

# The Books of the Maccabees



Background ... The Texts ... Implications

# The Books of the Maccabees

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## Focus

- What are the books about?
- Why were the books written?
- When were the books written?
- Where are the books found?
- Who accepts the books ... as canon?
- What are the book's lasting implications?

# The Books

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1 Maccabees: A history - Mattathias and his five sons deliver Israel from the threat posed to Judaism by Hellenization ... 2<sup>nd</sup> cent BCE.

2 Maccabees: Generally parallels 1 Maccabees but presents a theological interpretation of history.

Two letters to the Jews in Egypt giving direction concerning the celebration of the feasts of Booths and Hanukkah.

*3 Maccabees: Misnomer ... an incident involving Egyptian persecution of Jews in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent BCE ... nothing to do with Maccabean revolt.*

4 Maccabees: An expansion of 2 Maccabees 6:18 - 7:42

Presents an interpretation of Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy.

# Schedule

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## **The Books of the Maccabees**

**Septuagint, Background, 1 Maccabees**      **23 Mar**

**1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees**      **30 Mar**

**4 Maccabees**      **6 Apr**

**3 Maccabees, Summary/ Influence**      **13 Apr**

**How Christianity Lost its Jewish Roots**

**20, 27 Apr, 4, 11 May (Wed 09:40 – 11:05)**

# The Books of the Maccabees

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The Books of the Maccabees (1, 2, & 4) recount how the priest ... Mattathias ... and his five sons delivered Israel from the threat posed to Judaism by Hellenization ... Antiochus IV (and renegade Jews) ... and restored political independence and religious freedom to Israel after 4 ½ centuries.

# The Septuagint

Hebrew Scripture of the Diaspora

# The Septuagint

## The Alexandrian Canon

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- A Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures compiled in Alexandria for the Jews outside of the homeland.
  - Made from Hebrew or Aramaic originals (although few of these early scriptures survive in anything but fragments).
  - Began in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE but ... obviously not considered a closed canon because texts continued to be added after the original translations ... some in Greek original ,, apparently into the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.
  - Was considered authoritative by Jews of the Diaspora.
  - Used by Philo, discussed by Josephus.

# The Septuagint

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- Hellenized (Greek speaking) Jews worldwide (outside of Israel) were using the Septuagint by the start of the common era and during the formative years of Christianity (late Second Temple Period).
- Numerous references (~250) to the Hebrew Scriptures made in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). Over half are clearly from the Septuagint.



# The Legend

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- From the Letter of Aristeas ... a *psuedepigraphon*.
  - Letter states that it was written by an aide to Ptolemy in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE ... but probably written by an Alexandrian Jew ~ 150-100 BCE.
- Ptolemy II, king of Egypt (285-247 BCE) wanted the Hebrew scriptures in the library he was building in Alexandria.
  - 72 scholars were brought from Israel ... 6 from each of the twelve tribes.
  - answered 72 questions
  - were led to the island of Pharos where they labored for 72 days, independently, but each had identical translations.
  - “the perfect translation”

# The Septuagint

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Although the Septuagint was a Jewish translation, and widely used, the earliest copies available today are all from later Christian sources:

- Codex Vaticanus (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Codex Sinaiticus (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Codex Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century)

... and these copies are not all identical.

Therefore ... although we speak of the Septuagint it is impossible to know exactly what that collection contained ... as used by Jews of the Diaspora during the late Second Temple Period.

# The Septuagint(s) and the Maccabees

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	Codex Vaticanus	Codex Sinaiticus	Codex Alexandrinus	Canonical
1 Maccabees		X	X	Roman Catholic Orthodox
2 Maccabees			X	Roman Catholic Orthodox
3 Maccabees			X	Orthodox
4 Maccabees		X	X	Coptic (Orthodox)

# The Background

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After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (70 CE), Jewish scholars took refuge in Yavneh (var Jabneh, Jamnia) (70-132 CE).

- The embryonic beginnings of Rabbinic Judaism.
- Judaism began to center on Torah instead of Temple; on prayer and charitable acts instead of sacrifice. “Scripture” took on greater importance.
- Not all books in the Septuagint are accepted, or even considered.
- Although some of the Septuagint translations date to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, those now considered Apocrypha date primarily from early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to mid 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

# The “end of Prophecy”

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- “Prophecy” is considered to have ended in the period after the return of the exiles from Babylon (538 BCE).
  - Prophets Haggai and Zechariah (~ 520 BCE) see hope of the establishment of a messianic kingdom.
  - Haggai ... rebuild the Temple.
- Temple completed ... dedicated ... 515 BCE.
  - Priesthood takes on greater role.
  - Beginning of “Second Temple Judaism.”
- Prophet Malachi condemns attitude of the people ... ~500-450 BCE
  - Reminiscent of pre-exilic prophet statements.

The Talmud states that there was no more prophecy in the Second Temple era (Talmud Sotah 48b)

# Hebrew Scripture(s)

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The final form of the Hebrew Scriptures ... the TaNaKh (*Torah* ... Law; *Nevi'im* ... Prophets; *Ketuvim* ... Writings) was not decided until ~3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

–By the end of 1<sup>st</sup> century CE there is clearly “an awareness” of closed canon. Josephus numbers the “sacred books.” The Torah and Prophets were “fixed” while the Writings were still in flux.

–No books of the “post-prophecy” era were considered for inclusion.

–It wasn't until 930 CE that the first complete Hebrew Bible, called the Aleppo Codex, utilizing masoretic symbols and ordering was completed ... the Masoretic Text.

–The earliest extant authoritative Masoretic text of the Hebrew Scriptures dates to 1009 CE.

# Christian “Old Testaments”

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Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox use the Septuagint(s) as the source of their “Old Testament” ... Hebrew Scriptures.

–Roman Catholics accept/ include 1, 2 Maccabees

–Most Eastern Orthodox accept/ include 1,2,3 Maccabees

–Some Non-Chalcedonian churches (e.g., Coptic, Syriac) accept/ include 1,2,3,4 Maccabees

Protestants generally use the Palestinian Canon as the source of their “Old Testament” ... Hebrew Scriptures.

–The 39 books of the Protestant “Old Testament” represent the 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures

No Christian “Old Testament” exactly equates to the TaNaKh ... the Hebrew Scriptures.

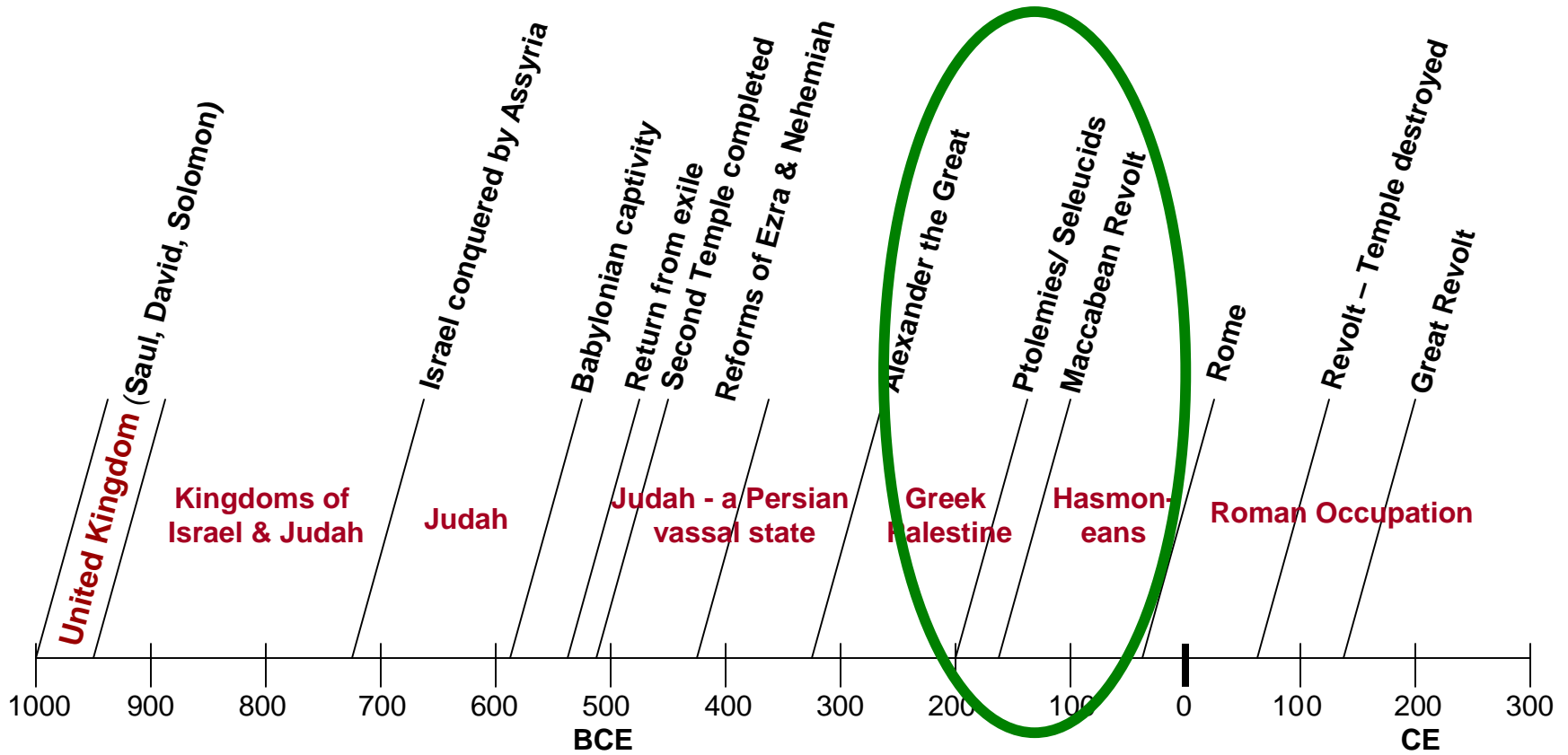
# The Maccabees

Jewish Revolt Against Hellenization

2<sup>nd</sup> cent BCE



# A History of "Israel"



Amos  
Hosea  
Isaiah  
Micah  
Hezekiah

Jeremiah  
Haggai  
Zechariah

Ezra  
Malachi

Maccabees

# Background To Conflict

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Alexander the Great dies in 323 BCE

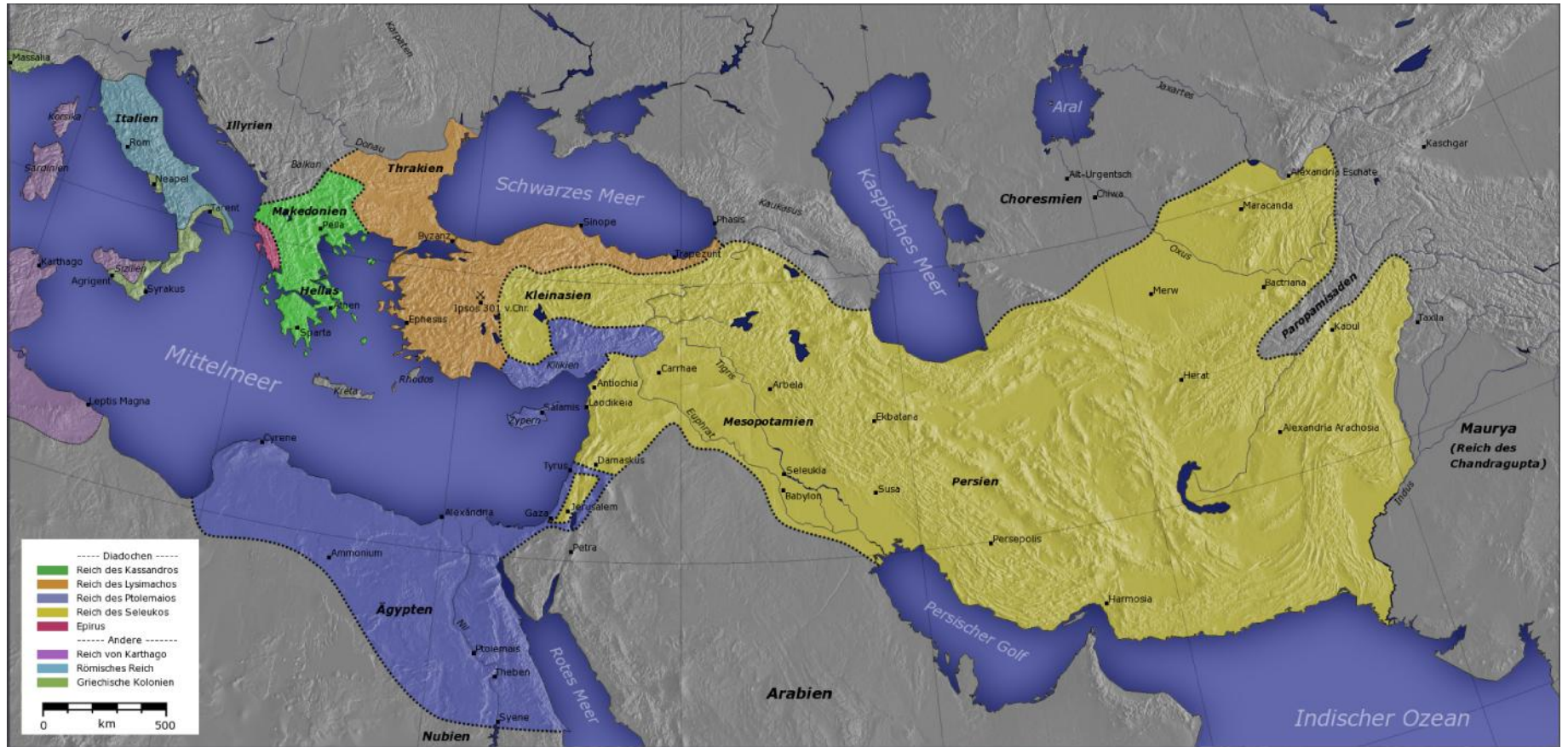
- Empire divided among generals
  - Seleucus ... Antioch, Syria
  - Ptolemy ... Alexandria, Egypt

Eventually these cities become more Greek than Greece, Hellenism spreads.

Judea becomes a buffer between the two states.

- Many Jews take up the Greek culture.
  - Hasideans (Pious), later Pharisees, are pietist holdouts.

# Seleucid Empire



Early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE

# Background To Conflict

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Judea comes under Seleucid control in 223 BCE.

Antiochus III, 198 BCE, issues decrees favorable to the Jews.

Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) becomes Seleucid emperor in ~ 175 BCE.

- “The Magnificent” to his friends ... “The Mad” to his enemies.
- Claims to be the manifestation of Zeus.
- Desires to fully Hellenize (*Hellenizo* ... to make Greek) the empire.

Onias, the chief priest in Jerusalem, strongly resists this Hellenization.

# Antiochus IV

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**Antiochus IV**



**Apollo**

**“the holy Ephiphanus” ... the  
“manifest”**

# Background To Conflict

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Antiochus IV attacks Ptolemys in Egypt in ~169 BCE.

- He is reported killed in battle ... Jews in Judea celebrate.
- On his withdrawal from Egypt Antiochus sacks Jerusalem and plunders the Temple.

Jason (Joshua) offers Antiochus IV money for high priesthood. (2 Macc 4:7-9)

- Successfully bought the office of high priest, supports Hellenization. (1 Macc 1:13-15, 2 Macc 4:10-15)
- Established a gymnasium in Jerusalem. (2 Macc 4:18-20)

# Background To Conflict

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Three years later, Menelaus buys the priesthood.

- Steals Temple vessels to pay for bribe. (2 Macc 4:27-32)

When Onias protests these actions, he is assassinated.

(2 Macc 4:33-38)

Pietist Jews, Hellenized Jews, and Greeks are appalled by this action. (2 Macc 4:35)

Even under Menelaus, Antiochus does not feel that Hellenization is proceeding quickly enough.

# Religious Persecution

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Sanctions are imposed and a Seleucid garrison is placed in Jerusalem. (1 Macc 1:41-64, 2 Macc 6:1-11)

- copies of the law are destroyed. (1 Macc 1:56)
- circumcision of children forbidden. (1 Macc 1:60, 2 Macc 6:10)
- Sabbath observance outlawed. (2 Macc 6:6)
- pagan altars established. (1 Macc 1:54)
- Jews forced to eat swine. (1 Macc 1:62)
- altar to Zeus placed in temple. (2 Macc 6:2)

Violations punishable by death.

The Temple is plundered. (2 Macc 5:15-21)



# Resistance

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Judas Maccabeus “the hammer,” the son of a priest leads a revolt against the Seleucids and defeats them.

- In 165 BCE, Judas establishes control over Jerusalem.
- The Temple is reconsecrated ... feast of Hanukkah.
- A Hasmonean dynasty is established which lasts until conquest by Rome in 63 BCE.

The books; 1, 2 and 4 Maccabees treat the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus.

Books 1 and 2 also detail the military struggle against Antiochus.

# 1 Maccabees

**The Establishment of Jewish  
Independence**

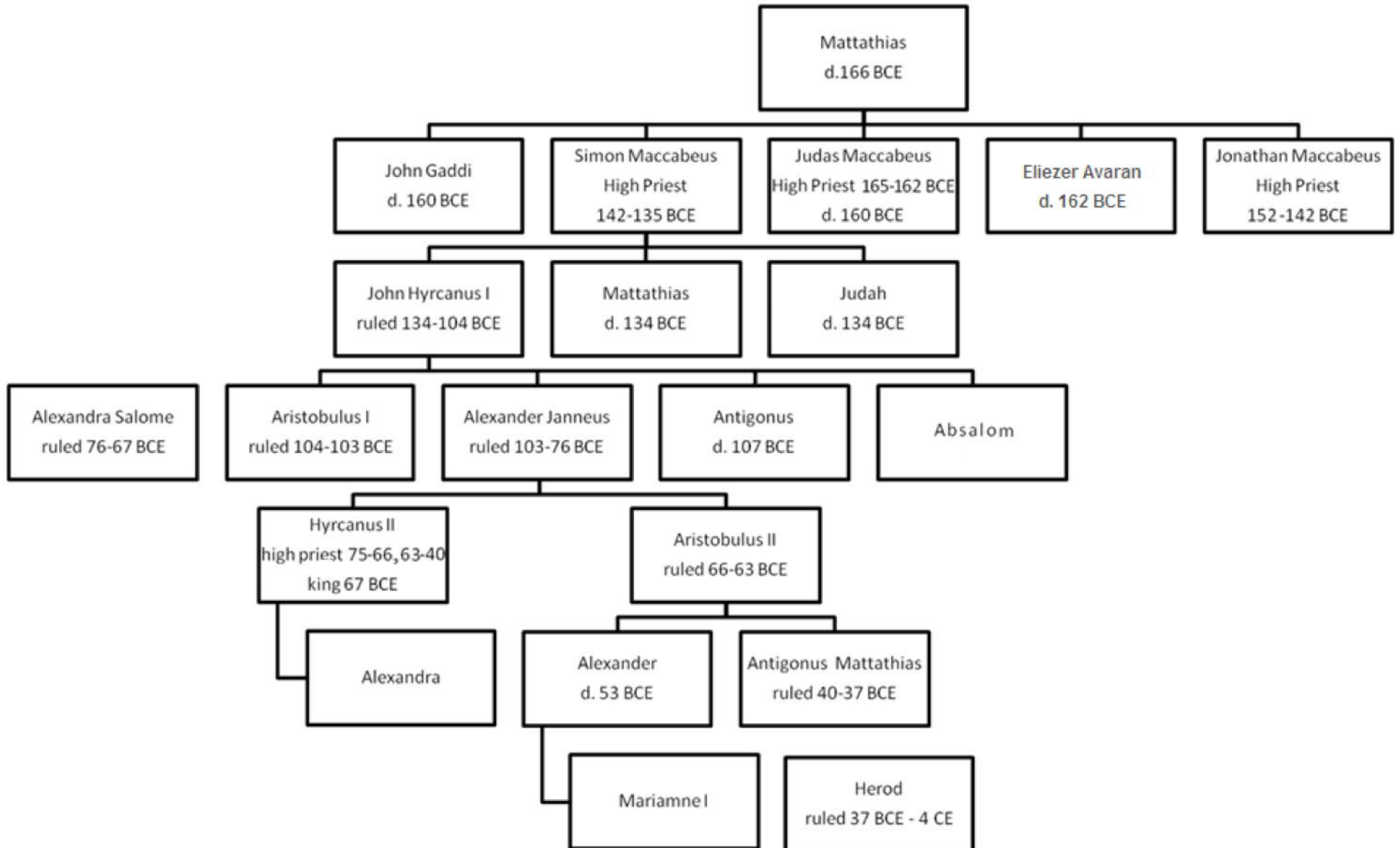
# 1 Maccabees

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- A story of Jewish nationalism ... over 40 years of struggle beginning in 167 BCE ... and the establishment of the **House of the Hasmoneans** and a free Israel (Judea). Written in the style of Samuel and Kings.
  - The Hellenization crisis. (chaps 1-2)
  - The war ... exploits of Judas. (chaps 3-9)
    - Restoration of Jerusalem ... the Temple ... death of Judas.
  - Post Judas ... stories of Jonathan and Simon. (chaps 9-16)
    - Continuing intrigues ... legitimization by Sparta and Rome.
- Israel remains independent until conquest by Rome in 63 CE.
- **An apology for the Hasmonean dynasty.**

# House of the Hasmoneans

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# 1 Maccabees

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- Written in Hebrew ... end 2<sup>nd</sup> cent BCE - beginning 1<sup>st</sup> cent BCE.
  - Manuscripts exist in Greek and Latin, early Hebrew version is lost.
  - Probably after death of John Hyrcanus (104 BCE) ... but before Roman takeover of 63 BCE.
  - Describes rededication of the Temple ... Hanukkah.
  - Excellent historical source, references to numerous historical documents.
- A defense of the Hasmoneans against critics.
  - House of Hasmoneans ... quickly became corrupt.
    - Recognized by Rome ... 139 BCE.
    - King and high priesthood ... often combined.
  - When John Hyrcanus (135-104 BCE) died ... his wife took over the government and his son became high priest. His son was not satisfied with this ... had his mother put into prison where she was starved to death ... and then he assumed both kingship and high priesthood.

# Mattathias ... beginning of revolt

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“Then the king's officers ... came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice ... Mattathias and his sons were assembled.

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.

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.’

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, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers.

Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances.’

# Mattathais

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Then 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.

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.** At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar.

Thus he burned with zeal for the law ... 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!'**

And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city.

Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there ..." (2:17-29)

- Numbers 25:6-15 ... Phinehas kills an Israelite and his Midianite wife ... God's honor defended.

# In Defense of God

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Numbers 25 ...

Phineas was a priest during the Exodus journey, the grandson of Aaron. He was displeased with the immorality with which the Moabites and Midianites had successfully tempted the Israelites to inter-marry and to worship Ba'al, so he personally executed an Israelite man and a Midianite woman.

*“And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel ... And when Phinehas ... saw it, he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. And he went after the man of Israel into the chamber, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly.” (Numbers 25:6-8)*

*“And HaShem spoke unto Moses, saying: 'Phinehas ... hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake ...  
... I give unto him My covenant of peace; and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his G-d, and made atonement for the children of Israel.’” (Numbers 25:10-13)*



# Legitimization

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The Maccabees (Hasmoneans) ... God's chosen ... and legitimate agents.

- Mattathias calls for revolt but soon dies ... the oldest son Simon is the titular head of the family ... but Judas is the military hero.
  - Judas ... called “the hammer” ... Maccabeus (Maccabee)
- In the recounting of the actions of the Maccabees there are numerous allusions to the heroes of the Hebrew scriptures ... e.g., Moses, David and the sayings of the prophets.
- When Judas dies ... “How is the mighty fallen, the savior of Israel.” (9:21)

However ...

- Foreign alliances ... work for the Maccabees ... but were consistently condemned by the ancient prophets. Rome ... as ally.
- Jewish renegades ... the success of Israel is always limited because of Jewish “apostates.”

# Israel Restored

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When Simon was leader ...

“The land had rest all the days of Simon. He sought the good of his nation; his rule was pleasing to them,

They tilled their land in peace; the ground gave its increase, and the trees of the plains their fruit.

Old men sat in the streets; they all talked together of good things ...

He supplied the cities with food ...

He established peace in the land, and Israel rejoiced with great joy.

Each man sat under his vine and his fig tree, and there was none to make them afraid.

He strengthened all the humble of his people; he sought out the law, and did away with every lawless and wicked man.

He made the sanctuary glorious, and added to the vessels of the sanctuary.”

(14:4-15)

- The Messianic Kingdom ??

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# Influence

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Influence ...

- Development of “messianic expectation.”
  - Restore political independence ... pay back the Gentiles in full ... drive foreign powers from Israel.
  - Israel ... although greatly outnumbered by enemies ... can be victorious ... if the Torah and Temple are properly respected.
- Used by Josephus (chapters 1-13) as a historical source in his *Jewish Antiquities*.
- Zeal for the Law versus “renegades and apostates.”
  - Apostate Jews are no better than Gentiles.
  - Latter “rebels” ... Zealots ... Sicarii ... during the uprisings of Late Second Temple period.