and with their nation. ⁵⁹Let us permit them to live according to their customs as before, since all this came to be because we suppressed their laws, and they have risen in defense of them."

⁶⁰These words pleased the king and

• 55. The fighting stops at the least expected moment and the Jews are granted the right to continue practicing their religion (v. 59). The

resistance of a handful of heroes has achieved this first result and it changes the history of the Jewish people.

the generals, ⁶¹so the king sent messengers to make peace with the Jews, and the Jews accepted it.

When the king and the generals had committed themselves with an oath, the Jews came out of the fortress. ⁶²The king went up to Mount Zion and when he saw the defenses, he broke his oath and ordered the surrounding wall to be demolished. ⁶³Then he hurriedly left and returned to Antioch where he found Philip already in control of the city. So he fought him and took the city by force.

^{2Mac}
^{14:1-}
¹⁰

7 ¹In the year one hundred and fifty-one, Demetrius the son of Seleucus escaped from Rome. He sailed with a few men to a port of the kingdom where he arrived and proclaimed himself king. ²As soon as he entered the kingdom of his fathers, the army arrested Antiochus and Lysias to hand them over to him. ³When Demetrius heard this, he said: "I do not want to see their faces." ⁴So the army executed them and Demetrius took the throne.

⁵At once all the Israelites without law or religion came to him. They were led by Alcimus, a man who sought the office of chief priest for himself. ⁶And they began accusing their own people before the king, "Judas and his brothers have murdered all your friends and have driven us away from our land. ⁷Send one of your trustworthy Friends, to see the havoc they have caused us and our province which belongs to the king. Let him punish all who support them."

Expedition of Bacchides and Nicanor

^{2:18} ⁸The king chose Bacchides, one of his Friends and a distinguished man of the kingdom, the governor of the western province of the Euphrates. ⁹He also sent with him Alcimus whom he had appointed chief priest, and ordered them to punish the Israelites.

¹⁰They set out with a large army. On reaching Judea, they sent messengers

to Judas and his brothers with treacherous proposals of peace. ¹¹But the Jews who knew that they came with a powerful army, did not trust them.

¹²However, a commission of teachers of the Law met with Alcimus and Bacchides to seek a satisfactory solution. ¹³These men from the group of the Hasideans, the first to seek peace in Israel, ¹⁴reasoned like this: "A man in the line of Aaron has come with the army, he will surely deal with us in fairness." ¹⁵Bacchides, moreover, sent them a friendly message and assured them under oath: "We do not wish any harm to you and your friends." ¹⁶They believed him. But he arrested sixty of them and executed them the same day, according to the word of the Scripture: ¹⁷*Around Jerusalem, they have scattered the dead bodies of your saints; they have shed their blood, and there was no one to bury them.*

^{Ps}
^{79:2}

¹⁸All the people were terrified and feared them. They said, "There is no justice or truth in these people who have violated the agreement they made with an oath."

¹⁹Bacchides left Jerusalem and encamped at Beth-zur. From there, he ordered the arrest of many prominent men who had deserted to him as well as some of the people. And he had them thrown into a deep pit.

²⁰Then he placed the province in the hands of Alcimus, leaving him with an army to help him and he returned to the king. ²¹Alcimus struggled to have the Israelites recognize him as chief priest, ²²and all who disturbed the peace of the people joined him. They became masters of the land of Judea and did great harm to the Israelites.

²³Judas saw that Alcimus and his men were an even greater menace to Israel than the pagans had been. ²⁴So he went throughout the territory of Judea to do justice to those traitors and to prevent them from going about the country.

^{2Mac 14:5} ²⁵ Alcimus realized that Judas and his men were of greater strength and that he could not resist them, so he returned to the king and accused them of serious crimes. ²⁶ The king then sent Nicanor, one of his more illustrious generals and a known enemy of Israel, with the mission to utterly destroy this people.

²⁷ Nicanor reached Jerusalem with a large army; he sent Judas and his brothers false messages of friendship saying to them, ²⁸ "Let us not begin as enemies once more; I will come with a few men to meet you face to face in friendship."

²⁹ He indeed came to Judas and they greeted each other peaceably, but the enemy was prepared to seize him. ³⁰ Judas was told that Nicanor had come to him treacherously, so he withdrew from Nicanor, and would not see him again. ³¹ When Nicanor saw that his plans had been discovered, he went out to look for Judas, and this time to fight him. He found him near Capharsalama. ³² About five hundred of Nicanor's men fell and the rest fled to the city of David.

Nicanor is defeated

^{Ezra 6:10} ³³ After these events, Nicanor went up to Mount Zion and some of the priests and elders came out of the temple to greet him peacefully and show him the sacrifice they offered for the king. ³⁴ But he mocked them, he scorned and insulted them ³⁵ and angrily swore this oath: "If you do not deliver Judas into my hands immediately, as soon as I have destroyed him, I will return and burn this temple." And he went away furious.

³⁶ The priests entered the temple, and they stood weeping before the altar and the sanctuary. They said, ³⁷ "You, Lord, chose this House that your name may be invoked in it, that it may be a house of prayer and petition

^{Is 56:7}
^{Mt 21:13}

for your people. ³⁸ Take vengeance on this man and on his army; let them die by the sword. Remember their insults and do not delay in punishing them."

³⁹ Nicanor left Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-horon where the Syrian army joined him. ⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Judas encamped in Adasa with three thousand men and prayed: ⁴¹ "Lord, when the messengers of the king of Assyria insulted you, your angel came and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand of his men. ⁴² So now, crush this army before us, so that all the rest may know that this Nicanor has blasphemed against your temple. Judge him according to his wickedness."

^{2Mac 15:22-24}

^{2K 19:35}

⁴³ The two armies met in battle on the thirteenth of the month Adar. Nicanor's army was defeated and he himself was one of the first to fall in the battle. ⁴⁴ When his troops saw that he was dead, they threw down their weapons and fled. ⁴⁵ The Jews pursued them a day's journey from Adasa to the entrance of Gazara, sounding the trumpets as they followed them. ⁴⁶ The people came out from all the neighboring villages of Judea and surrounded the fugitives, forcing them to return to defend their lives. So all fell by the sword, not even one of them was left.

⁴⁷ Then the Jews seized the plunder and booty; they cut off Nicanor's head and the right hand he had so arrogantly stretched out, and they displayed them at the entrance of Jerusalem within sight of all. ⁴⁸ The people were elated and ⁴⁹ celebrated their victory annually on the thirteenth of the month Adar.

⁵⁰ The land of Judah enjoyed peace for a short time.

Alliance with the Romans

8 ¹ In the meantime, Judas was informed about the Romans. He was told that the Romans were valiant in war and that they showed goodwill towards all who sided with them; that they offered friendship to all who approached them, ² and were a strong ally in war.

He was told of their wars and of their exploits among the Gauls whom they conquered and forced to pay taxes, ³ and of all they had done in Spain to gain possession of the silver and gold mines, ⁴ and how they had conquered that land by dint of intelligence and perseverance, despite its great

• **8.1** The prophets insisted on the fact that because the Jewish people were God's people, they had to trust God without seeking any other help. To try to make alliances with the pagan people would have meant to mistrust God. Judas has a different concept and seeks an alliance with the Romans.

The first victories inspired great hope. The Jews never recovered their autonomy since the

exile and now, Judas and his companions think that the time to restore the ancient kingdom of Solomon and David has come.

Judas is a great admirer of the organization and the power of the Romans and thinks their protection will lead to the restoration of the kingdom of David.

The prophets were right: those who seek the kingdom of God and justice must not rely on the

distance from their own land. He also learned how they had defeated the kings who came from the ends of the earth to attack them, how they managed to conquer and crush them. There were others who paid them an annual tax.

⁵They had defeated and subjected Philip and Perseus, the kings of Macedonia and others who opposed them. ⁶They had vanquished Antiochus the Great, king of Asia, who went to fight the Romans with one hundred and twenty elephants, cavalry, chariots and a very strong army. But he was defeated ⁷and fell into their hands. He and his successors were forced to pay an enormous amount in tax, to surrender hostages, and to cede some of their best provinces ⁸like India, Media and Lydia which afterwards the Romans gave to King Eumenes. ⁹The Greeks had planned to come and destroy the Romans, ¹⁰but hearing of it, the Romans sent a single general against them. They killed a great number of Greeks, took their women and children, destroyed their fortresses and enslaved them to this day.

¹¹In the same way, they also destroyed and subdued other countries and islands, as well as others who opposed them. ¹²But they have usually remained faithful to their allies and to those who relied on them.

The Romans were really powerful. They conquered kingdoms far and near, and all who heard their name feared them. ¹³They appointed as kings those who were to their liking and deposed those who were not.

¹⁴But in spite of all this, not one of them had himself crowned or dressed as a king in order to be exalted. ¹⁵They had created a senate and three hundred and twenty men deliberated on daily matters relating to the good of the people and the maintenance of order. ¹⁶Every year they would choose one man to rule over them and govern the empire, and all obeyed him without envy or jealousy.

^{2Mac}^{4:11} ¹⁷So Judas sent Eupolemus the son of John, and Jason the son of Eleazar to Rome, entrusting them with the mission to make a covenant of friendship with the Romans. ¹⁸Since the Greeks treated the Israelites as slaves, Judas hoped to liberate them from oppression in this way.

¹⁹The envoys from Judas went to Rome, where they arrived after a long journey. When they entered the Senate they addressed the assembly: ²⁰“Judas Maccabeus, his brothers and the people of Israel have sent us to you to

rich and the powerful. The Romans, whom Judas admires so much, will become enemies. And two centuries later, in Jesus' day, they will destroy the Jewish nation.

• **9.1** Then comes the moving story of Judas' death. He dies in the glory of his faith and

conclude a covenant of peace with you and to be numbered among your allies and friends.”

²¹The Romans approved this proposal, ²²and this is the copy of the letter they wrote on bronze tablets which they sent to Jerusalem as a memorial of peace and alliance:

²³“May all go well with the Romans and the Jewish people at sea and on land forever, may both sword and enemy be far from them!

²⁴If war comes first to the Romans, or to any of their allies in any part of its empire, ²⁵the Jewish nation shall enter the war wholeheartedly, as circumstances permit. ²⁶The Jewish nation will not receive from them wheat or weapons, or money, or ships as Rome has decided. They must fulfill their obligations without recompense.

²⁷In the same way, if the Jewish nation is attacked, the Romans shall fight at her side with all zeal as circumstances may allow.

²⁸The Roman allies will not receive wheat or weapons, or money, or ships as Rome has decided, but the Romans shall fulfill their obligations without deception. ²⁹On these terms the Romans conclude their alliance with the Jewish nation.

³⁰If after these terms have taken effect, either party should wish to add or delete anything, the said party shall do so in common agreement with the other party, then what has been added or deleted shall be binding.

³¹And concerning the harm King Demetrius does to the Jews, we have written to him as follows, ‘Why do you lay such a heavy yoke upon the Jews, our friends and allies?’

³²If they complain about you again, we shall defend their rights and attack you by sea and land.”

Death of Judas Maccabeus

9 ¹When Demetrius was informed of the death of Nicanor and the defeat of his army, he sent Bacchides and Alcimus back to Judea with the best troops of his army. ²They took the road to Galilee and besieged the city of Mesaloth in the Arbela region. They captured it and killed many. ³In the first month of the year one hundred and fifty-two, they encamped before Jerusalem. ⁴From there twenty thousand

heroism, like the many who “were hoping for the restoration of Israel” and died in this hope.

We can see God's grace for him in this premature death. The path that he had begun because of his faith, ends in compromises by his descendants and in the corruption which often accompanies political power.

infantry and two thousand cavalry set out for Berea. ⁵Judas had his camp in Elasa with three thousand picked men. ⁶When they saw the huge number of enemies, they were terrified. Many slipped out of the camp, and only eight hundred men were left. ⁷Judas saw the dispersal of his army and this crushed his spirit. The battle was imminent but he had no time to group them together. ⁸Yet in spite of being dismayed, he did his best to encourage those who remained with him: "Let us fight our enemies. We may yet be able to defeat them."

⁹They tried to dissuade him, "We cannot do anything now but save ourselves. We can come back later with our brothers and fight. But now we are too few." ¹⁰But Judas answered them, "God forbid that I should run away from them. If our time has come, then let us die as valiant men for our brothers, without tarnishing our glory."

¹¹The army of Bacchides marched out of their camp while the Jews remained in their place to engage them in battle. The cavalry was divided into two wings. In the first line, the veterans in war advanced, and the archers and slingers followed. ¹²Bacchides was on the right wing. At the sound of the trumpets, they advanced on both sides. The Jews also sounded the trumpets.

¹³And the earth trembled with the noise of the armies, and a battle began which lasted the whole day.

¹⁴Judas saw that Bacchides and the main strength of his army was on the right. The most courageous of the Israelites went with him, ¹⁵and they defeated the right wing of the enemy, pursuing them up to the hills. ¹⁶But when those on the left wing saw the right wing

being defeated, they attacked Judas and his men from the rear. ¹⁷They fought bitterly and many fell on both sides. ¹⁸Judas also fell, and the rest fled.

¹⁹Jonathan and Simon took their brother and buried him in the tomb of their fathers at Modein. ²⁰All the people of Israel mourned and wept for him for many days, repeating this lamentation: ²¹"How the hero has fallen, he who saved Israel."

²²The other deeds of Judas, his battles, exploits and heroism were not written for they were many. Jn
21:25

Jonathan succeeds Judas

• ²³After the death of Judas, the renegades reappeared throughout the territory of Israel and the evildoers took courage. ²⁴At the same time, there was a severe famine, and the country went over to their side. ²⁵Bacchides chose renegade men and made them masters of the land. ²⁶These men traced and searched out all the friends and supporters of Judas and brought them before Bacchides who punished and humiliated them in a thousand ways. ²⁷It was a terrible trial for Israel such as had never been experienced since the disappearance of the prophets. 4:46
14:41

²⁸So the friends of Judas came together and said to Jonathan, ²⁹"Since your brother Judas died, we haven't found anyone like him to head the resistance against the enemy, against Bacchides and all the enemies of our nation. ³⁰So we now choose you to take his place, to be our head and lead us in our wars." So from that day on, ³¹Jonathan accepted the leadership and succeeded his brother Judas.

³²When Bacchides heard of this, he planned to kill Jonathan. ³³But Jonathan was informed of the plot and fled to the desert of Tekoa, together with his brother Simon and his followers. They encamped by the lake Asphar. ³⁴Bacchides found this out on the sabbath day, and with all his army he crossed the Jordan.

³⁵Jonathan had sent his brother John, representative of the people, to ask their friends the Nabatean to store for them their

• 23. Jonathan, chosen to succeed his brother Judas, must flee to the desert with his people. He sends his brother John with the baggage to bring it to a safe place beyond the Jordan. There, they are the victims of an ambush. Then, Jonathan goes to the other side of

the Jordan to avenge them. When he comes back, he finds that Bacchides and his army followed behind him and now block their access to the river. They break through enemy lines, however, and swim across.

large amount of baggage. ³⁶But the tribe of Yambri and the people of Medeba captured John and took all he had with him, then departed with the booty. ³⁷After this had happened, Jonathan and his brother Simon were told that the Yambrites were celebrating a solemn wedding and were escorting the bride, a daughter of one of the magnates, from Nadabath with great pomp.

³⁸Both remembered the murder of their brother John, so they went up and hid under cover of the mountain. ³⁹At a certain moment they heard a confusion of sounds; then they saw a great deal of baggage. The bridegroom, his friends and brothers came straight to them with tambourines, musical instruments and many weapons. ⁴⁰Then the Jews rushed down on them from their ambush and killed them. There were many casualties and others fled to the mountain. Finally the Jews seized all the plunder. ⁴¹So the wedding turned to mourning and the music to lamentation. ⁴²Having avenged the death of their brother, the Israelites went back to the marshes of the Jordan.

Let us return to Bacchides. ⁴³He arrived with a strong army on the sabbath day at the banks of the Jordan. ⁴⁴So Jonathan said to his men, "Courage! Let us fight for our lives, for today things are going to be serious. ⁴⁵Dangers surround us – we have the waters of the Jordan on this side, the marshes and the thickets on the other side – there is no place to turn. ⁴⁶So cry out to Heaven for deliverance from our enemies."

⁴⁷And the battle began. Jonathan stretched out his arm to strike Bacchides, but he eluded him and withdrew. ⁴⁸So Jonathan and his men leapt into the Jordan, swimming to the other side; but their enemies did not follow them. ⁴⁹On that day, about a thousand of Bacchides' men fell.

⁵⁰Bacchides returned to Jerusalem. Then he began to build fortified cities in Judea – the strongholds of Jericho, Emmaus, Bethhoron, Bethel, Timnath, Pharathon and Tephon – with high walls and barred gates, ⁵¹and a garrison stationed in each of them to harass the Israelites. ⁵²He also fortified the cities of Beth-zur, Gazara and the Citadel, and placed troops in each of them with supplies of provisions. ⁵³He took the sons of the leaders of the land as hostages and imprisoned them in the Citadel of Jerusalem.

⁵⁴In the year one hundred and fifty-three (159 B.C.), in the second month, Alcimus ordered the demolition of the wall of the inner court of the temple. This meant no less than destroying the work of the prophets. ⁵⁵Alcimus did in fact begin the demolition but soon after suffered a stroke, so the work was suspended. Alcimus was no longer able to speak, not even to rule over his household.

⁵⁶After a while, he died in great agony. ⁵⁷Because of his death, Bacchides returned to the king and the land had peace for two years.

The siege of Bethbasi

⁵⁸Then all the renegades agreed on a plan: "Jonathan and his people now live in peace without any fear at all. Let us bring Bacchides back; he can arrest them all in one night." ⁵⁹They went to Bacchides, and when they had convinced him, ⁶⁰he set out with a large contingent. He secretly sent letters to his supporters in Judea instructing them to seize Jonathan and his men. But their plot was found out and their plan foiled. ⁶¹Instead the supporters of Jonathan arrested fifty Jewish leaders of this conspiracy and had them executed.

⁶²Jonathan and Simon then withdrew with their men to Bethbasi in the desert; they rebuilt the ruins and fortified it. ⁶³When Bacchides heard this, he assembled all his men and notified his adherents in Judea. ⁶⁴He went to attack Bethbasi, besieged it for many days and built engines of war. ⁶⁵Then Jonathan left his brother Simon in the city and went out into the countryside with a handful of men. ⁶⁶He defeated Odomera and his brothers and the people of Phasiron in their camp. ⁶⁷Then they turned back and began to attack the troops who had laid siege to the city. Meanwhile, Simon and his men went out of the city and burned the engines. ⁶⁸They attacked Bacchides who was defeated and dismayed by the failure of his expedition. ⁶⁹He was greatly enraged against the renegades who had advised him to return to the Jewish country; he executed many of them, and decided to return to his own land. ⁷⁰When Jonathan learned this, he sent messengers to him to make a treaty of peace and to exchange prisoners.

⁷¹Bacchides accepted his terms. For Bacchides' part, he fulfilled his promises and swore that henceforth and until the day of his death, he would never harm him in any way. ⁷²He turned over to Jonathan the prisoners taken earlier in Judea. Then he returned to his own country and never came back again to the territory of Judea. ⁷³So there was peace in Israel, and Jonathan resided in Michmash where he began to govern the land, and the renegades disappeared from Israel.

War between Alexander Balas and Demetrius

10 ¹In the year one hundred and sixty (152 B.C.), Alexander Epiphanes, son of Antiochus, sailed for Ptolemais and occupied it. He was well received and he began to reign. ²When Demetrius heard this, he assembled a very large army and marched out to fight him. ³At the same time, he sent a

letter of friendship to Jonathan and offered him vast power,⁴ for Demetrius thought: "Let us make the first move in making peace with him before he makes peace with Alexander against us,⁵ remembering all the wrongs we have done to him, his brothers and his nation."

⁶So Demetrius authorized Jonathan to organize an army and manufacture arms; he named him his ally and ordered the release of the hostages who were in the Citadel of Jerusalem.⁷ Jonathan went at once to Jerusalem and read the letter before all the people and those in the Citadel.⁸ They were afraid when they heard that the king had authorized Jonathan to organize a great army,⁹ and they released the hostages to Jonathan who handed them back to their families.¹⁰ Jonathan resided in Jerusalem and began rebuilding and restoring the city.

¹¹He commanded the builders to build the walls and the defenses of Mount Zion with hewn stones. And they did so.

¹²Then all the foreigners who stayed in the fortresses built by Bacchides began to flee,¹³ each of them abandoning his post and returning to his own land.¹⁴ Only at Beth-zur did some who had abandoned the Law and the precepts remain, since this was like a place of refuge.

• ¹⁵King Alexander was informed of the promises Demetrius had made to Jonathan; he was also given an account of the battles and exploits of Jonathan and his brothers and the trials they had endured.¹⁶ So Alexander declared: "Shall we ever find another man like him? Let us make him our ally and friend."¹⁷ And he wrote him a letter:¹⁸ "King Alexander to our brother Jonathan, peace.¹⁹ We have heard of you, that you are a valiant man and most worthy of our friendship.²⁰ Therefore, we now appoint you High Priest of your nation and bestow on you the title Friend of the King (he also sent him a purple robe and a golden crown). So we invite you to watch over our interests and maintain friendly relations with us."

²¹This is why in the seventh month of the year one hundred and sixty (152 B.C.), on the occasion of the feast of Tabernacles, Jonathan put on the sacred vestments. He also recruited troops and manufactured a great quantity of arms.

• **10.15** Jonathan represents the Jews before Alexander, but with what title? The Jews had not had a king since the Exile, and what is more, they would not have accepted any king who was not a descendant of David. Since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, priests ruled over the Jewish community. So Jonathan must be the High Priest and to be able to represent the Jewish people, he is to receive this charge from

²²When Demetrius heard what had happened, he was greatly displeased and said,²³ "What have we done that Alexander is ahead of us in gaining the friendship of the Jews?"²⁴ I will also write them kind words and promise them honor and gifts to win them to my side."²⁵ So he wrote to the Jews:

"King Demetrius greets the Jewish nation.²⁶ You have kept your agreement with us and have remained our friends, and have not joined our enemies. We have heard of it and so we rejoice.²⁷ Therefore, continue to be faithful and we will grant you privileges in return for all you do on our behalf.²⁸ I will free the Jews from many taxes and grant them royal privileges and exemptions.²⁹ From now on and forever, I now free all Jews from payment of tribute, salt dues and crown levies.³⁰ I give up from this day and henceforth the third of the harvest and half of the fruit of the trees which I have the right to exact from the region of Judea and the three districts annexed to it from Samaria and Galilee.³¹ From this day on and for all time, Jerusalem shall be a Holy City and be free with all its territory, with the right to collect tithes and tributes.³² I also give up control of the Citadel of Jerusalem and turn it over to the High Priest that he may choose the men he wants to defend it.³³ I grant freedom without ransom to all the captives taken from Judea into any part of my kingdom. I free everyone from the taxes they owe me for their livestock.

³⁴All feasts, sabbaths, new moons, special days and the three holy days before and after a feast shall be days of exemption for all the Jews in my kingdom.³⁵ No one shall have the right to pursue or molest them for any motive whatsoever.³⁶ I also decree that they be accepted into the king's army to the number of thirty thousand Jews who shall receive the same salary as the rest of the king's forces.³⁷ Some of them shall be stationed at the king's fortresses, and positions of trust shall be given to some of them; their officers shall be chosen from among themselves and they will live according to their laws as the king has prescribed in the land of Judea.

³⁸The three districts of Samaria annexed to Judea shall be considered part of Jewish territory; to avoid any conflict of power, these shall be subject to no authority other than that

Demetrius. This starts a moral crisis for the Jews since no one could proclaim himself high priest, but became one only through family rights (see Lev 8).

Jonathan's appointment caused division among the most religious Jews. Many opposed him, among whom were the Hasideans (7:13) who would later give rise to the Pharisees.

10:1 of the High Priest. ³⁹I give the city of Ptolemais and its territory as a gift to the temple of Jerusalem to cover the expenses of public worship. ⁴⁰Henceforth, I will give fifteen thousand pieces of silver annually for the maintenance of the temple which shall be taken from the royal revenues from appropriate places. ⁴¹Moreover, I give all that should have been paid to me by the administrators in previous years.

⁴²In addition, I also remit the five thousand pieces of silver levied every year from the tributes to the temple, and give them to the priests in charge of public worship. ⁴³Anyone who takes refuge in the temple of Jerusalem or in any of its enclosures because of his debt on royal taxes or because of any other debt, shall not be disturbed and his possessions anywhere in my kingdom shall be duly protected.

Ezra 6:4 ⁴⁴Finally, the cost of rebuilding or restoring the sanctuary shall be passed on to the king's account, ⁴⁵as well as the expenses of reconstructing the walls of Jerusalem, the fortification of its defenses and the construction of the walls in the cities of Judea."

⁴⁶When Jonathan and the people heard such proposals, they did not believe or accept them, for they remembered the great wrongs Demetrius had done to Israel and the ill-treatment to which he had subjected them. ⁴⁷They decided in favor of Alexander, for he was the first to propose peace, and they became his faithful allies. ⁴⁸King Alexander assembled a great army and encamped opposite Demetrius. ⁴⁹The two kings met in battle and the army of Demetrius was routed. Alexander pursued him until Demetrius was defeated. ⁵⁰The battle lasted until sunset, and on that day Demetrius died.

⁵¹Then Alexander sent messengers to Ptolemy the king of Egypt with the following message: ⁵²"I am now again in my kingdom and have assumed power after defeating Demetrius and all his army. ⁵³Now I occupy the throne of my ancestors as master of all the land. Let us be friends. ⁵⁴Give me your daughter in marriage, and I will become your son-in-law, and I will give you, and her, gifts worthy of you."

⁵⁵King Ptolemy replied as follows: "Blessed be the day when you returned to the land of your ancestors and ascended to their throne! ⁵⁶I will without delay do for you as you

have proposed. But meet me in Ptolemais. There we shall see one another and I will receive you as my son-in-law as you have requested."

⁵⁷Ptolemy left Egypt with his daughter Cleopatra in the year one hundred and sixty-two, and arrived at Ptolemais. ⁵⁸Alexander went to meet him, and Ptolemy gave him his daughter Cleopatra, and celebrated her wedding with great splendor as kings do.

Political liability of Jonathan

• ⁵⁹King Alexander also wrote to Jonathan to come and meet him. ⁶⁰So Jonathan went to Ptolemais with great pomp and met the two kings. Then he gave them and their Friends much silver and gold and many other gifts. ⁶¹The renegades, the pest of Israel, gathered together to accuse Jonathan, but the king paid no attention to them. ⁶²The king even gave orders that Jonathan remove his garment and be clothed in purple and it was done. ⁶³The king also seated him by his side, and said to his captains: "Go with him into the center of the city and proclaim that no one is to accuse Jonathan under any pretext, and no one is to molest him for any reason." ⁶⁴When his accusers saw the public honor given to Jonathan and that he was clothed in purple, they all fled. ⁶⁵The king did him great honor and enrolled him among his first Friends, and appointed him general and governor. ⁶⁶So Jonathan returned to Jerusalem happy and secure.

⁶⁷In the year one hundred and sixty-five (147 B.C.), Demetrius the son of Demetrius, returned from Crete to the land of his ancestors. ⁶⁸When King Alexander heard of it, he was so greatly disturbed that he returned to Antioch. ⁶⁹Demetrius took his general Apollonius, the governor of Coele-Syria, who assembled a large force. He encamped at Jamnia and sent the following message to Jonathan, the high priest:

⁷⁰"Are you the only one who resists our authority? And am I to be ridiculed because of you? Why do you stand against our authority in your mountains? ⁷¹If you have confidence in your forces, come down to the plain and let us measure each other's strength there, for I have with me the army of the cities.

⁷²Inquire and find out who I am and who are those who support me. Men will tell you that you cannot resist us, for your fathers

• 59. Jonathan gets more and more involved in politics and this chapter does not hide how dirty politics can be, the way it is usually practiced. What was said earlier about Judas is confirmed (9:1); the time to restore a kingdom of God which would be a nation among nations has gone.

The mission of Christians is to be involved in politics as yeast among the masses, in spite of

the fact that they will find temptations and errors among many unscrupulous people. The Church herself, however, must be careful not to go back to seeking success through a compromise with partisan forces, since her own mission cannot be confused with partisan politics. Moreover, the Church does not divide people into good and bad, friends or enemies, according to their positions in social struggles.

were twice defeated on their own land. ⁷³Nor will you be able to withstand the cavalry and so great an army on the plain, where there are no stones or rocks offering a refuge."

⁷⁴When Jonathan heard Apollonius' message, he was greatly aroused. So he left Jerusalem with ten thousand picked men, and his brother Simon came to his help. ⁷⁵They encamped near Joppa, but the inhabitants of the city closed the gates to them, as Apollonius had a garrison there. ⁷⁶So Jonathan gave the order to attack. The people in the city were so afraid that they opened the gates to him, and Jonathan occupied Joppa. ⁷⁷When Apollonius learned of it, he mobilized three thousand cavalry and a large army. Then he set out towards Azotus, pretending to march through the land, but in fact his troops were spreading out in the direction of the plain, since he had a great number of cavalry on which he relied. ⁷⁸Jonathan pursued him towards Azotus and they began to fight. ⁷⁹Apollonius had left a thousand picked horsemen hidden behind Jonathan, ⁸⁰but Jonathan was informed of the ambush.

The horsemen surrounded Jonathan's men and shot their arrows from morning till evening. ⁸¹But the Israelites faced them as Jonathan had commanded until the horses of the enemy tired. Once the cavalry were exhausted, ⁸²Simon and his men advanced and attacked the infantry. The enemy was defeated and fled.

⁸³The cavalry scattered over the plain and those who fled went to Azotus, where they entered the temple of Dagon, their idol, to save their lives. ⁸⁴But Jonathan set fire to Azotus and the surrounding towns, and plundered them. He also burned down the temple of Dagon with all who had taken refuge in it. ⁸⁵There were about eight thousand men who either fell by the sword or were burned to death. ⁸⁶Jonathan then left for Askalon where the inhabitants received him with great honor. ⁸⁷From there, Jonathan and his men returned to Jerusalem laden with booty.

⁸⁸When King Alexander heard what had happened, he bestowed new honors on Jonathan. ⁸⁹He sent him a golden brooch which is usually given to the kinsmen of kings. He also gave him Ekron and all its territory as his possession.

11 ¹But the king of Egypt assembled an army as numerous as the sands of the seashore, with many ships, for he intended to trick Alexander, take his kingdom and add it to his own. ²He went to Syria with words of peace, and the inhabitants of the cities opened their gates to him. They came out to meet him, as Alexander had ordered, ³because Ptolemy was his father-in-law. But as soon as Ptolemy entered the cities, he sta-

tioned garrisons in them. ⁴When he reached Azotus, he was shown the burnt temple of Dagon, Azotus and its surroundings in ruins, the scattered corpses that had been abandoned, and the charred remains of those whom Jonathan burned to death in the battle, piled in heaps along the king's way.

⁵They recounted to King Ptolemy everything Jonathan had done. They were hoping that the king would disapprove, but he said nothing. ⁶Jonathan went with great pomp to Joppa to meet the king. They greeted each other and spent the night there. ⁷On the following day, Jonathan accompanied the king as far as the Eleutherus river, and then returned to Jerusalem. ⁸King Ptolemy for his part seized the coastal cities as far as Deleucia by the sea, for he had made plans against King Alexander. ⁹He sent this message to Demetrius: "Come and let us forge an alliance. I will give you my daughter who was married to Alexander, and you will reign on the throne of your fathers. ¹⁰The fact is I now regret having given him my daughter, for he has tried to kill me." ¹¹He accused Alexander because he wanted to take his kingdom. ¹²Ptolemy took his daughter away and gave her to Demetrius. In this way, his enmity towards Alexander became public. ¹³Ptolemy then entered Antioch and took for himself the crown of Asia. So he held two kingdoms: the kingdom of Egypt and the kingdom of Asia.

¹⁴At that time, Alexander was in Cilicia trying to quell a rebellion. ¹⁵When he heard what had happened, he returned to fight Ptolemy. Ptolemy went out to meet him in battle with a strong army, and Alexander was defeated. ¹⁶As he fled to Arabia and sought refuge there, ¹⁷Zabdiel the Arab cut his head off and sent it to Ptolemy. ¹⁸But after three days, Ptolemy died, and immediately the Egyptian soldiers who guarded the fortified cities were killed by the local inhabitants. ¹⁹In this way, Demetrius became king in the year one hundred and sixty-seven (145 B.C.).

²⁰In those days, Jonathan assembled the Jewish army to attack the Citadel in Jerusalem which was occupied by the Syrians, and he prepared many siege engines. ²¹But some wicked men who were traitors to their country, informed the king. ²²When the king heard of it, he became angry and immediately set out for Ptolemias. From there he wrote to Jonathan telling him to stop the siege and to come to see him as soon as possible. ²³Jonathan received the message, but he ordered the siege to continue. Then he decided to risk himself, and went to see the king with the elders and priests of Israel. ²⁴Bringing gold, silver, fine garments and other presents, they went before the king in Ptolemias and won him over. ²⁵Some traitors accused

them.²⁶ But the king in the presence of all his Friends treated Jonathan as kings before had treated him.²⁷ He confirmed Jonathan's office as high priest with all the privileges he already had. And he numbered him among his first Friends.

^{10:30} ²⁸ Jonathan asked the king to exempt Judea and the three districts of Samaria from taxes, and promised him three hundred talents in return.²⁹ The king agreed and wrote to Jonathan regarding the matter in these terms:³⁰ "King Demetrius to Jonathan, to his brothers and to the whole Jewish nation, peace.³¹ We are sending you a copy of the letter we have written to our kinsman Lasthenes that you may know:³² King Demetrius greets his kinsman Lasthenes.³³ Because of their fidelity to us, we have decided to grant favors to the Jewish nation, who are our friends and who fulfill their obligations to us. We wish to reward their fidelity.³⁴ We confirm the possession of the territory of Judea and the three regions of Aphairema, Kydda and Ramathaim which have been annexed to Judea from Samaria, with all their dependencies. And to all who go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice, we grant exemption from the tax the king formerly received from them annually until now, from the produce of the soil and from the fruit of the trees.

³⁵ In the same way, they shall also be exempt from the other taxes due to us, especially from the taxes on the produce of the salt mines, and the gold crowns they formerly offered us.³⁶ None of these privileges shall ever be annulled.³⁷ Have a copy of this decree made and delivered to Jonathan to be displayed on the Holy Mountain in a conspicuous place."

³⁸ King Demetrius was able to place the kingdom under his rule and no one dared oppose him, so he dismissed his army, sent all the men back to their homes, except the foreign troops he had recruited from the islands of the pagans. And this drew the hatred of all the troops who had served his fathers.³⁹ Then Trypho, one of Alexander's former supporters, took advantage of the army's discontent with Demetrius. He went to lamleku the Arab who was in charge of the education of Antiochus, the son of Alexander.⁴⁰ Trypho persuaded him to hand the boy over to him in order to restore Antiochus to the throne of his father. He told him of all the decisions of Demetrius and the resentment of his soldiers towards him. And Trypho spent a long time there.

⁴¹ Meanwhile, Jonathan asked King Demetrius to withdraw the troops from the Citadel in Jerusalem and to call back the garrisons from the fortresses, since they were always fighting Israel.⁴² Demetrius answered him, "Not only will I do this for you and for

your people, but as soon as I have the occasion to do so.⁴³ For the present, you would do well to send me reinforcements, for all my soldiers have deserted me."

⁴⁴ Jonathan sent off three thousand valiant men to Antioch; they presented themselves before the king, and this made him very happy.⁴⁵ About a hundred and twenty thousand rebel inhabitants gathered at the center of the city intending to do away with the king.⁴⁶ Demetrius took refuge in the palace while the residents occupied the streets of the city and began to attack.⁴⁷ The king then called on the Jews to help him, and the Jews rallied round him. Then they spread out through the city and killed a hundred thousand men on that day.⁴⁸ They burned the city, seized a great deal of plunder, and saved the king.⁴⁹ The Jews took control of the city. And the inhabitants were so discouraged that they begged the king,⁵⁰ "Forgive us and stop the Jews from maltreating us and the city."

⁵¹ They threw down their arms and made peace. With this, the Jews merited the admiration of the king and they became famous throughout the kingdom. Then they returned to Jerusalem laden with booty.⁵² But when Demetrius felt secure on his throne and the land was in peace,⁵³ he forgot his promises and changed his attitude towards Jonathan. He did not treat him with the same kindness as he had done before, but began to treat him very harshly.

⁵⁴ After this Trypho came back with Antiochus who was still a boy. He was proclaimed and crowned king,⁵⁵ and the troops discharged by Demetrius rallied to him and fought against Demetrius who had to flee.⁵⁶ Trypho seized the elephants and occupied Antioch.

⁵⁷ Then the young Antiochus sent Jonathan this letter: "I confirm your office as High Priest and make you governor of four districts, and I include you among the Friends of the King."⁵⁸ He sent him a service of gold plate, and granted him the right to drink from gold vessels and to be clothed in purple and wear the golden brooch.⁵⁹ He also appointed Jonathan's brother Simon as general from the Ladder of Tyre to the frontiers of Egypt.

⁶⁰ Jonathan then began to make rounds of the region and the cities on the western side of the Euphrates. The whole Syrian army came to his aid. He came to Askalon and the inhabitants of that city went out to receive him with full honors.⁶¹ From there he went to Gaza, but the people there closed their gates on him. So Jonathan laid siege to it and burned the suburbs of the city, plundering everything.⁶² Then the people of Gaza sought peace, and he made peace with them. But he took the sons of their elders as hostages and sent them away to Jerusalem. Then he trav-

eled through the province until he reached Damascus. ⁶³Jonathan then received news that the generals of Demetrius were in Kadesh of Galilee with a great army and planned to capture him. ⁶⁴Leaving his brother Simon in Judea, he went out to meet them in battle. ⁶⁵Simon encamped against Beth-zur and laid siege to it for many days. ⁶⁶The inhabitants sued for peace, which he granted them. But he expelled them from the city and occupied it, and stationed a garrison there.

⁶⁷Meanwhile, Jonathan encamped with his army by the waters of Gennesaret; then early in the morning, they went to the plain of Hazor. ⁶⁸The army of the pagans went out to confront them on the plain, after laying an ambush for him in the mountains. ⁶⁹As they advanced directly towards the Jews, the men in ambush broke cover and began to attack.

^{2Mac}^{11:17} ⁷⁰The men of Jonathan's side fled. And only Mattathias, the son of Absalom, and Judas, the son of Chalphi, the leaders of his army remained with him. ⁷¹At this, Jonathan tore his garments, put dust on his head, and prayed. ⁷²Then he faced his attackers, defeated them and put them to flight.

⁷³So the troops who had abandoned him came back to his side, and together they pursued the enemies as far as Kadesh where the enemy camp was, and there they, too, pitched camp. ⁷⁴About three thousand pagans perished that day. Then Jonathan returned to Jerusalem.

Jonathan renews the alliances with the Spartans and Romans

12 ¹Jonathan saw that circumstances were to his advantage. So he chose men and sent them to Rome to confirm and renew the alliance of friendship with the Romans. ²He also sent letters to the Spartans and to other places for this same purpose. ³Those who went to Rome entered the Senate and delivered this message: "The High Priest Jonathan and the Jewish nation have sent us to renew with you the friendship and alliance that formerly united us." ⁴The Senate gave them letters of recommendation to the authorities of each region, enabling them to journey safely back to the land of Judah.

⁵This is a copy of the letter Jonathan wrote to the Spartans: ⁶"Jonathan, High Priest, the senate of the nation, the priests and the whole country of the Jews, to the people of Sparta, their brothers: peace. ⁷In the past, our high priest Onias received from Areios, your king, a letter stating that you are indeed our brothers, as the enclosed copy attests. ⁸Onias received the envoy with great honor and accepted the letter which clearly spoke of friendship and alliance.

⁹Though we are not in need, for we have

our consolation in our Sacred Books, ¹⁰we have decided to send ambassadors to you to renew our fraternal bonds and friendship in order not to become strangers to you, for it has been a long time since you wrote us.

¹¹For our part, we constantly remember you in all circumstances, on special days, in the sacrifices we offer, as well as in our prayers; for it is but right and proper to remember our brothers ¹²and greatly rejoice at your prosperity and fame. ¹³For our part, we have been involved in many trials, in misery and wars, for neighboring kings have attacked us. ¹⁴However, we did not want to be a burden to you or to the rest of our allies and friends during these wars, ¹⁵for our help comes from Heaven. Finally we have been freed from our enemies who have been humbled.

¹⁶So we have chosen Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason, and sent them to the Romans to renew our former friendship and alliance with them. ¹⁷We have also ordered them to go to you, greet you and deliver this letter to you on our behalf, with which we wish to renew our alliance. ¹⁸We shall be glad to receive a favorable response."

¹⁹This is a copy of the letter which Onias had received: ²⁰"Areios, king of the Spartans, to Onias the High Priest. ²¹We have found in one of our documents that the Spartans and the Jews are brothers, for both are of the race of Abraham. ²²Now that we have come to know this, we shall be grateful if you send us news of your welfare. ²³And we say this to you: our livestock and our possessions are yours, and similarly all that are yours are ours. This is what we have instructed our envoys to say to you."

²⁴Jonathan learned that the generals of Demetrius had come to attack him with a larger army than before. ²⁵So he left Jerusalem at once and went to face them in the country of Hamath, so as not to give them time to invade his own land. ²⁶He sent spies to their camp, and on their return, they told him that the enemy planned to attack them during the night.

²⁷So, at sunset, Jonathan ordered his men to keep watch throughout the night with their weapons at hand, ready to fight. And he posted guards around the camp. ²⁸When the enemies learned that Jonathan was keeping watch with his troops and ready for battle, they were afraid and discouraged; for this reason, they kindled fires in their camp and fled. ²⁹But neither Jonathan nor his army knew of their withdrawal until morning, for they saw the fires burning the whole night. ³⁰Jonathan pursued them but was not able to catch up with them, for they had crossed the Eleutherus river.

³¹ So Jonathan went back against the Arabs called Zabadeans, defeated them and plundered them. ³² After breaking camp, he went to Damascus and traveled throughout the region. Meanwhile, ³³ Simon had also set out and gone as far as Askalon and the neighboring fortresses. He then proceeded to Joppa and occupied it, ³⁴ for he had heard that the inhabitants of that city planned to hand the Citadel over to the supporters of Demetrius. And he stationed a garrison there to hold it.

³⁵ On returning, Jonathan summoned the elders of the people. The assembly decided to build fortresses in Judea, ³⁶ to make the walls of Jerusalem still higher, and to erect a barrier between the Citadel and the city, to separate it from the city and to isolate it and prevent its defenders from going out to buy or sell. ³⁷ They also held an assembly to rebuild the city. Part of the wall over a rushing stream had fallen and they built up a new wall they called Chapthenatha. ³⁸ Simon rebuilt Adida in the Shephelah, fortified it and erected barred gates in it.

³⁹ Trypho wanted to reign in Asia, and to do away with King Antiochus in order to be king himself. ⁴⁰ But he feared that Jonathan might not allow him to do so, and might even come to attack him. He set out and came to Bethshan. ⁴¹ At once Jonathan went out to meet him with forty thousand men, and he, too, came to Bethshan.

Jonathan is taken by deceit

• ⁴² When Trypho saw that Jonathan had come with a large army, he was afraid to begin the assault. ⁴³ So he received Jonathan with honor, presented him to all his Friends, gave him gifts, and instructed his Friends and his troops to obey Jonathan as they obeyed him. ⁴⁴ Then he asked Jonathan, "Why have you bothered to come with so many men? Are we perhaps enemies?" ⁴⁵ Send them back to their

homes and remain here with some of them. Then you will come with me to the city of Ptolemais because I wish to hand it over to you, as well as the other fortresses and to place the rest of the troops and their officers at your disposal. Then, I will return home, for I have come only for this."

⁴⁶ Jonathan believed him and did as Trypho had asked him. He dismissed his men who then returned to the land of Judea, ⁴⁷ and three thousand men remained with him. Of these, he left two thousand in Galilee and only a thousand accompanied him. ⁴⁸ But as soon as they had entered Ptolemais, the inhabitants closed the gates. They seized him and killed all who had come with him.

⁴⁹ Trypho sent troops and cavalry to Galilee and to the Great Plain to wipe out all of Jonathan's men. ⁵⁰ On receiving the news that Jonathan and his companions had been seized and killed, his soldiers encouraged one another and prepared to face their pursuers. ⁵¹ When their enemy saw them ready to fight for their lives, they turned back. ⁵² So the men of Jonathan reached the land of Judea safe and sound. They wept for Jonathan and his companions and they were discouraged. And all Israel was in mourning. ⁵³ Then all the neighboring nations planned to destroy them on seeing that they were now without leader or ally. And the pagans said: "This is now the opportunity to wipe out the remembrance of them from humankind."

• **12.42** After Judas and two of his brothers, Jonathan dies in the war for liberation. Simon, the last of the brothers replaces him.

The book continues with the story of Simon's rule and deeds until the year 134 B.C. when he is murdered.

Simon is successful in his wars. He is very clever in taking advantage of the rivalries among the various kings struggling to settle in the kingdom of Persia. His victories and the peace which he achieved will dampen the enthusiasm for the faith which had started the war for liberation. Simon, the liberator, becomes Simon the dictator at the end of a process often re-

peated in history. To that effect, see 14:41-47; 15:32.

When Jesus comes one hundred and fifty years later, Simon's descendants will be the chief priests, the most materialistic group among the Jews (the Sadducees); Caiaphas, who condemned Jesus, was one of them.

Note what is briefly mentioned in 13:41-42 and in 15:3. After four centuries of dependence, the Jews become a nation once again. This new and exalting experience explains why, a century and a half later, in Jesus' day, they could not stand Roman domination.

Simon succeeds Jonathan

13 ¹Simon heard that Trypho had assembled a great army to invade Judea and devastate it. ²As the people were frightened and apprehensive, he went up to Jerusalem. ³There he called the people together and encouraged them with this exhortation:

^{1K}
^{19:10}

“All of you know what I, my brothers, and the family of my father have done for the laws and for the Holy Place. You also know the wars and the hardships we endured. ⁴All my brothers died for Israel and now I alone am left. ⁵God forbid that I should seek my own safety when things go wrong! For my life is not of more worth than the lives of my brothers. Now that all the nations have united in their hatred in order to destroy us, ⁶I will defend my nation and the Holy Place, your wives and your children.”

⁷All were encouraged with these words ⁸and they exclaimed in a loud voice: “Be our leader in place of Judas and your brother Jonathan. ⁹Lead us in the war and we will obey your commands.”

¹⁰So Simon assembled all the men able to fight and hastened to finish building the walls of Jerusalem, which was fortified on all sides.

¹¹Then he sent Jonathan, son of Absalom, with a strong army to Joppa. They drove out those who occupied it and remained there.

^{11:70}
^{12:33}

¹²Meanwhile, Trypho left Ptolemais with a large army to invade Judea, taking Jonathan with him as prisoner. ¹³Simon encamped in Adida facing the plain. ¹⁴But when Trypho learned that Simon had taken command in place of his brother Jonathan and was prepared to fight him, he sent some envoys to him with this message: ¹⁵“We have in our custody your brother Jonathan because of the money he owes to the royal treasury for the offices he held. ¹⁶So, send a hundred talents of silver and two of his sons as hostages lest he slip away when we release him, and come back against us. Then we shall let him go.”

¹⁷Simon knew that Trypho was deceiving him, but he still sent for the money and the boys so as not to draw upon himself the anger of the people of Israel who might say: ¹⁸“They killed Jonathan because Simon refused to send Trypho the money and the boys.” ¹⁹He therefore sent the boys and the hundred talents, but Trypho broke his word and did not set Jonathan free.

²⁰After this, Trypho advanced to invade Judea and plunder it. He moved along the way to Adora, but Simon and his army kept confronting him wherever he went. ²¹Then the men in the Citadel sent messengers to Trypho urging him to come at once to their rescue by way of the desert and to bring them food. ²²Trypho prepared his entire cavalry to

go, but it snowed so heavily that night that he was not able to go. So he left for Gilead, ²³and when he approached Baskama he killed Jonathan and buried him there. ²⁴Then Trypho returned to his own land. ²⁵Simon sent men to look for the remains of Jonathan, his brother, and he buried him in Modein, the city of their fathers. ²⁶All Israel deeply mourned and wept for Jonathan for many days.

²⁷Simon built a monument over the tomb of his fathers and brothers, high enough to be seen even from afar, with the back and front covered with marble. ²⁸He erected seven pyramids facing each other, for his father and mother and his four brothers. ²⁹He surrounded the pyramids with great columns, and he had trophies of arms carved upon the columns as a lasting remembrance; and beside the armor, sculptured ships were to be seen by all who sailed the sea. ³⁰This is the tomb he constructed in Modein and it is still there today.

³¹Trypho treated the young King Antiochus in bad faith, and put him to death. ³²He then made himself king in his place, put on the crown of Asia and caused great havoc in the country.

³³Now Simon rebuilt the fortresses of Judea, surrounded them with high towers and great walls with barred gates, and stored food in them.

³⁴Simon chose men whom he sent to King Demetrius in his attempt to obtain tax exemption for the region, on the grounds that all that Trypho did was to plunder. ³⁵King Demetrius responded favorably to his request and wrote to him as follows,

³⁶“King Demetrius greets Simon, High Priest and Friend of the King, the elders and the Jewish nation. ³⁷We have received the golden crowns and the palm you have sent us and we are disposed to make a lasting peace with you, and to write to the officials to grant you remission of your debts. ³⁸All our concessions in your favor are definitive and the fortresses you have built are yours.

³⁹Moreover, we pardon all errors and offenses committed to this day, as well as the crown tax you owe. From now on, any other tax that used to be paid in Jerusalem shall no longer be collected. ⁴⁰If any of your men are qualified to enlist in our army, they can do so. And let peace reign between us.”

⁴¹So, in the year one hundred and seventy (142 B.C.), Israel became free from the yoke of the pagans. ⁴²They began to write in their documents and contracts, “In the first year of Simon, high priest, general and leader of the Jews.”

⁴³In those days, Simon encamped against Gazard and surrounded it with his army. He constructed a mobile tower, brought it up to

^{2Mac}
^{14:4}

the city, attacked and occupied one tower. ⁴⁴Then the men of the mobile tower entered the city, causing great dismay.

⁴⁵The inhabitants with their wives and children went up on the walls, tore their garments, cried out in a loud voice to Simon and sought peace. ⁴⁶They said to him, “Treat us not as our wickedness deserves, but according to your mercy.” ⁴⁷Simon was reconciled with them and did not treat them according to the rigor of war. But he expelled them from the city and purified the houses where idols were kept. He then entered the city singing hymns of thanksgiving.

⁴⁸After cleansing it from all its impurity, he settled in it men who observed the Law. He fortified it and built a house there for himself.

⁴⁹The men who occupied the Citadel in Jerusalem could no longer come out or go into Jewish territory to buy or sell. So they were desperately in need of food, many of them dying of hunger. ⁵⁰They begged Simon for peace, and he granted it to them. But he expelled them from there and cleansed the Citadel from all that reminded them of the presence of the pagans. ⁵¹On the twenty-third day of the second month of the year one hundred and seventy-one (141 B.C.), the Jews entered it with songs and palm branches to the accompaniment of zithers, cymbals and harps, and with hymns and songs, for a great plague had been crushed and removed from Israel. ⁵²Simon decreed that this day be celebrated as a day of annual rejoicing. He strengthened the fortifications of the Temple hill by the side of the military Citadel, and dwelt there with his men.

⁵³John, son of Simon, had come to manhood, so his father appointed him general in command of all the troops, and John lived in Gazara.

Simon rules victoriously over Judah

14 ¹In the year one hundred and seventy-two, King Demetrius assembled his army and marched into Media to look for help in order to fight Trypho. ²Arsaces, king of Persia and Media, heard that Demetrius had entered his territory, so he sent one of his generals to capture him alive. ³The general went and defeated the army of Demetrius, seized him and brought him to Arsaces, who put him in prison.

⁴Judea had peace as long as Simon lived. He worked for the well-being of his country; his rule pleased the people, and he enjoyed much renown as long as he lived. ⁵To add to his glory, he took Joppa and made it a harbor, opening a way to communicate with the islands of the sea. ⁶He extended the frontiers of his land and was lord of his nation. ⁷He brought back many captives, conquered Gazard, Beth-zur and the Citadel and cast out

everything pagan that was in it. No one was able to resist him.

⁸The inhabitants tilled their fields in peace; the land gave its grain and the trees their fruit.

⁹The elders sat at ease in the squares and talked of their welfare, while the young men wore finery and armor. ¹⁰He supplied the cities with food and made them into strongholds, until his fame spread out to the ends of the earth. ¹¹He established peace in the land and Israel knew great joy. ¹²Each one sat under the shade of his vine and his fig tree, with no one to disturb him. ¹³There was no one in the land to fight them, for the kings had been defeated. ¹⁴He raised up the humble among his people, he observed the Law and cleared out the renegades and the wicked. ¹⁵He restored the splendor of the Temple and increased the number of its sacred vessels.

¹⁶When the news of Jonathan’s death reached Rome and Sparta, these people, too, were deeply grieved. ¹⁷But as soon as they heard that his brother Simon had succeeded him as High Priest and was in command of the country and the cities in it, ¹⁸they wrote to him on bronze sheets to renew the alliance and friendship they had made with his brothers Judas and Jonathan.

¹⁹The letter was read in Jerusalem before the whole assembly. ²⁰This is a copy of the letter sent by the Spartans,

“The leaders and the people of Sparta to Simon, High Priest, and to the elders, to the priests and to all the Jewish people, their brothers: greetings. ²¹The envoys you sent to our people informed us of the successes and prosperity of your nation. We rejoiced at their coming. ²²We have recorded their declaration in our public acts as follows: ‘Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason, ambassadors of the Jews – have come to renew their relationship with us. ²³It has been a pleasure for the people to receive them with honor and deposit a copy of their statement in the public archives as a remembrance for the people of Sparta.’ And they made a copy of all this for the High Priest Simon.”

²⁴After this, Simon sent Numenius to Rome with a large gold shield weighing a thousand minas to confirm their alliance with the Romans.

²⁵When the people came to know these events, they said, “What favor can we do for Simon and his sons? ²⁶It was he and his brothers and the family of their fathers who strengthened the resistance; they have fought the enemies of Israel and restored its freedom.” ²⁷So they engraved an inscription on bronze sheets and set it up on pillars on Mount Zion. This is a copy of the text:

“On the eighteenth day of the month Elul, in the year one hundred and seventy-two, the third year of Simon, the High Priest, ²⁸in the

Zec
8:4Mic
4:4Zep
3:12

12:16

grand assembly of the priests of Israel, the leaders of the nation and the elders of the people, the following was proclaimed:

²⁹“During the frequent wars for freedom in our land, Simon, the son of Mattathias, a priest from the family of Joarib, and his brothers risked their lives and stood up against the enemies of their nation to preserve the Holy Place and the Law, and brought eternal glory to their nation. ³⁰Jonathan rallied the nation, and became the High Priest, and then rested with his fathers. ³¹The enemies of the Jews then planned to invade their land in order to destroy their Holy Place. ³²So Simon arose to fight for his nation. He spent much of his own wealth to procure arms and to pay the salary of the soldiers of his nation.

³³He fortified the cities of Judah and Bethzur on the frontiers of Judea, where the enemy arsenal had been and he stationed a Jewish garrison there. ³⁴He also fortified Joppa by the sea, and Gazara on the borders of Azotus, which was formerly inhabited by enemies, and established Jewish colonies there, providing them with all they needed. ³⁵The people saw Simon’s faith and the glory he had resolved to win for his nation. They made him their commander and High Priest because of the services he rendered, the justice and faithfulness he showed to his nation, and because he sought in every way to increase the honor of his people.

³⁶In his days, the Jews managed to root out the pagans from their land, especially from the city of David, Jerusalem, where they had built a Citadel from which they went out to profane the surroundings of the temple and to violate its holiness. ³⁷He settled Jewish soldiers in it and fortified it for the security of the region and the city, and built the walls of Jerusalem higher. ³⁸And for this, King Demetrius confirmed him in his office as High Priest, ³⁹made him one of his Friends and bestowed high honors on him, ⁴⁰for he had heard that the Romans had considered the Jews their friends, allies and brothers, and had received Simon’s envoy with honor.

Simon: high priest and dictator

⁴¹The king also took into account that the Jews and the priests had agreed that Simon be their leader and High Priest until a prophet worthy of trust appeared.

⁴²They wanted him to be their general and take charge of the Holy Place, and to appoint men to supervise the works, to administer the country, the army and the fortresses.

⁴³They also wanted everyone to obey him, that all documents of the nation bear his name and that he be clothed in purple and wear golden ornaments.

⁴⁴None of the people or the priests shall be allowed to act contrary to these provisions or contradict his orders, or convene a public assembly without his consent, or be clothed in purple, or wear the golden brooch. ⁴⁵Whoever opposes these decisions or violates any of these shall be liable to punishment.”

⁴⁶All the people agreed to grant Simon the right to act in accordance with these provisions. ⁴⁷And Simon accepted and agreed to assume the office of High Priest and to be the general and leader of the Jews and of the priests, and to preside over all.

⁴⁸They decided that this decree be engraved on bronze sheets and set up in a conspicuous place in the sacred enclosure, ⁴⁹and that copies be deposited in the Temple treasury and made available to Simon and his sons.

15 ¹Antiochus, son of King Demetrius, sent from the islands of the sea to Simon, the High Priest and leader of the Jews, and to the whole nation, ²the following letter: “King Antiochus to Simon, high priest and leader, and to the Jewish nation: peace!

³Since wicked men have seized the kingdom of our ancestors, I now intend to recover it and to reestablish it as it was before. I have gathered a very large army and have equipped warships ⁴to make a landing in the country and take revenge on those who devastated our land and laid waste many cities in my kingdom. Now, therefore, ⁵I confirm in your regard all the tax exemptions and all other privileges granted you by my royal predecessors. ⁶I authorize you to mint your own coinage for your nation. ⁷I accept the autonomy of Jerusalem and the Holy Place; all the arms you have manufactured as well as the fortresses you have constructed and those you have occupied are yours. ⁸From this day on, I cancel all debts to the king and everything you may owe in the future. ⁹And when I have taken possession of my kingdom, I shall bestow great honors on you, your nation and on the Temple, making you famous throughout all the earth.”

¹⁰In the year one hundred and seventy-

10:89
11:58

4:46
9:27

four, Antiochus marched out to the land of his ancestors, and all the troops rallied to him, so that only a few remained with Trypho. ¹¹Antiochus pursued him and Trypho took refuge in Dor on the coast. ¹²Trypho knew how critical the situation had become for him and that his army had deserted him. ¹³Antiochus encamped before Dor with a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers and eight thousand horsemen. ¹⁴And he surrounded the city while the ships attacked from the sea: the city was completely surrounded by land and sea, and no one could go in or come out.

^{14:24} ¹⁵Then Numenius and his companions arrived from Rome, carrying letters addressed to the kings and to the nations in the following terms: ¹⁶“Lucius, consul of the Romans, to King Ptolemy: peace! ¹⁷The Jewish people sent by the High Priest Simon and by the Jewish people have come to us as our friends and allies to renew our friendship and alliance of old.

¹⁸They have brought us a gold shield weighing a thousand minas. ¹⁹It is our desire to write to the kings and the peoples that they should not harm the Israelites nor injure them or their cities or their land, nor ally themselves with their aggressors. ²⁰We have accepted with pleasure the shield that the Jews sent us. ²¹Now, if some wicked Jews who have fled from their land are in your country, hand them over to the High Priest Simon that he may punish them according to their Law.”

²²The same letter was sent to King Demetrius, to Attalus, Ariarathes and Arsaces, ²³and to all the nations, to Sampsames, the Spartans, Delos, Myndos, Sicyon, Caria, Samos, Pamphylia, Lycia, Halicarnassus, Rhodes, Phaselis, Cos, Side, Aradus, Gortyna, Cnidus, Cyprus and Cyrene. ²⁴They also sent copies of these letters to the High Priest Simon.

War with the Syrians renewed

²⁵King Antiochus encamped before Dor, in the new district, continually sending his battalions against it and constructing siege engines. He kept Trypho shut in and prevented him from going out or in. ²⁶Simon sent him two thousand picked men to help him in the fight, with silver, gold and plenty of equipment. ²⁷But Antiochus did not accept them; instead, he annulled the concessions he had granted to Simon and declared him his enemy. ²⁸He sent Athenobius, one of his Friends, to him in order to meet him and say to him: “You have occupied Joppa, Gazara and the Citadel of Judea which are cities of my kingdom. ²⁹You have laid waste their territory and done great damage in the land, and have seized many towns in my kingdom.

³⁰Restore, then, the cities you have seized

and the taxes of the places you now occupy beyond the borders of Judea. ³¹Or pay me five hundred talents of silver as compensation for the damage you have caused and another five hundred talents for the taxes of the cities. If not, then I shall declare war against you.”

³²Athenobius, the Friend of the king, arrived in Jerusalem and when he saw the magnificence of Simon, his plates of gold and silver and the pomp that surrounded him, he was amazed. But he delivered the king’s message. ³³Simon answered him, “We have not occupied any foreign land nor seized any foreign property: this is the inheritance of our ancestors. It was our enemies who seized this for some time, ³⁴but now that we have a favorable opportunity, we are only recovering the inheritance of our ancestors.

³⁵Joppa and Gazara, which you claim, did great harm to our people and laid waste our land; but we are prepared to give you a hundred talents for them.”

Athenobius did not say anything, ³⁶but went back to the king very angry and reported to him Simon’s reply. He also told him of Simon’s magnificence and everything he had seen. So the king became furious.

³⁷Meanwhile, Trypho fled to Orthosia on a ship. ³⁸The king appointed Cendebeus as general and gave him part of the troops and the horsemen. ³⁹He ordered him to encamp against Judea, rebuild Kedron and fortify its gates and make war on the people. The king then went on pursuing Trypho. ⁴⁰Cendebeus arrived at Jamnia and began to disturb the people. He invaded Judea, imprisoned some people and put them to death. ⁴¹He fortified Kedron, stationed horsemen and troops there to make sorties and to patrol the roads to Judea, as the king had commanded him.

Simon is murdered

16 ¹At that time, John went up from Gazara to relate to his father what Cendebeus was doing. ²So, Simon called his two elder sons, John and Judas, and said to them: “I and my brothers and the family of my father have fought the enemies of Israel from our youth until today. And many times, we were able to liberate Israel. ³But now I am old, while you – thanks be to Heaven – are already mature men. Take my place and my brother’s, and go out to fight for our country. May Heaven’s help be with you!”

⁴Then he chose a thousand men and horsemen from the country whom he sent against Cendebeus. And they spent the night in Modein. ⁵They arose early in the morning and advanced into the plain and saw what a large army, both infantry and cavalry, was coming to meet them.

A stream lay between them, ⁶and John

with his troops drew up against the enemies. His troops were afraid to cross the stream, so he crossed over first. On seeing this, his men crossed after him. ⁷He divided his army into two groups and set the horsemen in the center for the enemy's cavalry was very numerous.

⁸They sounded the trumpets, and Cendebeus and his army were defeated. Many of them fell, and those who remained fled to the fortress. ⁹Judas, the brother of John, fell wounded, but John pursued the enemies until Cendebeus reached Kedron which he had fortified. ¹⁰The enemy fled as far as the towers in the fields of Azotus, but John burned these down. About two thousand of the enemy perished. And after this, John returned safely to Judea.

¹¹Ptolemy, son of Abubos, had become general in command of the plain of Jericho. He had much silver and gold, ¹²besides being the High Priest's son-in-law. ¹³He became too ambitious and thought of becoming the leader of his nation. So he looked for ways to do away with Simon and his sons. ¹⁴Simon was then making the rounds of the cities of Judea and attending to their administration. In the eleventh month called Shebat, in the year one hundred and seventy-seven (134 B.C.), Simon came to Jericho with his two sons, Mattathias and Judas. ¹⁵The son of Abubos received them treacherously into the

small fortress called Dock which he had built. He gave them a grand banquet, but had set men in hiding. ¹⁶When Simon and his sons were drunk, Ptolemy and his men reached for their weapons and rushed on Simon in the midst of the banquet. They killed him with his two sons and some of his servants. ¹⁷With this, Ptolemy committed a great act of treachery, repaying evil for good.

¹⁸Ptolemy then made haste to send a letter to the king to inform him of what had happened, asking Antiochus to help him in handing over to him the cities and the country. ¹⁹He also sent other men to Gazara in order to kill John, and asked the commanders of the Jewish troops in a letter to defect to him, promising them silver, gold and gifts. ²⁰He then sent others to seize Jerusalem and the Temple hill.

²¹But a man ran and reached Gazara before them, informing John that his father and brothers had been killed. And he added, "He has also sent some people to kill you." ²²John was shocked by the news. So he arrested the men who had been sent to kill him and put them to death, for he knew that they had come with this purpose.

²³The rest of the deeds of John, his battles, his exploits, the walls he built and all his other achievements ²⁴are written in the annals of his pontificate from the day he succeeded his father as High Priest.



MACCABEES

2

The second book of Maccabees is not a continuation of the first book.

Whereas the first book presents the history of the Jewish people during those critical years in a comprehensive and balanced way, this other focuses on a series of facts – and at times, commentaries and legends – allowing the author to emphasize the hopes and suffering of the persecuted believers. This second book, less interesting than the first for historians, is, nevertheless, extremely important in the Bible because of its profound vision of suffering and death and also of God’s justice. This book (with the book of Daniel) is the first in the Bible to affirm the resurrection of the dead, as the Wisdom of Solomon would do also at the next century.

First letter to the Jews in Egypt

1 • ¹Greetings to our brothers, the Jews in Egypt, from their brothers, the Jews in Jerusalem and in the region of Judea – may you have peace and happiness. ²May God fill you with every good and remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his faithful servants. ³May he give you all a heart to worship him and to fulfill his will with generosity and a well-disposed spirit. ⁴May he incline your hearts to listen to his law and precepts, and give you peace. ⁵May he hear your prayers and be reconciled with you, and not abandon you in time of misfortune. ⁶This is what we now pray for you.

⁷In the year one hundred and seventy-nine, when Demetrius was king, we Jews wrote to you during the most critical moment of trials that we had to endure during those years. And we said to you: “Jason and his associates have betrayed the cause of the Holy Land and of the Kingdom. ⁸They have burned the Temple gateway and shed innocent blood.

But we prayed to the Lord and were heard. And now we have just offered a sacrifice with wheat flour, lighted the lamps again and set

out the loaves of bread. ⁹So we write to you again that you may celebrate the Feast of Tents in the month of Chislev in this year one hundred and eighty-eight.

^{10:1, 6}

Second letter to the Jews in Egypt

¹⁰The inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea, their senators and Judas, to Aristobulus, teacher of King Ptolemy, belonging to the family of the anointed priests, and to the Jews in Egypt: greetings and prosperity.

¹¹Having been saved by God from great dangers, we give him thanks because he came to our help against the king himself. ¹²God drove out those who fought against the Holy City; ¹³their leader left for Persia with a seemingly invincible army, but the priests of the goddess Nanea laid a trap for them and killed them in her temple.

¹⁴Antiochus and his friends came to that place under the pretext of marrying the goddess, but in reality they wanted to seize its great treasures as a dowry. ¹⁵The priests of Nanea had set out the treasures and Antiochus entered the sacred enclosure with a few men. But as soon as Antiochus had entered, they closed the temple ¹⁶and opened a secret door in the ceiling. Then they threw stones down and crushed the leader and his men. They then dismembered the bodies, cut off their heads and threw them to those outside. ¹⁷In all these things, may our God be blessed for he has handed over the impious to death.

¹⁸As we are about to celebrate the purifi

^{1Mac 6:1-13}

<sup>Dt 29:3
Jer 24:7</sup>

^{1Mac}
^{4:36} cation of the Temple on the twenty-fifth day of Chislew, it seems good to us to inform you, so that you, too, may celebrate the Feast of Tents and remember the fire that appeared when Nehemiah, who built the Temple and the altar, offered sacrifices. ¹⁹For when our ancestors were deported to Persia, the devout priests of the time took some of the fire from the altar and hid it secretly in the hollow of a dry well, with such caution that the place remained unknown to everyone.

²⁰Many years had passed, when in God's own time Nehemiah, who was commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to look for it. ²¹But they reported to us that they did not find the fire but instead a thick liquid. So Nehemiah ordered them to draw it out and bring it to him.

When the sacrifice had been prepared on the altar, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and the victims placed on it. ²²They did so and after some time the sun which had previously been clouded over, shone. At once such a great fire blazed up that all were astonished.

²³While the sacrifice was being consumed, the priests together with all those present prayed. Jonathan led while Nehemiah and the rest responded. ²⁴This was their prayer:

"Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, dreadful and strong, just and merciful, you alone are good and are King, ²⁵you alone are generous, just, all-powerful and eternal. You who save Israel from many evils, who chose our ancestors and sanctified them, ²⁶accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel. Protect your heritage and sanctify it.

^{Dt}
^{30:3} ²⁷Gather our scattered people together, set free those held in slavery among the nations, turn your eyes on those who are despised and crushed; so the pagans may know that you are our God. ²⁸Afflict those who oppress us, who insult and treat us with contempt. ²⁹Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses said."

^{Ex}
^{15:17} ³⁰The priests sang the hymns, ³¹and when the sacrifice was all consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the remaining liquid be poured over some large stones. ³²This was done, and a flame flared up but it was outshone by the

fire from the altar. ³³This matter became known, and it was reported to the king of the Persians that the liquid with which Nehemiah and his companions had burned the sacrifice was found in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire. ³⁴So, after verifying the facts, the king ordered that a fence be built to enclose the place and decreed that it be a sacred place.

³⁵The king gave some of that liquid to those who enjoyed his favor, and they gave him gifts in return. ³⁶Nehemiah and his companions called the place "Nephtar" which means "purification" but afterwards, many called it "Naphtha."

2 ¹It is found in the archives that the prophet Jeremiah ordered the exiles to take the fire, as we have already said. ²After giving them the Law, he exhorted them not to forget the precepts of God and not to let themselves be dazzled by the idols of silver and gold with all their adornment. ³He spoke to them of many similar things, admonishing them never to lose their love for the Law.

Bar 6

Popular beliefs

⁴It is also said in these writings of the past that the prophet Jeremiah, fulfilling orders from Heaven, commanded that the ark of the Covenant with its tent be brought with him. And he went to the mountain which Moses had climbed before and from where he had seen the promised land. ⁵There Jeremiah found a cave; and he brought in the ark, the tent that covered it and the altar of incense. Then he closed up the entrance with stones.

Dt
34:1

⁶Some of those who followed him returned to mark out the way, but they could not find it anymore.

⁷When Jeremiah learned this, he reproached them and said, "This place is to remain hidden until God has compassion on his scattered people and

• **1.1** This part of the first letter could be a model for wishing someone a "Happy New Year."

The Jews of Palestine write this letter after having overcome their oppressors. When they are about to celebrate the Purification of the Temple which has been retrieved from the enemy forces, they inform the Jewish communities dispersed in Egypt about it.

The letter deals with several themes. We single out the legend according to which the Ark (which

had in fact been destroyed in the fall of Jerusalem in 587) had been saved and hidden. This was to express the great faith of the people; nothing that God had done in the time of their ancestors could be lost.

Note 2:13-15. This fact, not totally reliable, completes what we read in 1 Chr 29:29-30; 2 Chr 9:29; 16:11... Ezra 7:25-26; Ne 8; regarding the formation of the nucleus of the Bible, a task which was achieved not by Nehemiah, but rather by Ezra.

Ex 24:16
1K
8:10 gathers them together. ⁸Then the Lord will reveal these things again and his Glory shall appear in the cloud as it appeared in the time of Moses and when Solomon asked God to come and consecrate his house.”

⁹It was also reported in these archives how Solomon, inspired by his wisdom, offered the sacrifice of the dedication and completion of the Temple. ¹⁰And as fire had come down from heaven through the prayer of Moses to consume the offerings and the sacrificial victim, so through the prayer of Solomon, fire also came down from heaven and burned up the holocausts. ¹¹And what Moses had said was fulfilled: *Inasmuch as the sin-offering was not eaten, the fire consumed it.* ¹²Solomon celebrated the feast, too, for eight days.

¹³This also can be read in the archives and in the Memories of Nehemiah’s time. It is recounted there that Nehemiah founded a library and collected the books dealing with the kings and the prophets, the writings of David and the letters of the kings about offerings.

¹⁴In the same way, Judas has just gathered all the books dispersed on account of the war we suffered, and they are now in our possession. ¹⁵So, if you need any of them, send someone to get them for you.

¹⁶We said we are now about to celebrate the feast of the purification of the Temple; you will do well to celebrate these feast days also, ¹⁷for God has saved all his people and returned to everyone his own land. He let us recover the kingdom, the Temple, and the worship rendered to him in that Temple, ¹⁸as is commanded in his Law. God himself, as we do hope, will soon have mercy on us and gather us together from everywhere to the Holy Place, since he has rescued us from great evils and has purified this Place.

Author’s preface

¹⁹The story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers has been written by Jason of Cyrene. He narrated the purification of the Temple of the Most High, the dedication of the altar, ²⁰the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator, ²¹and the heavenly manifestations in favor of those who fought bravely and gloriously for Judaism. Although they were few in number, they liberated the whole land and put to flight hordes of foreigners. ²²They regained the Temple renowned throughout the world, liberated the city and reestablished the laws which were nearly abolished, for the Lord was gracious to them in his great kindness. ²³All this, which has been set forth in five volumes

by Jason of Cyrene, we shall now attempt to sum up in a single book. ²⁴We recognize that these books contain many figures, and that it is difficult for those who wish to understand this history because of so many facts. ²⁵So we have concerned ourselves to offer something engaging for those who simply want to read, something easily committed to memory, and profitable for anyone who reads it.

²⁶For us who have undertaken the arduous task of summarizing, it has not been easy but has cost as much effort ²⁷as it would to prepare a banquet which would please everyone. But like those who prepare a banquet, we have endured this toil willingly in order to please others. ²⁸So we leave to the historian the task of relating accurately all the details, and we have condensed this enormous work into a simple summary.

²⁹For just as the architect of a new house has to be concerned about the whole construction, while the painters and decorators are concerned only about what relates to their task, so it is with us. ³⁰The analysis of details and discussion on disputable points belongs to the historian. ³¹But for one who tries to condense a report, his task is to summarize and not present a complete narration of facts and events.

³²So let us begin our narrative without going on at length about what has been said before, for it would be senseless to expand the preface while cutting short the narration of the history itself.

Heliodorus attempts to seize the temple treasures

3 ¹While the Holy City enjoyed complete peace and the laws were observed as perfectly as possible through the piety of Onias the High Priest and his hatred for all wickedness, ²it came about that kings honored the Holy Place and made the High Priest richer by their magnificent gifts. ³Even Seleucus, king of Asia, paid from his own account for the expenses of the sacrificial services. ⁴But a certain Simon, a priest of the tribe of Bilgah and the Temple administrator, came into conflict with the High Priest regarding the inspection of the city markets. ⁵But he could not prevail over Onias. So he went to Apollonius of Tarsus, the governor of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, ⁶and reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold wealth,

that there was a great amount of money which had nothing to do with the expenses required by the sacrifices, and that all this could easily be brought under the control of the king.

⁷Apollonius met with the king and told him about the wealth that had been disclosed to him. The king then sent Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, with a letter that authorized him to transfer the treasures. ⁸Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, pretending that he was going to visit Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, but with the intention of carrying out the king's order.

⁹On his arrival in Jerusalem, he was hospitably received by the city and the High Priest to whom he related the report that had been made. He revealed the reason for his coming and asked the High Priest if the report was really true. ¹⁰The High Priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans. ¹¹Some belonged to Hyrcanus, son of Tobias, a person of very prominent position, who had also been affected by these slanders. All in all, the treasury had four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold. ¹²Finally, Onias pointed out that it was utterly impossible to cheat those who had put their confidence in this Holy Place and in the inviolable majesty of that Temple venerated throughout the world.

¹³But, following the orders of the king, Heliodorus insisted that all those treasures should be turned over to the king. ¹⁴So, on the day set for Heliodorus to draw up the inventory, there was great disturbance in the city. ¹⁵The priests in their sacred vestments stood before the altar and called upon Heaven: he who had given the law governing deposits should now preserve them for those who had deposited them.

¹⁶None could look at the face of the High Priest without being deeply touched, for his appearance and his

paleness revealed the anguish of his soul. ¹⁷A kind of fear overwhelmed him that made him tremble from head to foot, showing to those who saw him the sorrow of his heart. ¹⁸People rushed out of their houses in great confusion to pray together because the Holy Place was about to be profaned. ¹⁹The women, girded with sackcloth below their breasts, thronged into the streets. The younger girls who were not yet allowed to go out into the streets ran to the doorways, and some climbed the walls and others looked out from the windows. ²⁰All raised their hands to heaven and joined in prayer. ²¹It was touching to see such a crowd prostrate in disarray on the ground and the High Priest in great anguish.

²²While they were praying to the All-powerful Lord to protect the deposits of the Temple and keep them safe for those who entrusted them to the High Priest, ²³Heliodorus began to carry out what had been decided upon.

²⁴He had already come near the Treasury with his bodyguard, when the Lord of the spirits and of every power caused so great a manifestation that all who had dared accompany Heliodorus were astonished before the power of God, and they lost their strength and courage. ²⁵There appeared to them a horse with magnificent gear and on it was a fearsome rider. It rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its forefeet. The rider appeared to have armor of gold. ²⁶And two young men, strong and very beautiful and magnificently clothed, also appeared. They stood on each side of Heliodorus, and flogged him continuously, inflicting stroke after stroke.

²⁷Heliodorus fell to the ground, enveloped in great darkness; then his men took him up and put him on a stretcher. ²⁸So he was carried away, powerless even to help himself, he who but a moment before had proudly entered the treasury with a great retinue

14:29
Dt
27:19

1Mac
10:43

and all his bodyguard. Everyone clearly recognized the power of God.²⁹ Because of the divine intervention, Heliodorus became mute and lost all hope of saving his life.³⁰ Meanwhile the Jews blessed the Lord who had glorified his Holy Place. The Temple, which a little while before had been filled with terror and fear, now overflowed with joy and gladness because of the extraordinary manifestation of God.

³¹ Then some of Heliodorus' companions begged Onias to call upon the Most High to grant the grace of life to him who was at the point of death.³² The High Priest, on his part, feared that the king might suspect the Jews of some foul play against Heliodorus, so he offered a sacrifice for the man's recovery.

³³ While the High Priest was offering the sacrifice of atonement, the same young men, clothed in the same way, again appeared to Heliodorus, and standing before him, said, "Thank Onias the High Priest, for through him the Lord grants you the grace of life.³⁴ And as for you, who have been scourged by heaven's command, make known to all how great is the power of God." Having said this, they vanished.

³⁵ Heliodorus then offered a sacrifice to the Lord and prayed at great length to him who had spared his life. He took leave of Onias and went back with his guards to the king.³⁶ There he began to bear witness to the works of the Most High God, which he had seen with his own eyes.

³⁷ The king asked Heliodorus who could be sent again to Jerusalem to carry out what he failed to do. Heliodorus answered him,³⁸ "If you have some enemy whom you wish to eliminate, send him there and you will see

him return well flogged; that is, if he ever returns at all, for surely, divine power is in that place.³⁹ He himself who dwells in heaven watches over the place and defends it, striking to death those who come to profane it."

⁴⁰ This was what happened to Heliodorus and how the Treasury was saved.

4¹ The Simon mentioned before as the informer about the treasures of the Temple, who was traitor to his country, spoke evil of Onias, accusing him of a plot against Heliodorus and saying that he was responsible for all the troubles.² He even dared to lay the blame for everything on Onias who was the great benefactor of the city, the defender of his compatriots and a zealous observer of the laws.³ The hostility between them reached such proportions that crimes were even committed by some of the supporters of Simon.

Cultural crisis

⁴ Onias recognized the dangers involved in such an unbearable rivalry. Even Apollonius, son of Menestheus, governor of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, was instigating Simon to evil.⁵ So Onias went to the king, not to accuse his fellow citizens, but for the good of the whole nation.⁶ For he saw that it was impossible to maintain peace and stop the foolishness of Simon without the king's intervention.

•⁷ When King Seleucus died, his son Antiochus who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the throne. Then, Jason, the brother of Onias the High Priest, usurped the office of high priest.⁸ In a conversation with the king, Jason promised three hundred and sixty talents of silver and eighty talents from other revenues.⁹ He further committed himself to pay one hundred fifty more talents if he would be allowed to establish on his own account a gymnasium with a Center for the cultural advancement of the youth and if the statute of Antioquian citizenship could apply to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well.

¹⁰ With the consent of the king and

• **4.7** We single out this paragraph which vividly describes the penetration of Greek culture. Should it be seen as progress or cultural colonization? See what is said to that effect in 1 Mac 1:41. Since the priests were better edu-

cated, they received the first shock of the cultural and spiritual crisis. Unfortunately for the Jews, at the time of the crisis, personal interests and politics entered into the appointment of the religious leaders.

using the power at his disposal, he at once set about encouraging his fellow citizens to adopt the customs of the Greeks. ¹¹He suppressed the privileges that kings had granted to the Jews through John, the father of Eupolemus, who had established friendship and an alliance between the Romans and the Jews. He overthrew lawful institutions and introduced new customs contrary to the Law.

^{1Mac}
^{8:17}

¹²So, he very readily founded a gymnasium right under the Citadel, and persuaded the noblest among the young to be educated in the Greek way. ¹³Paganism was propagated through Jason's influence, who proved to be more of a godless wretch than a high priest.

Greek customs were so much in vogue, ¹⁴that priests no longer showed any interest in serving at the altar. They despised the sanctuary and neglected the sacrifices and as soon as the discus throw began they would run to the stadium to take part in athletic competitions prohibited by the Law. ¹⁵They did not value anymore the customs of their ancestors, but held in highest esteem the values of the Greeks.

¹⁶With this, they themselves were put in a difficult situation, for those whom they took as models and whose customs they wanted to imitate in everything proved to be their enemies and tyrants. ¹⁷For it is not easy to break the divine laws with impunity as the following episodes will show.

¹⁸When the quinquennial games held every five years were going on in Tyre before the king, ¹⁹the wicked Jason sent as envoys some "citizens of Antioch" from the inhabitants of Jerusalem and he entrusted to them three hundred drachmas of silver allotted for the sacrifice to Hercules. When these envoys came, they decided that it was not fitting to spend the money on the sacrifice, but preferred to spend it on other things. ²⁰So through the sole ini-

tiative of those sent to spend the money for the sacrifice to Hercules, the amount was used instead for the construction of trireme ships.

²¹Antiochus had sent Apollonius, son of Menestheus, to Egypt to represent him in the enthronement of King Philometor. But when Antiochus learned that Philometor had become his political adversary, Antiochus was worried about his own safety. ²²So, he left Joppa, and went to Jerusalem where he was well received by Jason and the whole city, entering the city in the midst of acclamations and torches. Then, he went with his troops to Phoenicia.

²³After three years, Jason sent Menelaus, brother of the Simon mentioned above, to bring the money to the king and initiate steps to negotiate urgent matters with him. ²⁴Menelaus presented himself to the king whom he impressed by his personal bearing as a man of authority, and so obtained the office of high priest for himself, offering three hundred talents more than Jason. ²⁵After receiving the royal mandate, he returned with nothing worthy of a high priest, but only with the rage of a cruel tyrant or a wild beast. ²⁶Jason, who had usurped the office of his brother, was now supplanted by another, and had to flee to the land of Ammon.

²⁷Menelaus held the office but did not pay the amount he promised to the king, ²⁸although Sostratus, the commander of the Citadel, demanded the payment, since the king had entrusted to him the collection of revenue. The two of them were then summoned by the king because of this. ²⁹Menelaus left his brother Lysimachus as his substitute, and Sostratus left Crates, the commander of the Cypriots.

Murder of Onias

³⁰Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Tarsus and Mallus revolted because their cities were given as a gift to Antiochis, the king's concubine. ³¹The king set out at once to reestablish order, leaving Andronicus, one of his ministers, as his deputy. ³²Menelaus thought of taking advantage of the opportunity, and stole some of the golden vessels from the Temple, which he then gave to Andronicus as gifts. He also managed to sell others in Tyre and in the neighboring cities.

³³When Onias had clear evidence of what Menelaus had done, he sought refuge in Daphne near Antioch, a place of asylum, and from there denounced him. ³⁴For this reason, Menelaus met Andronicus in private and urged him to kill Onias. Andronicus went to Onias and deceitfully gained his confidence, offering Onias his right hand in oath. He was

able to persuade Onias, in spite of the latter's suspicion, to come out of his place of refuge. Then Andronicus killed him at once without any regard for justice.

³⁵For this reason, not only Jews but people of other nationalities as well became indignant and grieved over the unjust killing of that man. ³⁶When the king returned to the regions of Cilicia, the Jews of Jerusalem, together with the Greeks who were for justice, went to see him and complained about the murder of Onias.

³⁷The king was touched and became sad, and even wept as he remembered the personality and noble conduct of the departed. ³⁸He became angry with Andronicus and immediately removed him from office. Then he ordered that Andronicus be divested of his purple robe, tore his garments off him, and led him all around the city up to the place where Andronicus had murdered Onias, and right there the king ordered that he be put to death – God dealing out to him the punishment he deserved.

³⁹Lysimachus committed much sacrilegious plunder in Jerusalem with the connivance of Menelaus. When this became known, the populace rebelled against Lysimachus, who had already taken many golden vessels from the city. ⁴⁰When Lysimachus saw the people rising up in rebellion and becoming enraged, he armed about three thousand men and began a violent repression, designating as leader a certain Auranus, a man advanced in years but of very little intelligence. ⁴¹So, as the people were attacked by the men of Lysimachus, they reacted by picking up stones and clubs, and even gathered handfuls of ashes lying at hand, and threw everything against the men of Lysimachus. ⁴²In this way, they wounded many of them, killed some, and put the rest to flight. As for the sacrilegious robber Lysimachus, they killed him near the treasury.

⁴³Because of all this a charge was brought against Menelaus and ⁴⁴when the king arrived at Tyre, three men sent by the council of the elders of Jerusalem told him of Menelaus' cruelty. ⁴⁵Seeing his ruin, Menelaus promised a great amount of money to Ptolemy, son of Dorymenes, in order to have the king in his favor.

⁴⁶Ptolemy then went with the king privately to a colonnade for some fresh air, and persuaded him to change his mind. ⁴⁷The king actually dismissed all the accusations against Menelaus, the cause of all this evil, while he condemned to death Menelaus' unfortunate accusers who would have been acquitted had a tribunal of barbarians judged them. ⁴⁸So those who had defended the cause of the city, the people and the sacred vessels were executed at once.

⁴⁹Some Tyrians were so enraged by that crime that they prepared a magnificent funeral for them. ⁵⁰But through the corruption of the rulers, Menelaus remained in power, growing in wickedness and becoming a tyrant towards his own people.

Antiochus sacks the temple

5 ¹By this time, Antiochus was preparing a second expedition against Egypt. ²And for nearly forty days, there appeared throughout the city, galloping through the air, horsemen dressed in gold, ³troops with swords drawn and formed in squadrons, cavalry squadrons in order of battle, attacks and charges from this side and that, movements of shields, many spears, arrows, missiles, the glitter of golden outfits and armor of all kinds. ⁴Everyone prayed that these apparitions would be an announcement of something good about to happen.

⁵As a false rumor spread that Antiochus had died, Jason gathered together about ten thousand men and launched a surprise attack on the city. The troops upon the walls defended the city, but once these were taken, the whole city fell into the hands of Jason, while Menelaus took refuge in the Citadel. ⁶Jason cruelly massacred his fellow citizens, without realizing that his victory against his own nation was the greatest defeat. He seemed to believe that he was winning over enemies when, in reality, these were his own people. ⁷But he did not stay in power for long and after obtaining nothing but shame for himself, he had to flee once again to the land of Ammon. ⁸Finally, he had a very unfortunate end. Accused before Aretas, the king of the Arabs, fleeing from city to city, pursued by all, scorned as a renegade from the law and hated as the executioner of his country and fellow citizens, he was banished to Egypt. ⁹And he, who had exiled so many from their own country, died in exile: for he went as far as Lacedemonia in the hope of finding protection there because of the kinship between that people and ours. ¹⁰He, who had deprived so many of burial places, died with no one to mourn him, no funeral rites nor place in the tomb of his fathers.

^{1Mac}
^{12:21}

Persecution of Antiochus

¹¹When news of these events reached the king, he thought that the whole of Judea had risen in rebellion. He became furious and, leaving Egypt, went to take Jerusalem by force. ¹²He ordered his soldiers to kill without mercy everyone they encountered and to behead as well all those who took refuge in their houses. ¹³Young and old perished; men, women and children were massacred, and infants and virgins were put to the sword. ¹⁴Within only three days, there were eighty

thousand victims – forty thousand perished in the slaughter and as many were sold as slaves. ¹⁵Not content with this, Antiochus boldly entered the holiest Temple in the entire world, guided by Menelaus, the traitor to the law and country.

¹⁶With his unclean hands, Antiochus seized the sacred vessels, and with impious hands took away what other kings had given as gifts for the glory and honor of the Temple. ¹⁷But in acting in such an insolent manner, Antiochus did not realize that the Lord had let him profane the Temple in order to punish the inhabitants of the city, because their sins had offended him.

¹⁸For, had the city not been sinful, Antiochus would have been flogged the moment he entered, as Heliodorus who was sent by Seleucus to rob the treasury had been. And he would have also repented of his audacity.

¹⁹But God had not chosen the people for the Temple, but the Temple for the sake of the nation.

²⁰Therefore, the Temple also shared in the nation's misfortune, as it also shared afterward in its restoration. As it had been abandoned in the time of the wrath of God, it was again restored to its glory when the Most High Lord was appeased.

²¹Antiochus took with him eighteen hundred talents which he had stolen from the Temple, and hurriedly went back to Antioch, so proud that he thought himself capable of sailing by land and walking on the sea. ²²At his departure, he left ministers to oppress our race. In Jerusalem, he appointed Philip, of Phrygian ancestry and of more barbarous character than he who had appointed him; ²³and he left Andronicus in Gerizim. Besides there was Menelaus, who surpassed them in his hatred for his fellow citizens. This man had indeed a deep hatred for Jewish compatriots.

²⁴Antiochus also sent Apollonius with an army of twenty-two thousand soldiers with orders to behead all the grown men and sell the women and children. ²⁵Arriving in Jerusalem, under the pretext of peace, he waited until the holy day of the sabbath. Then he took the Jews by surprise as they rested. He ordered his men to conduct a military parade, ²⁶and he killed all those who came out to see the show. Then, running through the streets, the soldiers killed many people.

²⁷Judas Maccabeus, however, withdrew

into the desert with about nine others willing to live like the wild beasts. There they fed on clean vegetables, for they did not want to eat unclean meat.

First victims of persecution

6 ¹After a while, the king sent an older Athenian to force the Jews to abandon their ancestral laws and no longer live according to the laws of God. ²And to have them also profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to the *Olympian god*. In the same way, he wanted them to dedicate the temple in Mount Gerizim to the *hospitable god*, according to the wishes of the inhabitants of the place.

³This worsened the evil and made it difficult and unbearable for all. ⁴The Temple was profaned by the orgies of the pagans who went there to have a good time with prostitutes, and had intercourse in the sacred enclosures. And besides, they brought into the Temple things not permitted by the Law; ⁵the altar was laden with unclean victims prohibited by the law. ⁶It was no longer allowed to celebrate the sabbath or observe the customs of our ancestors, or even to declare oneself a Jew. ⁷But, on the contrary, they were led by bitter necessity to celebrate the king's birthday with a monthly sacrifice.

And when the feast of Dionysus came, they were also forced to follow the Dionysus procession and wear floral wreaths.

⁸At the suggestion of the inhabitants of Ptolemy, a decree was sent to the neighboring Greek cities ordering them to treat the Jews who lived there in the same way and oblige them to participate in the sacrifices. ⁹Those who would not adopt the Greek customs

• **6.1** Religious persecution as it is experienced by the people means:

- obligatory suppression of religious customs;
- sexual licentiousness disguised as cultural progress;
- violence against those who remain faithful to God;
- abandoning the humble and the women

who are faced with the cruelty of the law and of the people.

The moral crisis continues in the wake of the trials that good people are going through. How can God allow this?

An answer is given: the purpose of these trials is to correct God's people. The Jews know that God's mercy is present during the trial.

^{1Mac}
^{1:21}

^{6:12}

^{Mk}
^{2:27}

^{1Mac}
^{1:29-37}

^{1Mac}
^{1:41}

^{13:25}
^{1Mac}
^{5:15}

were to be killed. So it was easy to foresee the fatal outcome.

¹⁰Two women were charged of having performed the rite of circumcision on their sons. They publicly paraded the women throughout the city with their babies hung at their breasts. Then they hurled them down from the city wall. ¹¹Others who had assembled in nearby caves to celebrate the sabbath were denounced to Philip and they allowed themselves to be burned. Because of the holiness of the sabbath day, they had scruples about defending themselves.

^{1Mac}
^{2:29}
^{Dn}
^{11:33}

¹²I now ask the readers of this book not to be shocked by these calamities. Bear in mind that this did not happen for the destruction of our race, but rather for our education.

^{Wis}
^{11:9-}
¹⁰
^{12:2,}
²⁰
^{1Thes}
^{2:16}

¹³God is showing his kindness when he does not let sinners continue on their way for a long time, but punishes them at once. ¹⁴As for the other nations, the patient Lord doesn't punish them until they reach the full measure of their sins. But he deals with us in a different manner: ¹⁵he does not wait until we have reached the full measure in order to punish us. ¹⁶Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us, and does not abandon his people, even when he punishes us with some adversity.

¹⁷After reminding our readers of these truths, let us continue the story.

The martyrdom of Eleazar

^{Lev}
^{11:7}
^{Dn}
^{11:32}

• ¹⁸Eleazar, one of the prominent teachers of the Law, already old and of noble appearance, was forced to open his mouth to eat the flesh of a pig. ¹⁹But he preferred to die honorably than to live in disgrace, and voluntarily came to the place where they beat him to death. He spit out bravely the piece of meat, ²⁰as should be done by those

who do not want to do things prohibited by the Law, even to save their life.

²¹Those in charge of this impious banquet took him aside, since they had known him for a long time, and tried to convince him to pretend to be eating the meat, but in reality, to eat something allowed by the Law and prepared by himself. ²²In this way, he could escape death, and be treated with humanity for the sake of their long-time friendship.

²³But he preferred to make a noble decision worthy of his age, of his noble years, of his shining white hair, and of the irreproachable life he had led from childhood. Above all, showing respect for the holy laws established by God, he answered that he would rather be sent to the place of the dead. And he added, ²⁴"It would be unworthy to pretend at our age, and to lead many young people to suppose that I, at ninety years, have gone over to the pagan customs. ²⁵If I led them astray for the sake of this short life I would bring disgrace to my old age. ²⁶Even if I could now be saved from mortals, I cannot – whether living or dead – escape from the hands of the Almighty. ²⁷I prefer to bravely sacrifice my life now, as befits my old age. ²⁸So I shall leave an excellent example to the young, dying voluntarily and valiantly for the sacred and holy laws."

Having said this, he gave himself over to death.

²⁹Those who escorted him considered his words foolishness, so their previous gentleness turned into harshness.

³⁰When he was almost at the point of death, he said groaning, "The Holy Lord, who sees all, knows that though I could have saved myself from death, I now endure terrible sufferings in my body. But in my soul, I suffer gladly

- 18. How noble are Eleazar's words:
 - he does not want to hide his faith;
 - he prefers honor to life;

- above all he fears God;
- to die out of faithfulness to divine laws sets a noble example for young people;

because of the respect I have for him.”
³¹In his death, he left a noble example and a memorial of virtue and strength, not only to the young but to the whole nation.

Martyrdom of the seven brothers

7 • ¹It happened also that seven brothers were arrested with their mother. The king had them scourged and flogged to force them to eat the flesh of a pig which was prohibited by the Law.

²One of them, speaking in behalf of all, said, “What do you want to find out from us? We are prepared to die right now rather than break the law of our ancestors.”

³The king became furious and ordered that pans and caldrons be heated over a fire. ⁴When these were red-hot, he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out, his head scalped, and his hands and feet cut off while his brothers and mother looked on.

⁵When he had been thoroughly mutilated, the king ordered that while still breathing, he be brought to the fire and roasted alive. While the smoke from the pan spread widely, the other brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die bravely. And they said,

⁶“The Lord God sees all, and in reality, has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, and clearly said: The Lord will have pity on his servants.”

⁷When the first had left the world in this way, they brought the second for execution. After stripping the skin with the

hair from his head, they asked him: “Which do you prefer: to eat the flesh of a pig or to be tortured limb by limb?”

⁸He answered them in the language of his ancestors, “I will not eat.” And so he, too, was tortured.

⁹At the moment of his last breath, he said, “Murderer, you now dismiss us from life, but the King of the world will raise us up. He will give us eternal life since we die for his laws.”

¹⁰After this, they punished the third. He stuck his tongue out when asked to, bravely stretched forth his hands, ¹¹and even had the courage to say: “I have received these limbs from God, but for love of his laws I now consider them as nothing. For I hope to recover them from God.” ¹²The king and his court were touched by the courage of this young man, so unconcerned about his own sufferings.

¹³When this one was dead, they subjected the fourth to the same torture. ¹⁴At the point of death, he cried out, “I would rather die at the hands of mortals, and wait for the promises of God who will raise us up; you, however, shall have no part in the resurrection of life.”

¹⁵They took the fifth at once and tortured him. But with his eyes fixed on the king, ¹⁶he said to him, “Though you are mortal, you have authority over people and are able to do what you will. But do not think that our race has been abandoned by God. ¹⁷Wait, and you shall see his great power when he tortments you and your descendants.”

¹⁸After this, they took the sixth who,

– Eleazar suffers physically, but he dies happy. We have in him the prototype, the model of martyrs.

• **7.1** In relating the martyrdom of these seven brothers, whose names are unknown, the author places on their lips a declaration of their faith in immortality. This is the most valuable message of the book.

In the previous centuries, God’s promises were for the people as a whole. The believer only hoped for the life and prosperity of his race.

Here, we have a giant step in the faith: the resurrection of individuals. It is not only the hope for survival of the spirit, or the soul: the believer thinks he will be raised as a person to meet God. In Ezekiel 37, in the vision of the dry bones, God was promising to raise his people who had died. Here, every person hopes to rise, body and soul, to share the happiness that God promised and will give on the final day.

If martyrs are not raised, how would God achieve justice?

Dn
12:2
Heb
11:35

14:2
1Mac
11:17

at the point of death, said, “Don’t be mistaken. We suffer all this because of ourselves for we have sinned against our own God; so these astonishing things have come upon us. ¹⁹But do not think that you are going to remain unpunished, after having made war with God.”

Acts
5:39

²⁰More than all of them, their mother ought to be admired and remembered. She saw her seven sons die in a single day. But she endured it even with joy for she had put her hope in the Lord. ²¹Full of a noble sense of honor, she encouraged each one of them in the language of their ancestors. Her woman’s heart was moved by manly courage, so she told them:

Job
10:8-
12
Ecl
11:5
Ps
139:
13

²²“I wonder how you were born of me; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor I who ordered the matter of your body. ²³The Creator of the world who formed man in the beginning and ordered the unfolding of all creation shall in his mercy, give you back breath and life, since you now despise them for love of his laws.”

²⁴Antiochus thought that she was making fun of him and suspected that she had insulted him. As the youngest was still alive, the king tried to win him over not only with his words, but even promised to make him rich and happy, if he would abandon the traditions of his ancestors. He would make him his Friend and appoint him to a high position in the kingdom. ²⁵But as the young man did not pay him any attention, the king ordered the mother to be brought in. He urged her to advise her son in order to save his life. ²⁶After being asked twice by the king, she agreed to persuade her son. ²⁷She bent over him and fooled the cruel tyrant by saying in her ancestral language:

“My son, have pity on me. For nine months I carried you in my womb and suckled you for three years; I raised you up and educated you until this day. ²⁸I ask you now, my son, that when you

see the heavens, the earth and all that is in it, you know that God made all this from nothing, and the human race as well. ²⁹Do not fear these executioners, but make yourself worthy of your brothers – accept death that you may again meet your brothers in the time of mercy.”

Heb
11:3

³⁰When she finished speaking, the young man said, “What are you waiting for? I do not obey the king’s order but the precepts of the Law given by Moses to our ancestors. ³¹And you who have devised such tortures against the Hebrews, shall not escape the hands of God. ³²Know that we perish because of our sins. ³³Our living Lord punishes and corrects us for a short time because he is angry with us, but he shall again be reconciled with his servants.

³⁴And you, the most wretched and impious man, do not be proud or be carried away by your vain hopes. Do not raise your hand against the children of Heaven, ³⁵for you have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty God, who sees everything. ³⁶Our brothers suffered a short time for the sake of eternal life and have already entered into the friendship of God. But you, for your part, shall suffer the punishment you deserve for your arrogance.

³⁷With my brothers, I give up my body and my soul for the laws of my fathers, calling on God that he may at once have pity on our race, and that by trials and afflictions, you may come to confess that he is the only God. ³⁸Through me and my brothers, may the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on the whole of our race come to an end.”

Is 53

³⁹The king was even more infuriated at him than at the others because of his mockery and he dealt more cruelly with him. ⁴⁰So the youngest also died undefiled, putting his whole trust in God. ⁴¹After all her sons, the mother also died.

⁴²This is enough to make known

what happened regarding the pagan sacrifices and the tortures beyond all imagination.

First exploits of Judas Maccabeus

^{1Mac 2:19-48 3:1-26} **8** ¹Meanwhile, Judas, also called Maccabeus, and his companions, would enter secretly into the villages, call their relatives, summon those who had remained faithful to Judaism, and finally they assembled about six thousand men. ²They prayed to the Lord to turn his countenance on his people oppressed on all sides, to take pity on the Sanctuary profaned by the impious, ³to have compassion on the city – destroyed and on the point of being leveled – to listen to the cry of the blood reaching out to him; ⁴and they asked that he not forget the unjust killing of innocent children and show his indignation against those who had insulted his Name.

⁵The Lord's anger turned into compassion, and as soon as Maccabeus had organized his troops, they became invincible against the pagans.

Judas generally took advantage of the night for his military campaigns. ⁶So he attacked them by surprise, set cities and villages on fire, captured strategic positions, and put to flight many of the enemies. ⁷And people everywhere talked about him and his bravery.

^{1Mac 3:38} ⁸When Philip saw that Judas was making progress little by little and his victories increased from day to day, he wrote to Ptolemy, the military commissioner of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, to come and help him under the king's service. ⁹Ptolemy at once appointed Nicanor, son of Patroclus, one of the king's first Friends, and sent him at the head of some twenty thousand men coming from all nations, with the order to wipe out all the Jews. At his side, he put Gorgias, a general of much experience in matters of war.

¹⁰Nicanor intended to raise two thousand talents by the sale of Jewish slaves in order to pay for the tribute the king owed to the Romans. ¹¹So he extended an invitation to all the coastal cities to come and buy slaves for a talent, without any regard for the punish-

ment of the Almighty that might come upon him.

¹²When Judas learned that Nicanor had come with a great army, he told his men about this. ¹³So the cowardly and those who had no confidence in divine justice took to flight. ¹⁴Still others sold everything they owned and asked God to deliver from the impious Nicanor those who had been sold even before any battle. ¹⁵They prayed that if the Lord would not save them because of their own merits, that at least out of consideration for the covenant he made with their ancestors and for that great venerable Name with which he had blessed his people, he would do so.

¹⁶Maccabeus gathered and reorganized his troops, numbering about six thousand, and exhorted them not to fear the enemy but to fight bravely against their unjust aggressors, despite their great number. ¹⁷He reminded them how those men had profaned the Holy Place, slaughtered the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and removed their traditional institutions. ¹⁸He said to them, "They come with confidence in their weapons and their boldness, but we trust in the almighty God, who is able to wipe out in one stroke all who invade our land and even the whole world."

¹⁹He recounted to them all the occasions when God had come to help their ancestors, especially when he wiped out one hundred and eighty-five thousand men under Sennacherib. ²⁰He also reminded them of what had happened in Babylonia, in the battle against the Galatians. On that day, eight thousand Jews fought side by side with four thousand Macedonians, and as the Macedonians were hard pressed, their Jewish allies alone killed twenty thousand of the enemies' troops with heaven's help and seized a great booty.

²¹Judas encouraged them with these words, and made them ready to die for their laws and country; then, he divided the army into four groups. ²²He assigned his brothers Simon, Joseph and Jonathan to each lead one division with fifteen hundred men in each. ²³He ordered that the Sacred Book be read, and he gave them their watchword "Help from God"; then, he himself led the first battalion, and fell on Nicanor. ²⁴With the help of the Almighty they slaughtered nine thousand enemies, wounded and crippled many, and put the rest to flight.

²⁵They seized the money of those who had come to buy the Jews, and pursued them for a good while. But it was nearly evening, ²⁶so they had to return because it was the vigil of the sabbath. That is why they stopped pursuing their enemies. ²⁷They gathered the weapons and the plunder of their enemies, and celebrated the sabbath on that day with praise and thanksgiving to God who had just

Ps
20:8

15:22
2K
19:35

saved them and had begun to show them his mercy.²⁸ After the sabbath, they divided part of the booty among those who had been tortured, the widows and the orphans; and they divided the rest among themselves and their men.²⁹ Having done this, they asked the Merciful Lord during a public prayer to be fully reconciled with his servants.

³⁰ Then, in an encounter with the army of Timotheus and Bacchides, they killed more than twenty thousand men, and took control of the fortified cities. They divided the abundant plunder into equal shares among themselves, those who had been tortured, the orphans, the widows and the aged.

³¹ They carefully stored in safe places the weapons they had taken from the enemies, and brought the rest of the booty to Jerusalem. ³² They killed the chief guard of Timotheus, an extremely wretched man who had done so much evil against the Jews. ³³ Then, as they celebrated their victory in Jerusalem, they burned alive those who had burned the temple gates, including Callisthenes who had taken refuge in one small house. So these men paid the price deserved for their impiety.

³⁴ The thrice-as-wretched Nicanor, who had brought thousands of merchants to buy the Jews, ³⁵ found himself humbled with God's help by those same men he had despised before. Having discarded his splendid robe he fled across the country as a fugitive, and reached Antioch, very much relieved that he had not perished with his army.

³⁶ He who had intended to pay the tribute owed to the Romans by selling the Jews, now affirmed that the Jews were invincible and invulnerable, and that Someone fought for them, provided they were obeying the laws prescribed by him.

Death of the persecutor

9 ¹ By that time, Antiochus had to return without glory from the regions of Persia.

² When he entered a city called Persepolis, and tried to plunder the temple and seize the city, its inhabitants rebelled and took up arms against him. This people threw Antiochus and his men out. They fled and returned very much humiliated. ³ When Antiochus came to Ecbatana, he was informed of what had happened to the two generals – Nicanor and

Timotheus – in Israel. ⁴ He was infuriated and determined to take revenge on the Jews for the offense he had just received in Persepolis when they forced him to flee.

He ordered the chariot driver to hurry up and not to stop until the journey's end. But the judgment of God was coming upon him, for he said in his pride, "As soon as I arrive in Jerusalem, I shall turn it into a cemetery of the Jews." ⁵ Then the Lord who sees all, the God of Israel, punished him with an incurable sickness of an internal nature. ⁶ He had barely finished speaking when he felt an unbearable pain in his stomach and began to be afflicted all over his body.

This was indeed just for one who had tortured others in the same way with countless new punishments. ⁷ But this did not diminish his arrogance. In his rage against the Jews, he gave orders to journey ahead with even more speed. Yet, because his chariot was running very fast, Antiochus fell and his physical condition worsened.

⁸ Not long before, in his conceit and sense of superiority he thought of giving orders to the sea and measuring the heights of the mountains. Now he lay down and had to be brought on a stretcher, giving to all a clear testimony of the power of God. ⁹ Worms began to teem in the body of the impious and though he was still alive, his flesh tore off into pieces, leaving him in agonizing pain. The stench of his decay was so intolerable that his whole army shunned him. ¹⁰ No one went near him who not long before thought he could touch the stars of heaven with his hand. ¹¹ Only when he was beaten by the divine scourge did he begin to shed his arrogance. His pains grew worse, and he realized this was the punishment of God. ¹² He himself could no longer endure his stench. He said, "It is right to submit to God. Mortals should not try to be equal with him." ¹³ And the wretch made a vow to the Lord who would no longer take pity on him.

¹⁴ He had marched to Jerusalem to level it and turn it into a cemetery. But now he even promised to declare it a free city. ¹⁵ Moreover, he who before had refused burial to the Jews and wished to throw them with their children to the wild beasts, now offered to make them equal with the Athenians. He had plundered the temple and profaned the Sacred Place;

• **9.1** The way God does justice. Antiochus' death is told differently in 1 Maccabees 6, which leads us to think that everything is not correct in this popular story. However, the author made no mistake in showing the change that illness and suffering bring about in the powerful.

At that moment, they see themselves as they really are, and they become aware of their pride. They discover the connection between their

present humiliation and those they inflicted on others. They promise to change their ways, though a bit late, as long as God grants them life.

The end of the persecutor shows that, if indeed God's real punishment is for the afterlife, there are also sins so abominable that they are punished in this world, as an example for others and to console the afflicted and the oppressed.

3:36
9:12
Dn
3:95
Jdt
5:6

1:11
1Mac
6:1-6

¹⁶but now he promised to decorate it lavishly, to return a great number of the sacred vessels, and to pay for all the expenses of the sacrifices. ¹⁷And he promised to become a Jew and to proclaim in all the inhabited countries the power of God.

¹⁸His pains however did not diminish, for the just judgment of God had come upon him. He lost hope of recovery and wrote to the Jews this letter of supplication, ¹⁹“To the honorable Jews, our citizens, good health, prosperity and all good things from the king and general, Antiochus. ²⁰If you and your children are well and your wishes are fulfilled, we give thanks to Heaven, for we remember your token of affection and kindness. ²¹On my return from Persia, I became gravely ill, and because of this, I thought it necessary to be concerned for the common security of all of you. ²²I do not despair of my condition, and even have great hope of recovering from this illness. ²³But I thought of how my father would designate his successor whenever he set out for any military expedition into the uplands, ²⁴so that his subjects would not be upset if anything unexpected should happen or any misfortune should befall him. Everyone would know who is in power. ²⁵I am aware that the kings of all the neighboring countries around are watching the turn of events and waiting for an opportune time. Therefore, I have designated my son, Antiochus, as king. I already presented and commended him to most of you, when I set out for the northern regions. And now I communicate to him this letter I am sending you. ²⁶I ask you, then, to take into account the favors each and everyone of you has received from me and maintain the same kindness toward me and my son. ²⁷I am sure that following my own policies of moderation and humanity, he shall live in good accord with you.”

²⁸In this way that blasphemer and murderer ended, suffering the terrible torments he had inflicted on others. He died miserably in the mountains of a foreign land. ²⁹His companion, Philip, brought his body and then withdrew to Egypt to the court of Ptolemy Philometor, because he feared the son of Antiochus.

Judas purifies the temple

¹Mac
4:36-
61

10 ¹With God’s help Maccabeus and his men seized the Temple and the city.

¹:19-
2:12

²They destroyed the altars built by the foreigners in the public squares, as well as the sacred enclosures. ³After purifying the Temple, they built a new altar. They kindled fire from flint and for the first time in two years offered sacrifices. Once again, there were incense, lamps, and the bread of presence.

⁴Having done all this they threw them-

selves flat on the ground and asked the Lord not to send them such calamities anymore. But if they should sin again, they asked that he would correct them with gentleness and not hand them over again into the hands of blasphemous and ferocious foreigners.

⁵The purification of the Temple took place on the same date on which the foreigners had profaned it, that is, on the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislev. ⁶For eight days they celebrated the feast with rejoicing, in the same way that they celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles remembering how, not long before on that same date, they were dwelling in the mountains and caves like wild animals.

⁷Then, carrying leafy branches and palms, they chanted hymns to Him who had brought the cleansing of his own Holy Place to a happy end.

⁸They also decided by public vote that this event would be commemorated annually by the whole Jewish nation.

Victories of Judas in Idumea

⁹This is all that refers to the death of Antiochus, called Epiphanes. ¹⁰We shall now proceed to narrate the events that happened under Antiochus Eupator, son of the impious, and to relate briefly the calamities brought about by the war.

¹¹In fact, once he inherited the kingdom, he appointed Lysias to be in charge of his affairs and to act as high commissioner for Coele-Syria and Phoenicia. ¹²Now Ptolemy, called Macron, was the first governor to do justice to the Jews. He was upset by injustices done against them, so he tried to solve all their problems satisfactorily. ¹³But the Friends of King Eupator made use of this to accuse him before the king. They continually called him a traitor, reminding him that he had once abandoned the land of Cyprus, which had been entrusted to him by Philometor, in order to go over to Antiochus Epiphanes.

Since he could not discharge his high office with dignity, he was driven to despair and committed suicide by poisoning himself.

¹⁴It was then that Gorgias was appointed military commissioner of those regions, and began to stir up war against the Jews by any means. ¹⁵On the other hand, the Idumeans had strong fortresses and harassed the Jews. Gathering the fugitives from Jerusalem, they managed to prolong the war.

¹⁶The men of Maccabeus, after praying and asking the Lord to come and fight at their side, attacked the fortresses of the Idumeans. ¹⁷They carried on with their assaults and the place fell into their power. They repelled those who fought on the ramparts, slaughtered all who fell into their hands, and killed more than twenty thousand men.

¹Mac
5:1-8

¹⁸ At least nine thousand men took refuge in the two towers that were strongly fortified with everything they needed to withstand a prolonged siege. ¹⁹ Maccabeus left Simon, Joseph, and also Zaccheus and his men in sufficient numbers to sustain the siege, and went off to where his presence was more needed.

^{1Mac}
^{5:17}

²⁰ Yet the men of Simon were tempted by greed, and let themselves be bought with the silver of those in the towers. So in exchange for sixty thousand pieces of silver, they allowed a number of them to escape. ²¹ As soon as Maccabeus learned this, he assembled the leaders of the people and accused those men of having sold their brothers for money by letting their enemies escape. ²² He condemned them to death as traitors, and proceeded at once to capture the towers. ²³ He killed more than twenty thousand men in those two towers, successfully bringing to an end the undertaking they had begun.

²⁴ Timothy, who had been defeated before by the Jews, gathered together an enormous number of foreign troops and a great number of horses from Asia. He appeared in Judea in order to conquer it by force of arms. ²⁵ Before his attack, the men of Maccabeus sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth as a means of entreating God. ²⁶ They bowed at the foot of the altar and asked God to treat them well and to be the enemy of their enemies, the adversary of their adversaries, as written in the Law.

^{Ex}
^{23:22}

²⁷ After praying, they armed themselves and advanced from the city. They stopped when they came close to the enemy. ²⁸ Right at daybreak, they attacked from both sides. One side placed their confidence in their Lord as the pledge of success and victory besides their bravery, while the others were moved by hatred. ²⁹ When the battle was at its height, there appeared from heaven before the enemies, five radiant men riding on horses with golden bridles, who put themselves at the head of the Jews.

^{2:21}

³⁰ They surrounded Maccabeus and defended him with their weapons, making him invulnerable. At the same time, they rained arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy, who in turn fell and were dispersed in great disorder, blinded and confused. ³¹ Twenty thousand five hundred infantrymen and six hundred horsemen died.

^{1Mac}
^{13:43-48}

³² Timothy took refuge in a heavily guarded fortress called Gezer where Chereas was in command. ³³ The forces of Maccabeus gallantly besieged the fortress for four days. ³⁴ Those within were confident in the strength of the fortress, so they hurled insults and curses at the Jews.

³⁵ At daybreak on the fifth day, twenty young men from the troops of Maccabeus,

enraged by the blasphemies they had been hearing, bravely stormed the wall and with brutal fury killed everyone who stood before them. ³⁶ Others took advantage of this diversion to climb the walls and set fire to the towers. They made bonfires and burned the blasphemers alive. Others destroyed the gates while the rest of the army entered to occupy the city.

³⁷ They killed Timothy who had hidden in a well, and his brother Chereas, and Apollophanes. ³⁸ When all this was over, they chanted hymns and praises to the Lord who had exalted Israel and had given them victory.

First campaign of Lysias

11 ¹ After a while, Lysias, the king's tutor and kinsman, who was head of the government, was much displeased at the turn of events, ² and gathered together about eighty thousand men and his entire cavalry. They advanced against the Jews intending to make the city of Jerusalem a Greek colony and ³ to convert the Temple into a source of revenue, as they had done with other sanctuaries of the pagans, and to put the office of high priest up for sale every year.

⁴ He took God's power for granted, and went up with his infantry regiments, his horsemen by the thousands, and his eighty elephants. ⁵ He entered Judea, came near Beth-zur, a strong city some kilometers away from Jerusalem, and besieged it.

⁶ When the men of Maccabeus learned that Lysias had begun laying siege to their strong cities, they prayed to the Lord together with all the people, with tears and lamentations, that the Lord might send a good angel to save Israel. ⁷ Maccabeus himself was the first to take arms and exhort the rest to go with him to face the danger and help their brothers and sisters. They set out together, full of enthusiasm. ⁸ While they were still near Jerusalem, a horseman dressed in white with golden armor appeared and stood at the head of them. ⁹ So with one voice, everyone blessed the merciful God. They were strengthened and prepared not only to face men in battle but even the most savage beasts and walls of iron.

^{Ex}
^{23:20}

¹⁰ They advanced with the aid of this ally sent from heaven, for the Lord had compassion on them. ¹¹ They charged like lions against the enemy, brought down eleven thousand infantrymen and one thousand six hundred horsemen, and forced the rest to flee. ¹² Most of them fled, wounded and disarmed, until Lysias himself fled in disgrace in order to save himself.

¹³ Lysias, being an intelligent man, reflected on the defeat he had suffered and understood that the Hebrews were invincible

because the powerful God fought for them. ¹⁴So he sent a messenger to convince them to accept peace with every kind of just condition. And he even promised to persuade the king to make peace with them, too.

¹⁵Maccabeus, thinking of the common good of all, accepted Lysias' offer of peace. And in fact, the king granted all the demands that Maccabeus had presented to Lysias in writing. ¹⁶Lysias wrote to them as follows:

"From Lysias to the Jewish people, greetings. ¹⁷John and Absalom, your envoys, have delivered to us your written petitions, asking us to respond. ¹⁸I have set forth before the king everything that needed his attention; and I have granted everything that was within my competence. ¹⁹Therefore, if you maintain your good will toward the State, I will also try in the future to work in your favor. ²⁰As for the details, I have given orders for your envoys and my own representatives to discuss these with you. ²¹May everything go well with you. In the year one hundred and forty-eight, the twenty-fourth day of the month of the Corinthian God."

²²The king's letter was as follows: "King Antiochus greets his brother Lysias. ²³From the day we succeeded to the throne of our father, who has gone to the dwelling place of the gods, it has been our desire that all our subjects live undisturbed so that everyone may dedicate himself to his own work. ²⁴Learning that the Jews do not wish to adopt Greek customs, as it was the will of my father, but prefer their own way of life and ask that they be allowed to live according to their laws, ²⁵and since it is our desire that this nation live in peace, we have decreed that the Temple be restored to them and that they be allowed to live according to the laws and customs of their ancestors.

²⁶You will do well, therefore, to send envoys to conclude a treaty of peace with them. May they come to know our constant aim, so they may be reassured and dedicate themselves with joy to their own occupations."

²⁷This was the king's letter to the Jewish people: "King Antiochus to the Council of Elders and to the Jewish people: greetings! ²⁸If you enjoy good health, we are happy for you; we ourselves are also well.

²⁹Menelaus has told us that you wish to return to your homes and occupations. ³⁰Therefore, I have issued a decree of amnesty for all who would go home before the thirtieth of the month of Xanthicus. ³¹The Jews from now on may live according to their own customs concerning their food, and be governed by their own laws as before. None of them is to be molested in any way for anything done involuntarily. ³²I have ordered Menelaus to reassure you of all this. ³³I wish you good health. In the year one hundred and

forty-eight, the fifteenth day of the month of Xanthicus."

³⁴The Romans also sent them a letter which read as follows: "Quintus Memmius and Titus Manius, ambassadors of the Romans, send their greetings to the Jewish people. ³⁵Everything that Lysias, the king's kinsman, has granted you, we also approve. ³⁶As for the matters about which Lysias considered it necessary to inform the king and take up with him, we ask that you study them carefully and send someone to us at once, so we can explain everything to the king to your advantage, for we are now leaving for Antioch.

³⁷Lose no time, therefore, in sending someone to us, that we may know your plans. ³⁸We wish you good health. In the fifteenth of the month of Xanthicus in the year one hundred and forty-eight."

Victories against the neighboring peoples

12 ¹After these agreements had been concluded, Lysias returned to the king and the Jews began to return to their fields. ²But the commanders of the different regions, Timotheus and Apollonius, the son of Genneus, as well as Hieronymus and Domo-phenes, and Nicanor, the leader of the Cypriots, would not let them live in peace and quiet. ³Moreover, the inhabitants of Joppa committed this grave crime. They invited the Jews with their wives and children to a cruise on some boats they had prepared, as if they did not have any hostility. ⁴This was decided by the city authorities and the Jews accepted in order to show their desire to live with them in peace and without any suspicion at all. But once out in the open sea, the men of Joppa pushed them into the water and at least two hundred died.

⁵When Judas Maccabeus was informed of this cruelty against his countrymen, he informed his men. ⁶After calling upon God, the just judge, he set out against the murderers of his brothers and sisters. He set fire to the harbor by night, burned the ships and put to the sword those who had taken refuge there. ⁷But, as the gates were closed, he could not enter the city, so he withdrew, intending to come back to wipe out all the inhabitants of Joppa.

⁸Meanwhile, he learned that the inhabitants of Jamnia wanted to deal in the same way with the Jews who lived there. ⁹He also attacked the people of Jamnia by night, and set the harbor and ships on fire. The blaze was so great that the glow could be seen even from Jerusalem, some fifty kilometers away.

¹⁰From there, they set out and marched against Timotheus, but when they had marched for about two kilometers, five thousand Arabs supported by five hundred

horses, attacked them. ¹¹A bloody battle took place, and the men of Judas emerged victorious with the help of God. The defeated Arabs sued for peace, and promised to give them livestock, and to help them in the future. ¹²Judas, convinced that they could indeed be useful to them, made peace with them. Then the Arabs withdrew to their camps.

¹³Judas attacked a city strongly fortified with ditches and walls. The city was called Caspin. People of every race lived there. ¹⁴The besieged, confident in the strength of their walls and because they had their storehouses full of provisions, underestimated the men of Judas and behaved most insolently toward them. They also shouted insults, blasphemies and sacrilegious words at them. ¹⁵The men of Judas called on the great Sovereign of the world who had demolished the walls of Jericho without engines of war during the time of Joshua, and then rushed furiously upon the walls. ¹⁶God willed that they should take possession of the city, and they carried out an incredible slaughter: the nearby lake, five hundred meters wide, seemed filled with blood.

The battle of Carnaim

¹⁷After marching for one hundred and fifty kilometers, they arrived in Charax, where the Jews were known as Tubians. ¹⁸They did not find Timotheus there, for he had gone without having achieved anything; but he had left a strong garrison in one place. ¹⁹Dositheus and Sosipater, leaders of the troops of Maccabeus, marched against them and destroyed the garrison of more than ten thousand men left behind by Timotheus.

²⁰Maccabeus then organized his army, set these two as their commanders, and rushed out against Timotheus who had twenty thousand infantrymen and two thousand five hundred horsemen with him. ²¹When Timotheus learned that Judas was approaching, he sent the women and children away with a good deal of the baggage to a fortress called Carnaim which was in an impregnable place and difficult to reach because of the narrow approaches surrounding it.

²²At the sight of the first battalion of Judas, terror and panic seized their enemies because of an apparition of Him who sees all things. They fled in all directions, so that they were dragged on the ground by their own companions and wounded by their own swords. ²³Judas pursued Timotheus in fury and ardor, putting to the sword those wicked men and killing about thirty thousand of them.

²⁴Timotheus himself fell into the hands of Dositheus' and Sosipater's troops. He very cunningly pleaded with them to let him go, for, as he said, he had the parents and brothers of most of the Jews in his power and they would surely be put to death if he were to be killed. ²⁵When he had convinced them by the strength of his words, they let him go in order to save their kindred.

²⁶Then Judas left for Carnaim and Atargateion, and killed twenty-five thousand men there. ²⁷After defeating and destroying these enemies, he led an expedition against the walled city of Ephron, where Lysias had taken refuge with people of every race. Strong young men were stationed outside the walls and they fought bravely. And there were stores of war engines and missiles inside.

²⁸After calling on the Lord almighty to crush the forces of the enemy, the Jews seized the city and killed more than twenty-five thousand of the people inside. ²⁹Moving off from there, they went to Scythopolis, a city one hundred and twenty kilometers from Jerusalem. ³⁰But as the Jews who lived there assured Judas that the inhabitants of that city had always treated them well and had received them favorably in times of persecution, ³¹Judas and his men thanked these people and asked them to extend the same kindness to his race in the future. Then they returned to Jerusalem, since the feast of Weeks of Pentecost was approaching.

³²After the feast and Pentecost, they marched against Gorgias who was the governor of Idumea. ³³Gorgias came out with three thousand infantrymen and four thousand horsemen to meet him. ³⁴The battle began and some fell in the ranks of the Jews.

³⁵Dositheus, a horseman from Bache-nor's troops, a very valiant man, grasped Gorgias by the cloak, and forcibly dragged him along, wanting to take that criminal alive. But a Thracian horseman rushed upon Dositheus and slashed his shoulder, so that Gorgias was able to flee to Marisa. ³⁶Judas saw that the men of Esdrias were exhausted because they had been fighting for a long time. He, therefore, prayed to the Lord to show himself as their ally and lead them in battle. ³⁷Then, he chanted a battle hymn in the language of their ancestors, charged against the troops of Gorgias all of a sudden, and defeated them.

Sacrifice for the fallen

• ³⁸Judas reorganized his army, and then went to the city of Adullam. Since

^{1Mac}
^{5:37-}
⁴⁴

^{1Mac}
^{5:45}

• **12.38** Judas' soldiers feel encouraged in their faith when they find that their companions who died in the war deserved it because of some sin. Before, for example in the days of Joshua,

believers were resigned to accept God's justice and were not concerned about their guilty brothers (see Jos 7).

Now, Judas' companions are concerned: did

it was the week's end, they purified themselves and celebrated the sabbath there. ³⁹The next day the companions of Judas went to take away the bodies of the dead (it was urgent to do it) and buried them with their relatives in the tombs of their fathers. ⁴⁰They found under the tunic of each of the dead men objects consecrated to the idols of Jamnia, which the Law forbade the Jews to wear. So it became clear to everyone why these men had died.

⁴¹Everyone blessed the intervention of the Lord, the just Judge who brings to light the most secret deeds; ⁴²and they prayed to the Lord to completely pardon the sin of their dead companions. The valiant Judas urged his men to shun such sin in the future, for they had just seen with their own eyes what had happened to those who sinned. ⁴³He took up a collection among his soldiers which amounted to two thousand pieces of silver and sent it to Jerusalem to be offered there as a sacrifice for sin.

They did all this very well and rightly inspired by their belief in the resurrection of the dead. ⁴⁴If they did not believe that their fallen companions would rise again, then it would have been a useless and foolish thing to pray for them. ⁴⁵But they firmly believed in a splendid reward for those who died as believers; therefore, their concern was holy and in keeping with faith.

⁴⁶This was the reason why Judas had this sacrifice offered for the dead – so that the dead might be pardoned for their sin.

Antiochus invades Judea

^{1Mac}
^{6:28}

13 ¹In the year one hundred and forty-nine, the men of Judas learned that Antiochus Eupator had come against Judea with countless troops, ²together with Lysias, his tutor who was head of the government.

Each of them was in command of a Greek army of one hundred and ten thousand infantrymen, five thousand and three hundred horsemen, twenty-two elephants and about three hundred chariots of war with scythes.

³Menelaus joined them, and incited Antiochus with every evil intent since he was not seeking the freedom of his country but only hoping that he would be restored to the office of High Priest. ⁴But the King of kings roused the anger of Antiochus against that wicked man, when Lysias made the king realize that Menelaus was the cause of all the evils.

So the king ordered that Menelaus be taken to Berea and executed according to the custom of the place. ⁵There is a tower in that place, twenty-five meters high, full of burning ashes, provided with a revolving device on top, which sloped on all sides into ashes. ⁶Whoever robbed any sacred thing or committed any other notorious crime was brought up to the tower, and then, pushed into the ashes. ⁷In this way, Menelaus died without even a burial. ⁸This was indeed a just punishment for him who had committed so many offenses against the Altar whose fire and ashes were sacred; and so, he met his death in ashes.

Prayer and success of the Jews in Modein

⁹The king came with a heart full of evil designs, prepared to be more cruel to the Jews, than his father had been. ¹⁰When Judas learned of this, he ordered his army to call on God day and night, so that as God had done in other circumstances, he would now also help those ¹¹who were in danger of being deprived of their Law, their country and their temple. God could not let his people, who had hardly begun to breathe freely, fall once again into the hands of blasphemous pagans.

¹²Once all the people had carried out the order to pray to the merciful Lord with lamentations, fasting and prayer for three consecutive days, Judas encouraged them and commanded them to stand ready. ¹³After summoning the Elders in private, he determined to leave with his men for a decisive attempt with the help of God, before the king's army could invade Judea and take control of Jerusalem.

¹⁴Judas entrusted the decision to the Creator of the world, and encouraged his men to fight heroically to the death for the Law, the Temple, the city, the country and the institutions. So he left with his army and encamped near Modein. ¹⁵He gave his men this watch-

^{1Mac}
^{6:43}

those who sinned stop being our brothers? They belonged to God's people as we do: being raised to life, will they not share a happy future with us?

Hence, Judas' initiative and the prayer for the dead. They have just discovered the solidarity among the members of God's people, between the living and the dead.

word: "God's victory." With the most capable young men of his army he attacked by night the tent of the king, putting to the sword about two thousand men, the strongest elephant and its rider. ¹⁶They caused fear and confusion in the camp and then withdrew in complete success. ¹⁷All this happened just as day was dawning, for God's help protected them.

^{1Mac 6:48-63} ¹⁸When the king saw the daring of the Jews, he tried to take control of their fortresses by using tricks. ¹⁹He advanced against Beth-zur, a city strongly defended by the Jews; he attacked it but was repelled and defeated. ²⁰Judas supplied the defenders of the city with everything they needed.

²¹Rhodocus, one of Judas' men, gave secret information to the enemies. He was hunted, captured and executed. ²²The king again kept in contact with the defenders of Beth-zur, made peace with them and withdrew. ²³He attacked the troops of Judas but was defeated. When he was informed that Philip, whom he had left in Antioch as head of the government, had revolted, he was dismayed. He sought peace with the Jews and had to accept and swear to observe their just petitions; he became reconciled with them, offered sacrifices, honored the Temple and showed generosity to the Holy Place.

²⁴The king took leave of Maccabeus and named Hegemonides as governor from Ptolemais to the land of the Gerarrites.

^{6:8} ²⁵When he came to Ptolemais, he found the inhabitants were indignant over that treaty; they were so angry they wanted to annul its terms. ²⁶But Lysias came up to the tribunal to defend what had been decided; he convinced and appeased them, winning their goodwill before he set out for Antioch. This was what happened with the king's expedition and retreat.

^{1Mac 7:1-38} **14** ¹Three years later, Judas and his men were informed that Demetrius, son of Seleucus, had landed in Tripoli with a fleet and a powerful army, ²and had taken control of the kingdom, killing Antiochus and his tutor Lysias.

³A certain Alcimus, who had been High Priest before, but was disgraced during the time of the rebellion, realized that there was no way for him to be restored to the ministry at the sacred altar. ⁴So, he went to King Demetrius in about the year one hundred and fifty-one, and offered him a golden crown, a palm and even some olive branches from the Temple as usual. On that day, he did not ask for anything. ⁵But he found a proper occasion for his evil designs when he was called to a meeting of the king's council. When he was asked with what disposition and spirit the Jews were to be confronted, he answered, ⁶"There exists a party called Hasideans

among the Jews, headed by Judas Maccabeus, that keeps up war and rebellion, and hinders the reestablishment of peace and order in the land. ⁷Because of them, I have been deprived of the dignity of my ancestors, that is, the office of High Priest. And I came here, ⁸concerned for the king's interests above everything else, but for my compatriots as well, since the fanaticism of those men has plunged our people into great misery.

⁹O King, look upon our land and nation which is hard pressed on all sides, with that same kindness you have for all. ¹⁰For as long as Judas lives, it is impossible for the State to find peace."

¹¹When Alcimus had said this, the rest of the King's Friends who were hostile to Judas, quickly incited Demetrius against him. ¹²And the king immediately chose Nicanor, who commanded the squadron of elephants, and appointed him military commissioner of Judea ¹³with orders to kill Judas, disperse his men and restore Alcimus as priest of the great Temple.

¹⁴The pagans who had earlier escaped from Judea for fear of Judas, flocked in great number to Nicanor, thinking that the misfortunes and defeat of the Jews would mean victory for them.

Treaty of peace between Nicanor and Judas

¹⁵When the men of Judas learned about the coming of Nicanor and the invasion of Nicanor was coming and about the invasion of the pagans, they sprinkled dust upon their heads, and called on Him who had established his people forever, and had each time protected his people by wonderful manifestations. ¹⁶Then, at their leader's command they set out to march, and the battle began near Dessau. ¹⁷Simon, the brother of Judas, had attacked Nicanor, but his men were suddenly confounded by the enemies, suffering a slight setback.

¹⁸However, as Nicanor had heard of the courage of Judas and his men and of how bravely they fought for their country, he feared resolving the situation by bloodshed. ¹⁹So, he sent Posidonius, Theodotus and Mattathias to arrange for peace. ²⁰After a thorough consideration of the conditions, he communicated this to his troops and it seemed that they were unanimous about it. The treaty of peace was accepted.

²¹So they set the date on which the leaders should meet. A chariot came forward from each side and they prepared seats of honor. ²²Judas positioned armed men in strategic places, in case of sudden treachery on the part of the enemy. But their meeting went well.

²³Nicanor spent some time in Jerusalem without doing any harm, and even dismissed

the people that had gathered around him. ²⁴He always had Judas with him, for he had a high regard for him. ²⁵He advised him to get married and have children, so Judas got married and enjoyed a peaceful life.

²⁶When Alcimus saw the good understanding between the two, he secured a copy of the signed accord and went to Demetrius, accusing Nicanor of acting against the interests of the State, inasmuch as he had appointed Judas, the enemy of the kingdom, as his minister.

²⁷The king was infuriated and stirred up by the slanders of that wicked man. He wrote Nicanor telling him how indignant he was over the treaty and ordering him to put Maccabeus in chains and to send him to Antioch at once.

²⁸Nicanor was dismayed to learn that he was asked to break the treaty with Judas who had done nothing wrong. ²⁹But he could not go against the king's orders, so he sought an occasion to carry this out by deceit.

³⁰Maccabeus noticed that Nicanor had become more reserved towards him and more unpleasant in their usual meetings, so he understood that this did not promise well. He began to gather some of his men, but did not make this known to Nicanor. ³¹When the latter became aware that Judas had escaped without being disloyal, he appeared in the holy Temple while the priests were offering the ritual sacrifices, and demanded that they hand Judas over to him. ³²The priests declared on oath that they did not know where he was to be found. ³³Then, he stretched out his hand to the sanctuary and made this oath: "If you do not hand Judas over to me in chains, I shall raze this place consecrated to God, destroy the altar, and right here build a splendid temple to Dionysus." ³⁴And after saying this, he left.

The priests stretched forth their hands to heaven and called on him who had unceasingly defended our nation, saying ³⁵"O Lord of the universe, though you do not need anything, it has pleased you to put among us this temple as your dwelling place. ³⁶So now, keep undefiled forever this house that has just been purified."

³⁷Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem, was denounced to Nicanor as being a very patriotic man, well known as "father of the Jews" because of his kindness. ³⁸In the time before the rebellion, he had been accused of Judaism and with much enthusiasm he had totally given himself to the defense of Judaism.

³⁹Now then, Nicanor, wishing to show his hatred towards the Jews, ordered more than five hundred soldiers to take him prisoner. ⁴⁰He thought that by putting him in prison, he would deal a great blow to the Jews.

⁴¹When the soldiers were about to capture the tower and were breaking the door of the courtyard (they had already ordered that fire be brought to burn the door), Razis, surrounded on all sides, struck his belly with his own sword. ⁴²He preferred to die bravely rather than fall into the hands of foreigners and suffer insults unworthy of his noble birth. ⁴³But when he fell upon his sword, he did not hit exactly, so when he saw the troops were now rushing in through the gates, he gathered enough strength to climb to the top of the tower, and manfully threw himself down upon the soldiers. ⁴⁴But they quickly withdrew, so he fell into an empty space.

⁴⁵Still alive, and aflame with valor, he stood up in spite of the blood that gushed forth and the wounds he had, and came running through the soldiers. ⁴⁶He stood on a steep rock and there, with his blood almost completely drained from him, he took hold of his intestines with both hands and hurled them at the crowd. Then calling upon the name of the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again one day, he left this life.

Victory for Judas and death of Nicanor

15 ¹Nicanor was informed that the men of Judas were in the neighboring villages of Samaria, so he prepared to safely attack them on the day of the sabbath. ²The Jews, who were forced to accompany him, said to him, "Do not destroy them so savagely and barbarously, but show respect for the day of the sabbath, for He who sees all has honored this day and sanctified it." ³But the wretch asked if there was indeed a sovereign in heaven who had commanded that the sabbath be holy. ⁴They answered, "It is the living God himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who has commanded us to celebrate the seventh day."

⁵"So I, as sovereign on earth, command you to take up arms and carry out the decrees of the king." But he could not bring to completion his evil designs.

⁶Nicanor was so sure of victory, that he planned to build a monument with the mortal remains of Judas and his men. ⁷But Maccabeus, for his part, felt confident and put his trust in God's help. ⁸He encouraged his men not to fear the attack of the pagans, and not to forget the times God had come to their help, confident that even now God would give them victory. ⁹He roused their spirit with the words of the Law and the Prophets, reminding them of previous triumphs. ¹⁰Encouraging his men more and more, he finished by showing them the evil of the pagans and how they had betrayed their oath.

¹¹So he armed them not with the sword or shield but with the certainty that comes from noble words. Then he made them all full of

^{1Mac}
^{7:33-}
³⁸

^{1Mac}
^{2:41}

^{Num}
^{14:21}

^{5:25}
^{12:3}

joy by telling them what he saw in a true dream.

• ¹²He had seen Onias, the former High Priest, a courteous, good man, humble in his ways, distinguished in his words and exemplary in his irreproachable conduct since childhood. With arms outstretched, Onias prayed for the whole Jewish community. ¹³Then, a gray-haired and honorable man appeared, praying in the same way, and characterized by dignity and majesty. ¹⁴Then Onias, the High Priest, said to Judas, "This is he who loves his compatriots, he who prays without ceasing for the people and for the Holy City. He is Jeremiah, the prophet of God." ¹⁵And Jeremiah had stretched out his right hand giving a golden sword to Judas, as he said, ¹⁶"Receive this sword as a gift from God, with which you shall destroy your enemies."

Gen
18:24
Ex
32:11
Jer
10:23
14:8
Job
42:8

1Mac
7:39

¹⁷Encouraged by these beautiful words of Judas, which were able to encourage righteous people and strengthen young souls, they determined not to set up camp with defenses. They decided instead to rush out bravely and take the offensive to settle the matter by fighting bravely, for the Holy City Jerusalem, their religion and the Temple were in danger. ¹⁸They considered of secondary importance any concern for their wives, children and friends; because they feared above all for the Temple consecrated to God. ¹⁹Regarding those who had stayed in the city, their anxiety was by no means little, since they were worried about the battle that was about to begin in the camp.

²⁰Everyone waited for the imminent outcome as the enemies attacked. They had set their troops in place, led the elephants to strategic positions and had the cavalry in the wings. ²¹Then Maccabeus could see this multitude with their weapons of every kind and the ferocious elephants. He stretched forth his hands to heaven and called on the Lord who works marvels, for he knew that God gives victory to those who deserve it, and this does not depend on weapons, but on the will of God.

8:19
2K
19:35

²²So Judas said in prayer, "O Lord, you sent your angel in the days of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, and he wiped out one hundred and eighty-five thousand men of the army of Sennacherib. ²³So now, O Lord of Heaven, send your good angel, before us too, to fill our enemies with fear and terror. ²⁴Show your power and let your arm strike those who

insult you and who come to destroy your holy people." With this, he ended his prayer.

²⁵Meanwhile, Nicanor and his men advanced amid blasts of trumpets and shouts of war. ²⁶Judas and his men, for their part, entered into battle with supplication and prayer. ²⁷As they fought with their hands, their hearts prayed to God. And being so magnificently strengthened by the manifest presence of God, they killed no less than thirty-five thousand enemies.

²⁸When the battle ended, and they returned rejoicing, they found Nicanor dead, lying on the ground with all his armor.

²⁹Then they blessed God in their ancestral language amidst shouts and clamors. ³⁰Judas, who had once fully consecrated himself to the welfare of his fellow residents and had never wavered in his affection for them, ordered that Nicanor's head and arms up to the shoulders be cut off and brought to Jerusalem.

³¹There he summoned his compatriots and priests. He stood before the altar and ordered them to send for those in the Citadel. ³²He showed them the head of that wretched, Nicanor, and the hand which that wicked man had raised in pride above the house of God. ³³He ordered that Nicanor's tongue be cut into pieces and given to the birds, and the hand be hung in front of the sanctuary as punishment for his arrogance. ³⁴Then they blessed Heaven saying, "Blessed be he who did not let his Sacred House be defiled!"

Jdt
13:15
14:1

³⁵Finally, Judas ordered that Nicanor's head be hung in the Citadel as a sign of God's help. ³⁶By popular agreement, they decided that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month called Adar in Aramaic, the vespers of the day of Mordecai would be commemorated as a festival day.

Author's conclusion

³⁷These were the events during the time of Nicanor. As from those days the city remained under the power of the Hebrews, I end my account here. ³⁸If the narration has been good and well composed, that is indeed what I desired; but if it has been ordinary and indifferent, it is what I was able to do. ³⁹The readers' pleasure depends on how the account was arranged, just as it is with one who drinks. It does not do any good when one drinks only pure wine or water but wine mixed with water is tasty and delightful. Let this, then, be my last word.

• **15.12** The faithful begin to discover the solidarity binding the living and dead members of God's people. Here, the men of God of the past

intercede for their descendants: Jeremiah, the prophet of previous centuries as well as Onias, the High Priest murdered a few years before.