

Babylon and Beyond

Maccabees and Hasmoneans

The Maccabean Revolt

- Prophesied in Daniel 11:33-35.
- The Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes began to persecute the Jews by outlawing their religious practices and forcing them to take part in pagan rites.
- In 167 B.C., an old priest named Mattathias sparked rebellion by refusing to offer a sacrifice to a pagan deity.
 - He killed the official in charge and also another Jew that stepped into offer the sacrifice in his place.
- Mattathias and his five sons retreated into the hills and began guerilla warfare against the Seleucids.
- Mattathias died about a year later, and the leadership of the rebellion fell to his son Judas Maccabeus, who led them to victories in a series of small skirmishes.
 - His nicknamed, *Maccabee* (“the hammer”), was applied to all Jewish fighters.
- In 164, Antiochus Epiphanes died, and his troops retreated from Israel.
- The Maccabees reclaimed Jerusalem and reestablished Temple worship.
 - This is the origin of Hanukkah.
- They began to conquer surrounding areas, like Idumea and Galilee.
- In 162, the Seleucid governor/general Lysias leads an offensive against the Maccabees and besieges Jerusalem.
- Lysias brokers a treaty with the Maccabees that repealed the anti-Jewish laws that Antiochus Epiphanes had instituted, then he and his army returned to Antioch.
- Later in 162, the new king Demetrius I Soter appointed the moderate Alcimus as high priest and marched on Jerusalem with an army and new governor Nicanor.
- In 161, Nicanor was killed in battle against the Maccabees at the Battle of Adasa.
- In 160, the general Bacchides led another expedition against the Maccabees.
- Judas Maccabeus was killed at the Battle of Elesa and his younger brother Jonathan Apphus assumed command of the rebellion.
- Jonathan and Bacchides were able to work out a treaty that stopped fighting and the Seleucid forces retreated.
- Civil war broke out in Seleucia between opposing family members which took the focus of Judah and allowed the Maccabees to become *de facto* rulers.
 - By playing sides against each other, Jonathan and his successor Simon Thassi became increasingly powerful.
 - Rome was also becoming increasingly involved in world affairs and made a treaty of support for the Maccabean government in 139 B.C.
- The Maccabees were thus able to create a quasi-independent nation, nominally associated with the Seleucids but increasingly siding with Rome.

The Hasmonean Dynasty

- The family of Mattathias continued lead Israel after the successful revolt and are known by their family name *Hasmonean*.
 - At first, they avoid using the term *king*, and use terms like *ethnarch* (Greek, “ruler of the people”) or *nasi* (Hebrew, “prince”)
- In 141, Simon Thassi was proclaimed both High Priest and *ethnarch* of Israel.
- In 135, Simon Thassi was assassinated by his son-in-law Ptolemy, and his son John Hyrcanus succeeded him.
 - Antiochus VII Sidetes immediately besieged Jerusalem and forced Simon to surrender with acknowledgement of Seleucid control and payment of 3,000 talents of silver.
- With the Seleucid empire crumbling from internal strife and outside pressure from the Romans and Parthians, John Hyrcanus began to conquer surrounding regions like Samaria (he destroyed their temple on Mt. Gerizim in 110) and Idumea.
 - He seems to have forcibly converted these conquered people to Judaism.
- In 104, Aristobolus I succeeded his father, took the title of *basileus* (Greek, “king”), and conquered Galilee.
- After Aristobolus’s death in 103, his brother Alexander Jannaeus ruled as king and high priest from 103-76,
- Alexander was succeeded by his wife Salome Alexandra, who ruled as queen from 76-67, and her son Hyrcanus II, who was high priest and later became king after Salome’s death.
- Hyrcanus II’s younger brother Aristobulus II rebelled and a period of uncertainty began.
 - Aristobulus was able to force Hyrcanus to surrender the throne and priesthood to him, and he held both from 67-63.
 - Hyrcanus’s advisor, Antipater the Idumean, sought to work the situation to his advantage and encouraged him to rebel against his brother with support from Aretas III of Nabataea.
- Then Rome intervened...

The Jews Under the Maccabees/Hasmonean

- Overall, this is a very confused and chaotic period.
- What started as a religious rebellion became just another monarchy with dynastic struggles, all of which is far closer to the world around them than their heritage.
- Religious factions like the Pharisees and Sadducees become powerful political parties.