

Festival of Light or Festival of Might?

Chanukah and the Exclusion of the Book of Maccabees from Tanach

יום א' לפרשת וישב

Young Israel of Jamaica Estates – December 18th, 2016



Part 2:

The Book of Maccabees & its Exclusion from Tanach

I Maccabees

Chapter 1: Background of the Maccabean Revolt

[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.

[4] He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him.

[7] And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died. [8] Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place.

[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."

[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.

[18] He engaged Ptolemy king of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell.

[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,

[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.

[31] He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls.

[34] And they stationed there a sinful people, lawless men.

[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.

[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."

[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.

[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.

[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: The Revolt of Mattathias

[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;

[13] Why should we live any longer?"

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

Chapter 3-9 – The Struggle for Liberation:

Ch. 3:

[1] Then Judas his son, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. [2] All his brothers and all who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel.

[3] He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he girded on his armor of war and waged battles, protecting the host by his sword. [4] He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion's cub roaring for prey. [5] He searched out and pursued the lawless; he burned those who troubled his people. [6] Lawless men shrank back for fear of him; all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. [7] He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed for ever. [8] He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. [9] He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing.

[13] Now when Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful men who stayed with him and went out to battle, [14] he said, "I will make a name for myself and win honor in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command."

[16]...Judas went out to meet him with a small company. [17] But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today." [18] Judas replied, "It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few. [19] It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven.

[22] He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them." [23] When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him.

[25] Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell upon the Gentiles round about them.

[27] When king Antiochus heard these reports, he was greatly angered; and he sent and gathered all the forces of his kingdom, a very strong army.

[42] Now Judas and his brothers saw that misfortunes had increased and that the forces were encamped in their territory. They also learned what the king had commanded to do to the people to cause their final destruction. [43] But they said to one another, "Let us repair the destruction of our people, and fight for our people and the sanctuary." [44] And the congregation assembled to be ready for battle, and to pray and ask for mercy and compassion. [45] Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness; not one of her children went in or out. The sanctuary was trampled down, and the sons of aliens held the citadel; it was a lodging place for the Gentiles. Joy was taken from Jacob; the flute and the harp ceased to play. [46] So they assembled and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah. [47] They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and rent their clothes. [48] And they opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles were consulting the images of their idols.

[53] How will we be able to withstand them, if thou dost not help us?"

[55] After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, in charge of thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens. [56] And he said to those who were building houses, or were betrothed, or were planting vineyards, or were fainthearted, that each should return to his home, according to the law.

Chapter 4:

[6] At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armor and swords such as they desired. [7] And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry round about it; and these men were trained in war. [8] But Judas said to the men who were with him, "Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. [9] Remember how our fathers were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. [10] And now let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us and remember his covenant with our fathers and crush this army before us today.

[13] they went forth from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets [14] and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed and fled into the plain,

[24] On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven, for he is good, for his mercy endures for ever. [25] Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.

[28] But the next year he [Lysias] mustered sixty thousand picked infantrymen and five thousand cavalry to subdue them.

[29] They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men. [30] When he saw that

the army was strong, he prayed, saying, "Blessed art thou, O Savior of Israel, who didst crush the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of thy servant David, and didst give the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan, the son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor.

[34] Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action. [35] And when Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness which inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he departed to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries, to invade Judea again with an even larger army. [36] Then said Judas and his brothers, "Behold, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it."

[37] So all the army assembled and they went up to Mount Zion. [38] And they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. [39] Then they rent their clothes, and mourned with great lamentation, and sprinkled themselves with ashes. [40] They fell face down on the ground, and sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried out to Heaven. [41] Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. [42] He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, [43] and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. [44] They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. [45] And they thought it best to tear it down, lest it bring reproach upon them, for the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, [46] and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. [47] Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. [48] They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. [49] They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. [50] Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. [51] **They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.** [52] **Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year,** [53] **they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which they had built.** [54] At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. [55] All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. [56] **So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise.** [57] They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and furnished them with doors. [58] There was very great gladness among the people, and the reproach of the Gentiles was removed. [59] **Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.** [60] At that time they fortified Mount Zion with high walls and strong towers round about, to keep the Gentiles from coming and trampling them down as they had done before. [61] And he stationed a garrison there to hold it. He also fortified Beth-zur, so that the people might have a stronghold that faced Idumea.

[...]

תפילת על הנסים

In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will. But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah. You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day. Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.

בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול חשמונאי ובניו
כשעמדה מלכות יון הרשעה על עמך ישראל
להשפילם תורתך ולהעבירם מחקי רצונך
ואתה, ברחמיך הרבים, עמדת להם בעת צרתם:
רבת את ריבם דנת את דינם נקמת את נקמתם
מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים
ויטמאים ביד טהורים ורשעים ביד צדיקים
וידים ביד עוסקי תורתך ולך עשית שם גדול
וקדוש בעולמך ולעמך ישראל עשית תשועה
גדולה ופרקו כהיום הזה. ואחר כן, באו בניך
לדבר ביתך ופנו את היכלך וטהרו את-מקדשך
והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך וקבעו שמונת ימי
חנכה אלו להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול.