

Festival of Light or Festival of Might?

Chanukah and the Exclusion of the Book of Maccabees from Tanach

יום א' לפרשת ויצא

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Part 1: Introduction & Historical Context to the Book of Maccabees

(1) משנה תורה להרמב"ם – הלכות מגילה וחנוכה (ג-א)

1] In [the era of] the Second Temple, the Greek kingdom issued decrees against the Jewish people, [attempting to] nullify their faith and refusing to allow them to observe the Torah and its commandments. They extended their hands against their property and their daughters; they entered the Sanctuary, wrought havoc within, and made the sacraments impure. The Jews suffered great difficulties from them, for they oppressed them greatly until the God of our ancestors had mercy upon them, delivered them from their hand, and saved them. The sons of the Hasmoneans, the High Priests, overcame [them], slew them, and saved the Jews from their hand. They appointed a king from the priests, and sovereignty returned to Israel for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Temple.

2] When the Jews overcame their enemies and destroyed them, they entered the Sanctuary; this was on the twenty-fifth of Kislev.¹ They could not find any pure oil in the Sanctuary, with the exception of a single cruse. It contained enough oil to burn for merely one day. They lit the arrangement of candles from it for eight days² until they could crush olives and produce pure oil.

3] Accordingly, the Sages of that generation ordained that these eight days, which begin from the twenty-fifth of Kislev, should be commemorated to be days of happiness and praise [of God]. Candles should be lit in the evening at the entrance to the houses on each and every one of these eight nights to publicize and reveal the miracle. These days are called Chanukah. It is forbidden to eulogize and fast on them, as on the days of Purim. Lighting the candles on these days is a Rabbinic mitzvah, like the reading of the Megillah.

א] בבית שני כשפילכו יון, גזרו גזרות על ישראל, ובטלו דתם, ולא הניחו אותם לעסק בתורה ובמצוות; ופשטו ידם בממונם, ובבנותיהם; ונכנסו להיכל, ופרצו בו פרוצות, וטמאו הטהרות. וצר להם לישראל מאוד מפניהם, ולחצום לחץ גדול, עד שרחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו, והושיעם מידם. ונגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים, והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם; והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים, וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתים שנה--עד החרבו השני.

ב] וכשגברו ישראל על אויביהם ואבדו, בחמשה ועשרים בחדש כסלו היה. ונכנסו להיכל, ולא מצאו שמן טהור אלא פך אחד; ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד בלבד, והדליקו ממנו נרות המערכה שמונה ימים--עד שקתשו זיתים, והוציאו שמן טהור.

ג] ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור, שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליכי חמשה ועשרים בכסלו, ימי שמחה והלל; ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים, בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות. וימים אלו, הן הנקראין חנוכה. והן אסורין בספד ותענית, כימי הפורים; והדלקת הנרות בהן, מצוה מדברי סופרים בקריאת המגלה.

(2) משנה תורה להרמב"ם – הקדמה ליד החזקה

Therefore, I girded my loins - I, Moses, the son of Maimon, of Spain. I relied upon the Rock, blessed be He. I contemplated all these texts and sought to compose [a work which would include the conclusions] derived from all these texts regarding the forbidden and the permitted, the impure and the pure, and the remainder of the Torah's laws, all in clear and concise terms, so that the entire Oral Law could be organized in each person's mouth without questions or objections. Instead of [arguments], this one claiming such and another such, [this text will allow for] clear and correct statements based on the judgments that result from all the texts and explanations mentioned above, from the days of Rabbenu Hakadosh until the present. [This will make it possible] for all the laws to be revealed to both those of lesser stature and those of greater stature, regarding every single mitzvah, and also all the practices that were ordained by the Sages and the Prophets. To summarize: [The intent of this text is] that a person will not need another text at all with regard to any Jewish law. Rather, this text will be a compilation of the entire Oral Law, including also the ordinances, customs, and decrees that were enacted from the time of Moses, our teacher, until the completion of the Talmud, as were explained by the Geonim in the texts they composed after the Talmud. Therefore, I have called this text, Mishneh Torah ["the second to the Torah," with the intent that] a person should first study the Written Law, and then study this text and comprehend the entire Oral Law from it, without having to study any other text between the two.

ומפני זה נערכתי חצני, אני משה בירבי מימון הספרדי, ונשענתי על הצור ברוך הוא, ובינותי בכל אלו הספרים; וראיתי לחבר דברים המתבארים מכל אלו החבורין, בענין האסור והמתיר והטהור והטמא והטהור עם שאר דיני תורה: כולו בלשון ברורה ודף קצרה, עד שתהיה תורה שבעל פה כלה סדורה בפי הכל--בלא קשיה ולא פרוק, ולא זה אומר בכה וזה אומר אלא דברים ברורים קרובים נכונים, על פי המשפט אשר יתבאר מכל אלו החבורין והפרושין הנמצאים מימות רבנו הקדוש ועד עכשו. עד שיהיו כל הדיני גלויין לקטן ולגדול בדין כל מצוה ומצוה, ובדין כל הדברים שתקנו חכמים ונביאים: כולו שלדבר, כדי שלא יהא אדם צריך לחבור אחר בעולם בדין מדיני ישראל; אלא יהיה חבור זה מקבץ לתורה שבעל פה כלה, עם התקנות והמנהגות והגזרות שנעשו מימות משה רבנו ועד חבור התלמוד, וכמו שפרשו לנו הגאונים בכל חבוריהן, שחברו אחר התלמוד. לפיכך קראתי שם חבור זה משנה תורה--לפי שאדם קורא תורה שבכתב תחלה, ואחר כך קורא בזה, ויודע ממנו תורה שבעל פה כלה, ואינו צריך לקרות ספר אחר ביניהם.

**-336BCE-
(3415)**

Alexander the Great ascends the throne as the newly appointed King of Macedon. He then goes on a ten year campaign in which he establishes the largest Empire of the Ancient World through much of Europe and Asia. Part of his conquest is through the Land of Israel which he conquered en route to Egypt.

Alexander the Great dies in Babylonia and his Kingdom is split into four different regions, each led by one of Alexander's most prominent generals. This leads to four smaller kingdoms that spend time over the next centuries in political and military competition with one another. All while the Roman Republic is in its infancy and begins to grow.

**-323BCE-
(3428)**

While fighting in Egypt, Antiochus IV is told of an attack on Jerusalem that deposed his appointed High Priest. He then marched on the city, massacred its inhabitants, re-installed his appointee and instituted measures to further entrench the hellenization of Jerusalem.

After Antiochus IV Epiphanes ascended the throne of the Seleucid Empire, Jason, the brother of Onias (חוני) the High Priest, bribes Antiochus to install him in place of his brother.

**-175BCE-
(3586)**

11) 2 Maccabees (ch. 4)

7 Later, when King Seleucus died and Antiochus (known as Epiphanes) became king, Jason the brother of Onias became High Priest by corrupt means. 8 He went to see the king and offered him 27,000 pounds of silver with 6,000 more pounds to be paid later. 9 Jason also offered him an additional 11,250 pounds of silver for the authority to establish a stadium where young men could train and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch.

**-167BCE-
(3594)**

12) 2 Maccabees (ch. 5)

11 When the news of what had happened in Jerusalem reached Antiochus, he thought the whole country of Judea was in revolt, and he became as furious as a wild animal. So he left Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm, 12 giving his men orders to cut down without mercy everyone they met and to slaughter anyone they found hiding in the houses. 13 They murdered everyone—men and women, boys and girls; even babies were butchered. 14 Three days later Jerusalem had lost 80,000 people: 40,000 killed in the attack and at least that many taken away to be sold as slaves.

**-166BCE-
(3595)**

After the death of his father Matityahu, Judah Macabee leads a revolt against the Seleucid Empire and, after a war of several years, achieves political independence for the Jews for the first time in centuries.

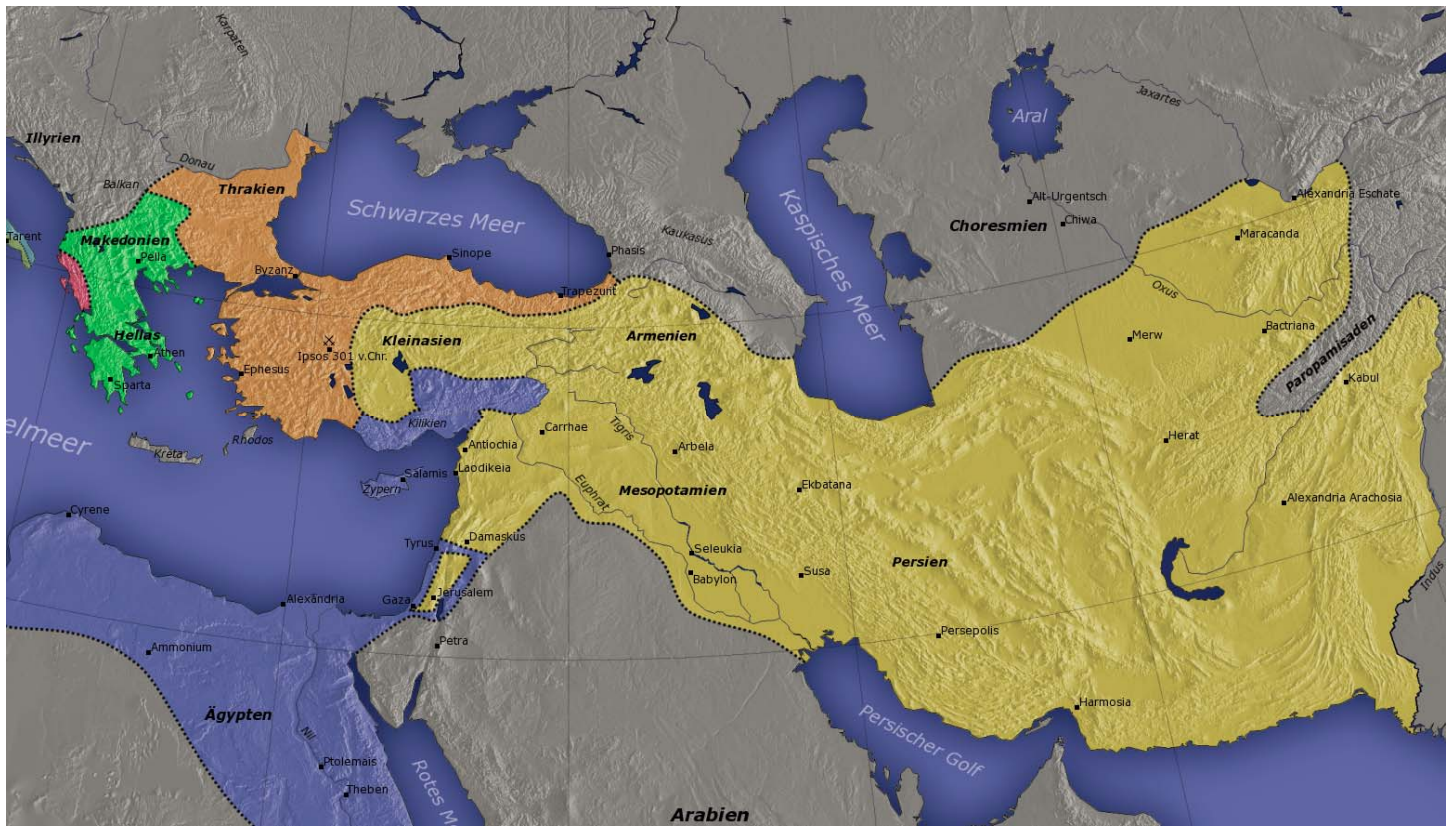
13) 1 Maccabees (ch. 3)

1 Judas Maccabeus took the place of his father Mattathias. 2 All his brothers and all the loyal followers of his father gave him their support, and they were happy to carry on Israel's war. 3 Judas brought greater glory to his people. In his armor, he was like a giant. He took up his weapons and went to war; with his own sword he defended his camp.

(166BCE-63BCE): Period of the leadership of the Hasmonean Dynasty. Over a century of Jewish independent political leadership over the Land of Israel. The last such period until 1948.

**-63BCE-
(3768)**

Pompey the Great, consul of the Roman Republic, after conquering the Pontic Kingdom (modern day Turkey), is asked to intervene in a civil war in Judea over the Hasmonean monarchy. This intervention makes Judea a Roman province ending over a century of Jewish political autonomy.



3) I Maccabees (ch. 1-3)

Chapter 1:

[1] After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) [2] He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. [3] He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. [4] He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him. [5] After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. [6] So he summoned his most honored officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. [7] And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died. [8] Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. [9] They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their sons after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth. [10] From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks. [11] In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us." [12] This proposal pleased them, [13] and some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. [14] So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, [15] and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil. [16] When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, that he might reign over both kingdoms. [17] So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. [18] He engaged Ptolemy king of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. [19] And they captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt. [20] After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred and forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. [21] He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. [22] He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. [23] He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures which he found. [24] Taking them all, he departed to his own land. He committed deeds of murder, and spoke with great arrogance. [25] Israel mourned deeply in every community, [26] rulers and elders groaned, maidens and young men became faint, the beauty of women faded. [27] Every bridegroom took up the lament; she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning. [28] Even the land shook for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame. [29] Two years

later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. [30] Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel. [31] He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. [32] And they took captive the women and children, and seized the cattle. [33] Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. [34] And they stationed there a sinful people, lawless men. These strengthened their position; [35] they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great snare. [36] It became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel continually. [37] On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood; they even defiled the sanctuary. [38] Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled; she became a dwelling of strangers; she became strange to her offspring, and her children forsook her. [39] Her sanctuary became desolate as a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into a reproach, her honor into contempt. [40] Her dishonor now grew as great as her glory; her exaltation was turned into mourning. [41] Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, [42] and that each should give up his customs. [43] All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. [44] And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, [45] to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts, [46] to defile the sanctuary and the priests, [47] to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, [48] and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, [49] so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. [50] "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die." [51] In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city. [52] Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; [53] they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had. [54] Now on the fifteenth day of Chislew, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, [55] and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. [56] The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. [57] Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death. [58] They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. [59] And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering. [60] According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, [61] and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. [62] But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. [63] They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. [64] And very great wrath came upon Israel.

Chapter 2:

[1] In those days Mattathias the son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. [2] He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, [3] Simon called Thassi, [4] Judas called Maccabeus, [5] Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus. [6] He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, [7] and said, "Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to dwell there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? [8] Her temple has become like a man without honor; [9] her glorious vessels have been carried into captivity. Her babes have been killed in her streets, her youths by the sword of the foe. [10] What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? [11] All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave. [12] And behold, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned it. [13] Why should we live any longer?" [14] And Mattathias and his sons rent their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly. [15] Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. [16] Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. [17] Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honored and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers. [18] Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts." [19] But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, [20] yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. [21] Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. [22] We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left." [23] When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. [24] When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. [25] At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. [26] Thus he burned

with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu. [27] Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" [28] And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city. [29] Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there, [30] they, their sons, their wives, and their cattle, because evils pressed heavily upon them. [31] And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that men who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. [32] Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. [33] And they said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live." [34] But they said, "We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day." [35] Then the enemy hastened to attack them. [36] But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, [37] for they said, "Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly." [38] So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of a thousand persons. [39] When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. [40] And each said to his neighbor: "If we all do as our brethren have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." [41] So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against every man who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our brethren died in their hiding places." [42] Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, every one who offered himself willingly for the law. [43] And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. [44] They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and lawless men in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. [45] And Mattathias and his friends went about and tore down the altars; [46] they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. [47] They hunted down the arrogant men, and the work prospered in their hands. [48] They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand. [49] Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and reproach have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. [50] Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our fathers. [51] "Remember the deeds of the fathers, which they did in their generations; and receive great honor and an everlasting name. [52] Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? [53] Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. [54] Phinehas our father, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. [55] Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. [56] Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. [57] David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom for ever. [58] Elijah because of great zeal for the law was taken up into heaven. [59] Hannaniah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. [60] Daniel because of his innocence was delivered from the mouth of the lions. [61] "And so observe, from generation to generation, that none who put their trust in him will lack strength. [62] Do not fear the words of a sinner, for his splendor will turn into dung and worms. [63] Today he will be exalted, but tomorrow he will not be found, because he has returned to the dust, and his plans will perish. [64] My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor. [65] "Now behold, I know that Simeon your brother is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. [66] Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. [67] You shall rally about you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. [68] Pay back the Gentiles in full, and heed what the law commands." [69] Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his fathers. [70] He died in the one hundred and forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his fathers at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.