

THE BOOK OF MACCABEES

I Macc. 1

¹After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) ²He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. ³He 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. ⁴He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him. ⁵After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. ⁶So 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. ⁷And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died. ⁸Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. ⁹They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth. ¹⁰From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

¹¹In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." ¹²This proposal pleased them, ¹³and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. ¹⁴So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, ¹⁵and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

¹⁶When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. ¹⁷So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. ¹⁸He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. ¹⁹They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

²⁰After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. ²²He 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. ²³He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. ²⁴Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance. ²⁵Israel mourned deeply in every community, ²⁶rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint, the beauty of the women faded. ²⁷Every bridegroom took up the lament; she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning. ²⁸Even the land trembled for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame. ²⁹Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. ³⁰Deceitfully 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. ³¹He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. ³²They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. ³³Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. ³⁴They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; ³⁵they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace, ³⁶for

the citadel became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel at all times.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 like 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 all should give up their particular 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 towns 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 festivals,⁴⁶ to defile the sanctuary and the priests,⁴⁷ to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals,⁴⁸ and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane,⁴⁹ so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances.⁵⁰ He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."⁵¹ In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town.⁵² Many of the people, everyone 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 Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah,⁵⁵ and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets.⁵⁶ The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire.⁵⁷ Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king.⁵⁸ They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns.⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of 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 Very great wrath came upon Israel.

I Maccabees 2

¹In those days Mattathias son of John son of Simeon, a priest of the family 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 live there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens?"⁸ Her temple has become like a person without honor; ⁹her glorious vessels have been carried into exile. Her infants 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? ¹¹All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave.¹² And see, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned them.¹³ Why should we live any longer?"¹⁴ Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.¹⁵ The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town 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 town, 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 people 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 obey his commandments, every one of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, ²⁰I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. ²¹Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. ²²We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left." ²³When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. ²⁴When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. ²⁵At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. ²⁶Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu.

²⁷Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" ²⁸Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town. ²⁹At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there, ³⁰they, their sons, their wives, and their livestock, because troubles pressed heavily upon them. ³¹And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that those who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. ³²Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. ³³They said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live." ³⁴But they said, "We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day." ³⁵Then the enemy quickly attacked them. ³⁶But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, ³⁷for they said, "Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly." ³⁸So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons. ³⁹When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. ⁴⁰And all said to their neighbors: "If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." ⁴¹So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places." ⁴²Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law. ⁴³And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. ⁴⁴They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. ⁴⁵And Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars; ⁴⁶they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. ⁴⁷They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands. ⁴⁸They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

⁴⁹Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. ⁵⁰Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors. ⁵¹Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. ⁵²Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? ⁵³Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. ⁵⁴Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. ⁵⁵Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. ⁵⁶Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. ⁵⁷David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. ⁵⁸Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. ⁶⁰Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions. ⁶¹And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. ⁶²Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendor will turn into dung and

worms. ⁶³Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. ⁶⁴My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor. ⁶⁵“Here is your brother Simeon who, I know, is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. ⁶⁶Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. ⁶⁷You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. ⁶⁸Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law.” ⁶⁹Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. ⁷⁰He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCESHEET

1. Deut. 13:7

If your brother, your own mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your closest friend entices you in secret, saying, "Come let us worship other gods"—whom neither you nor your fathers have experienced—

2. Esther 4:3

Also, in every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes.—

3. Lamentations 2:10

Silent sit on the ground The elders of Fair Zion; They have strewn dust on their heads And girded themselves with sackcloth; The maidens of Jerusalem have bowed Their heads to the ground.

4. mMiddot 2:3

There were thirteen breaches in it, which had been originally made by the kings of Greece,

5. Num. 25:6–8

Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman over to his companions, in the sight of Moses and of the whole Israelite community who were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. When Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he left the assembly and, taking a spear in his hand, he followed the Israelite into the chamber and stabbed both of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. Then the plague against the Israelites was checked.

1. ספר דברים פרק יג פסוק ז

כִּי יסִיתְךָ אָחִיךָ בֶן־אִמְךָ אוֹ־בִנְךָ אוֹ־בִתְּךָ אוֹ אִשְׁתְּ חֵילְךָ אוֹ רֵעֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כִּנְפֹשְׁךָ בְּסִתְרֵךָ לֵאמֹר נִלְכֶה וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ אֶתְּךָ וְאֶבְתֶּיךָ:

2. מגילת אסתר פרק ד פסוק ג

וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מִגִּיעַ אֲבָל גְּדוּל' לַיהוָה וְצוֹם וּבְכִי וּמְסַפָּד שֶׁק וְאִפְרָ יֵצַע לְרַבִּים:

3. מגילת איכה פרק ב פסוק י

יִשְׁבוּ לְאָרֶץ יְדִמוּ וְזִקְנֵי בִתְצִיּוֹן הֶעֱלֹוּ עֶפְרָל עַל־רֵאשֵׁם חֲגָרוּ שָׁקִים הוֹרִידוּ לְאָרֶץ רֵאשֵׁן בְּתוֹלַת יְרוּשָׁלַם:

4. משנה מידות פרק ב משנה ג

וּשְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה פְרֻצוֹת הָיוּ שָׁם, שְׁפָרְצוּם מִלְכֵי יוֹן.

5. ספר במדבר פרק כה פסוקים ו-ח

וְהִנֵּה אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּא וַיִּקְרַב אֶל־אָחִיו אֶת־הַמִּדְיָנִית לְעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְעֵינֵי כָל־עֵדֶת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָמָּה בְּכֵים פָּתַח אֶהָל מוֹעֵד: וַיֵּרָא פִּינְחָס בֶּן־אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וַיִּקָּם מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה וַיִּקַּח רֶמַח בְּיָדוֹ: וַיָּבֵא אַחֲרַיִם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הַקְּבֹה וַיִּדְקַר אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֶל־קִבְתָּהּ וְתַעְצֹר הַמַּגֵּפָה מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

6. Ex. 32:26

Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come here!" And all the Levites rallied to him.

6. ספר שמות פרק לב פסוק כו

וַיַּעֲמֵד מֹשֶׁה בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לַיהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּאָסְפוּ
אֵלָיו כָּל־בְּנֵי לֵוִי: