
The Maccabean Revolt

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Syria had one incredibly evil ruler by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. This man was so evil that he made Herod the Great look like a great humanitarian by comparison. Antiochus was the prototype for the Antichrist of the Tribulation.

In 168 B.C. he desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by setting up an altar to Jupiter Olympus, where he dedicated the use of the Temple to this false God by offering up the flesh of a swine. This was the 'abomination of desolation' of Daniel 11:31, ""His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation."

Antiochus made a furious effort, with the help of the corrupt high priesthood (who helped because of a bribe), to Hellenize the Jews.

The high priest himself, a man by the name of Jason, was power mad, and attempted a coup in Jerusalem when Antiochus was mistakenly reported dead during a military campaign in Egypt.

His brief reign was characterized by violence, but the real violence would begin when Antiochus heard of the coup. He returned to Jerusalem with his army, besieged it, and killed 40,000 Jews upon its capture, and sold at least as many into slavery. Then he went back to Egypt.

Eventually, Antiochus awoke the ire of Rome, and he was arrested and ordered to back off from Egypt or die. He did so, but he made another stop at Jerusalem, where he took out his frustration on the Jews. He entered the city on the Sabbath, and murdered thousands of men in the synagogues, while enslaving the women and children. He defiled the Temple in every way imaginable, and caused the daily ritual system to cease entirely. This meant war.

During this time of great persecution there was a priest by the name of Mattathias. He was an old man of noble blood, and he had retired to a little town west of Jerusalem. There he was commanded to sacrifice on the Pagan altar, and he refused. In fact, he became enraged when a Judean came forward to sacrifice, and he struck the man, overthrew the altar, called upon the faithful to

follow him, and fled with his sons into the wilderness.

This was the Maccabean family. The example of Mattathias was followed by many in various parts of the country. His story was well known, and the idolatrous altars were being overthrown, and Jewish worship and culture was being reestablished. The rigorous life of a rebel took its toll on Mattathias, and he died just a year later, in 166 A.D.

The third son of Mattathias, Judas, took over for him in directing the war for independence. He was a man full of energy and clever in the running of the war. He was an expert at guerrilla warfare, attacking at night, and at the most surprising times and places. Encouraged by early success, he became even more bold, and defeated Antiochus' head general, Apollonius, at Bethhoron.

It was only a little while later that Antiochus left Jerusalem and left the government to a man name Lysias. Lysias was a military dunce, and Judas defeated his larger army at Emmaus, and later at Bethsura. Judas was then able to occupy Jerusalem, where he purified the Temple.

Judas continued his triumphs on the military field, and after the battle of Adasa, the Jews had almost won their independence. Almost. Bacchides led another invading army, and this time the Jews were caught unaware. Able to only muster a small group of men, and losing many of those on the night before the battle, Judas was defeated, and died.

All that was gained seemed lost. The patriots were in a state of total disorder, and it was only renewed persecution that brought them together again.

The Jews again looked to the Maccabees, this time Jonathan, the youngest son of Mattathias would be their champion. Jonathan would fight a skillful defensive campaign in the Jordan Valley, and when a new king took the throne in Syria, he gained support, and Israel a fair amount of freedom.

Jonathan was made high priest, and there was peace in the land for some 20 years. Sadly, in 144 B.C. Jonathan fell victim to the treachery of a man by the name of Tryphon, and was imprisoned in Ptolemais, in Galilee. This act left just one Maccabee, Simon.

Simon had all along been a steady military leader, but had left the national leadership to his brothers. Now it was his turn, and he placed himself at the head of the patriot party. After a short while, Tryphon put Jonathan to death, and seized the throne of Syria.

Simon had the wits to make an appeal for the freedom of the Jews to Demetrius, a well known general with connections to Rome.

This appeal was accepted, and once again it seemed as though the Jews would be free.

Although Mattathias had begun the rebellion over the issue of the Jewish religion, after 32 years, the war, and political freedom became the thing. Relationship with God had taken a back seat to military strategy and tactics, and politics. And remember, that no nation can remain free without a relationship with God.

At the time of Simon, in 143 B.C., Israel had apparently won their freedom through military skill and political maneuvering. They had won almost every battle that they had fought for 25 years. They had successfully manipulated the political machines of their foreign occupants.

They had done everything just right, but they had failed in the most important regard: the spiritual life.

Just eight years after the apparent victory of Israel, Simon and two of his sons was murdered by Ptolemaeus, and in 135 B.C. the nation of Israel once again found itself on the brink of slavery.

John Hyrcanus was one of the two living sons of Simon. When he heard of the death of his father, he marched with the army against Jericho.

Unfortunately, Ptolemaeus held a trump card: he had Simon's widow, John's mother, captive, and the sabbatical year of the year of Jubilee was just around the corner, so the siege of Jericho failed.

Seeing no further use for the woman, Ptolemaeus had her killed, and then he fled to Philadelphia. Antiochus the sixth (not Epiphanes) then invaded Judea, and besieged Jerusalem, and Hyrcanus and the army was trapped there and placed into a desperate situation.

The Jews caught a break when a truce was granted for the passover feast, and Hyrcanus took the opportunity to bargain with Ptolemaeus. Hyrcanus compromised like crazy in order to gain the freedom of Israel, even going to the extreme of

opening David's tomb to pay the tribute demanded by the Syrian General.

He then went to Parthia to bargain further for the freedom of Israel, and through compromise and manipulation was able to establish a treaty that lasted for more than fifty years.

By 30 B.C., the line of the Maccabees had died out with the death of Hyrcanus II, the grandson of Hyrcanus. His granddaughter was Mariamne, who went on to marry Herod the Great.

Now, where were the Pharisees during all this time? Well, they had begun to grasp for political power, so that they might more effectively carry out their mission. At first they were on the side of the Maccabees, but the more the rebels concentrated on the war, the further they got away from strict observance of the Law, and so they earned the wrath of the Pharisees.

Because of the gross compromises of Hyrcanus, and looting of David's tomb, more and more Jews went to the side of the Pharisees. After the death of Hyrcanus I, his daughter became queen, and seeing the handwriting on the wall, she abandoned her political power to Pharisees.

At the time of the birth of Christ, the Romans through Herod held the outward political power, while the Pharisees held it internally. The people found themselves under a double tyranny, and it was a difficult time indeed.

Concluding principles:

- Freedom without a relationship with God is in reality slavery.
- War without a relationship with God is a waste.
- Both slavery and freedom begin in the soul.
- **John 8:32**, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.""
- **Gal 5:1**, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."