

# The Machabees

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When Alexander the Great died unexpectedly in 323 B.C. his vast empire was divided between his eight generals and his half-brother, Philip Arrhidaeus. The generals soon quarrelled, and a series of wars resulted, which ended by the annexed Jordan. In 317 B.C.; Olympias (Alexander's mother), had his half-brother and heir and posthumous widow (Roxana) and Alexander's son (Alexander IV), in 311 B.C.

Antigonus, the one-eyed general of Philip of Macedon and of Alexander after him, ruled Palestine from 323 B.C., until he was slain in the battle of Ipsus in Phrygia (Asia Minor) in 301 B.C.

Ptolemy, ruler of Egypt, had occupied Palestine twice between 315 and 312 B.C., but on each occasion he was driven out. By the treaty of Ipsus, Palestine was given to Seleucus, ruler of Syria; but Ptolemy had occupied it again, and Seleucus ceded it to him.

About 300 B.C. Seleucus founded the city of Antioch on the Orontes for his capital with its harbour of Seleucia, and he and his heirs (the Seleucid dynasty) governed Syria, Mesopotamia and part of Asia Minor—the Syrian Empire. The Ptolemies of Egypt ruled Palestine from 301 to 198 B.C., indeed not without opposition from the Seleucids of Syria; and already before 180 B.C. Ben Sirach refers to the latter as "the sceptre of the proud... the rule of impiety" (Ecclesiasticus 35, 23).

Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.) and Seleucus II (246-226 B.C.) to take Palestine from Ptolemy Philadelphus and Ptolemy Evergetes I were unsuccessful. Antiochus III (the Great), 223-187 B.C., invaded Palestine in 218 B.C.; was repulsed after the battle of Paneas near the sources of the Jordan in 202-200 B.C.; and finally at the defeat of Scopas, the Egyptian General, the Jews exchanged the mild rule of the Ptolemies of Egypt for the harsh rule of the Seleucids of Syria from 198 B.C.

The two Books of Machabees describe the successful struggle of the Jews for civil and religious freedom (175-135 B.C.). 1 and 2 Machabees are not consecutive; 1 Machabees gives an outline of the whole campaign from 175 B.C. while 2 Machabees gives something of the background and describes in detail some incidents of the first fourteen years (175-161 B.C.). 1 Machabees was written in Hebrew by a Palestinian Jew about 100 B.C. The Hebrew original is lost; it has come down in a Greek translation. 2 Machabees is an abridgment by an inspired writer of five books by a certain Jason of Cyrene (2 Machabees 2, 24). The abridgment was made in Greek in Jerusalem about 124 B.C. The work of Jason which is not extant was written in Egypt not long before 160 B.C. 1 Machabees is a sober history of the facts; 2 Machabees is a lively narrative in which the writer adds his own reflections; points practical lessons of piety; and traces the working of divine Providence.

## **Heliodorus**

Antiochus the Great and his son, Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.), continued this policy until the last year of his reign (2 Machabees 3, 3). The trouble was begun by an apostate Jew—Simon, of the tribe of Benjamin. This Simon, a lay official in the Temple, quarrelled with the high priest Onias III (198-175 B.C.), who was an excellent man and a good leader. Defeated in law, Simon sought a traitorous revenge. He told Apollonius, governor of Coelesyria (the country between Lebanon) and Anti-Lebanon) and Phoenicia, that in the Temple treasury there was immense wealth which could be acquired by the king who was paying a heavy war indemnity to Rome.

Apollonius duly informed his royal master Seleucus sent his chancellor, Heliodorus, with a troop of soldiers to Jerusalem to seize the money. Heliodorus pretended that he was making a tour of inspection; and in Jerusalem he was courteously received by the high priest. But when he made known his real purpose Onias explained to him that of the Temple treasure (four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold) part was in deposit for widows and orphans, and the remainder was the property of a rich man named Hyrcanus. This money—personally, not nationally, owned—must not be removed. Heliodorus replied that he would seize it by force.

The high priest, the priests, and the people of Jerusalem were horrified at the impending sacrilege; and they prayed God to defend the Temple. Their prayer was granted; a miracle occurred. When Heliodorus entered the Temple a golden horseman in armour suddenly bore down upon him; and the horse struck him down. Two young men appeared, who "scourged him without ceasing with many stripes". (2 Machabees 3, 26). Heliodorus was carried out, unconscious and apparently dying. Moved by the request of friends of Heliodorus and also by the consideration "that the king might perhaps suspect that some mischief had been done to Heliodorus by the Jews" (2 Machabees 3, 32), Onias offered a sacrifice; and Heliodorus was restored to health.

He returned to Antioch, and told the king of his misadventure. The king enquired of him who then would be a suitable man to send to seize the treasure. Heliodorus replied: "If thou hast any enemy or traitor to thy kingdom, send him thither, and thou shalt receive him back scourged, if so be he escape: for there is undoubtedly in that place a certain power of God" (2 Machabees 3, 38). This did not end the affair; in fact it was only the beginning.

## **Antiochus IV (Epiphanes): 175-164 B.C.**

Simon next falsely accused Onias of having incited Heliodorus to plunder the Temple. Hellenism, the adoption of Greek culture and manners, had long been making inroads among the Jews. The Hellenist Jews now rallied to Simon; the orthodox to Onias. A number of the supporters of Onias were murdered by the Hellenists. Apollonius was encouraging Simon. So with real reluctance Onias went to Antioch to ask the heathen king of Syria to quell the disturbance among the rival Jewish factions—it was the only course left to him. Before any result could come of this mission, however, Seleucus IV was slain.

He was succeeded by his brother, Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (the Illustrious) but was nicknamed Epimanes (the Insane) for his extravagant conduct.

The Hellenist faction became bolder. Josue or Jason (a Greek name for the Hebrew Jesus), brother of Onias, obtained by simony from Antiochus the office of high priest. Onias was deposed and fled for safety to a heathen sanctuary near Antioch. Jason gloried in his further purchased from the king

of Syria permission to build a Greek gymnasium in Jerusalem. Jews removed the mark of circumcision; adopted Greek fashions; neglected their sacred duties in the Temple to assist at the heathen games and contests. Jason even sent three hundred drachmas (the Greek name for Heracles being Baal Melqart) to Tyre for sacrifices to the Phoenician god. Priests became citizens of Antioch.

Three years later (172 B.C.) Jason sent money to the king of Syria. The bearer was Menelaus, a brother of Simon the Benjaminite, who began the trouble. Menelaus, by outbidding Jason, secured for himself the high priesthood. Jason was deposed and exiled. He took refuge in Trans-Jordan with the Ammonites—hereditary enemies of the Jews. Menelaus, either neglecting or unable to pay his debt to king Antiochus, was deposed in turn; and Lysimachus, his brother, was appointed high priest. Menelaus stole and sold the sacred vessels of the Temple. Onias from his exile reproved him for the sacrilege. While the Syrian king was absent in Cilicia, Menelaus persuaded Andronicus, the king's deputy, to murder Onias. This crime shocked the feelings of Jews and Greeks alike—even of Antiochus, who "being moved to pity, shed tears, remembering the sobriety (culture) and modesty (virtue) of the deceased" (2 Machabees 4, 37). Andronicus was degraded and put to death.

Lysimachus, urged on by Menelaus, continued to plunder the Temple; and the orthodox Jews were goaded into revolt. Lysimachus armed three thousand men, but the multitude attacked them with stones and clubs; put them to flight; and slew Lysimachus. Menelaus was accused to the king. Three men were sent from Jerusalem by the Sanhedrin to prove the charges against him. But Menelaus bribed a courtier named Ptolemy to obtain his acquittal from Antiochus. The guilty Menelaus was freed; his innocent accusers were put to death—"those poor men, who, if they had pleaded their cause even before Scythians, should have been judged innocent" (2 Machabees 4, 47).

Antiochus invaded Egypt in 170 B.C., and defeated his nephew, Ptolemy Philometor, with great losses in men and booty. A false rumour went abroad that Antiochus was dead; and Jason with a thousand followers returned from Trans-Jordan, and took Jerusalem. Antiochus on his way back from Egypt attacked Jason; and for three days there was ruthless slaughter of the citizens. Antiochus profaned and despoiled the Temple, and returned to Antioch.

## **The Machabees**

In 168 B.C. Antiochus forbade the Jews under pain of death to observe the Law of God. The sacred Books were seized and destroyed. A Syrian garrison was stationed in a fortress south of the Temple. The people were required to sacrifice and burn incense to the heathen god, Olympian Zeus. This persecution caused many Jews to renounce their faith; but on the other hand it produced noble heroes and glorious martyrs.

Eleazar, a chief scribe ninety years old, suffered torture and death rather than renounce the Law of God—"leaving... the memory of his death for an example of virtue and fortitude" (2 Machabees 6, 31). A Jewish woman and her seven sons were required to eat swine's flesh contrary to the Law. They all refused. One by one the seven sons were cruelly tortured to death in the presence of their mother. Never flinching, "she bravely exhorted every one of them in her own language (i.e. Aramaic), being filled with wisdom: and joining a man's heart to a woman's thought" (2 Machabees 7, 21). Then she herself was martyred. These unnamed martyrs are commemorated in the Roman Martyrology on August 1st under the title of 'the Machabees.'

## **Mathathias**

Mathathias, a priest, with his five sons, took refuge in the hills near his native Modin (between Jerusalem and Jaffa). Pursued thither by the king's agents he rose in revolt and invited all who loved the Law of God to join him. Other groups went to the desert of Juda. Syrian soldiers from the garrison in Jerusalem attacked one of these groups on the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday). The Jews refused to give battle, and the Syrians slaughtered them all—men, women and children—to the number of a thousand. Mathathias and his followers then decided that in future they would defend themselves on the Sabbath day; otherwise the Syrians would take advantage of their religious scruples, and kill every loyal Jew.

The Assideans now joined Mathathias; and other lesser groups followed the example of the Assideans. The Jews took the offensive. They destroyed the heathen altars; enforced circumcision; restored the Law of God.

Mathathias died in 166 B.C.; and Judas Machabeus (the Hammer of God), his third son, took his place as leader.

## **Judas Machabeus**

Judas Machabeus was a man of great faith and piety; a brave and resourceful general. He soon became a national hero; and with a small but valiant army of six thousand he began to wage regular war against the Syrian empire. Apollonius was defeated and slain in 166 B.C. Seron, military commander in Coelesyria, marched against the Jews with a new army to be defeated at Bethoron and driven to Philistia.

In 165 B.C. the royal treasure was so low; so Antiochus with half the army of Syria crossed the Euphrates into Persia on a plundering expedition. The other half of the army he left to his regent, Lysias, with orders that the Jewish nation was to be completely exterminated. Lysias appointed to Judea three generals: Ptolemy, Nicanor, Gorgias. They had between them a force of forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry. These extreme measures of Antiochus served only to rouse in the Jews greater valour. They assembled at Maspha (a place of hallowed memories since the days of Samuel), and prayed and fasted together. Judas reorganised his army, and marched to Emmaus to meet the Syrian force. In a stirring address he exhorted them to be valiant in defence of their homes and their Sanctuary: "For it is better for us to die in battle, than to see the evils of our nation, and the holies: Nevertheless as it shall be the will of God in heaven so be it done" (1 Machabees 3, 59-60). The Syrians were defeated and routed.

In 164 B.C. Lysias himself came with an army of sixty thousand infantry and five thousand cavalry. But Judas defeated him. Judas then marched to Jerusalem, and while his soldiers kept the Syrian garrison at bay the Temple was repaired and reopened after three years; a new altar of holocausts was built; divine worship was restored. It was a great festival for a week: and thereafter it became an annual festival of the Jews.

Judas fortified Mount Sion to protect the Temple from the Syrians in the Akra or fortress.

Jealous of these successes the neighbouring gentile nations began a persecution of the Jewish minorities living among them. Judas first conquered the Idumeans and Ammonites. Then he sent his brother Simon with three thousand soldiers to expel the Phoenicians who had invaded Galilee, while Judas himself and his brother Jonathan crossed into Galaad. Here the Nabateans were friendly

to Judas. He defeated the besiegers; took the fortress of Datheman where the Jews were besieged and in sore straits. He took the principal cities of Galaad; and brought back to Palestine the Jews of that region. In his absence Judas had left a troop of soldiers under Joseph and Azarias to defend the homeland with orders not to take the offensive. Moved by vanity and ambition, these two generals attacked at Jamnia on the west coast, and were repulsed with heavy loss by Gorgias the Syrian commander.

Judas captured Hebron from the Idumeans; marched into Philistia; and burned the ports of Joppe and Jamnia. After the attack on Jamnia objects from the pagan shrines were found on the bodies of Jews who had fallen. Judas warned his followers that this was a violation of the Law of God; and that the death of these soldiers was a punishment of their superstition. Then he collected and sent to Jerusalem two thousand drachmas to have sacrifices offered for them. And the sacred writer adds: "It is therefore a holy and wholesome (i.e., salutary) thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sin" (2 Machabees 12, 46). This passage is of importance for the doctrine of Purgatory in the Old Testament. The mind of Judas obviously was that these men who died for the faith took the heathen amulets in ignorance, and thus sinned venially—not mortally.

In the meantime, events had gone badly for Antiochus. Lured by the prospect of acquiring the immense treasure stored in the temple of Persepolis he attacked the city; but he was defeated in battle. Next a messenger came with tidings of the victories of the Jews. Finally, stricken by God he fell sick of a loathsome and painful malady. He appointed a courtier named Philip, regent of Syria and tutor of his nine year old son and heir—Antiochus V; and at Tabes between Ecbatana and Persepolis he died "with great grief in a strange land" (1 Machabees 6, 13); "a miserable death in a strange country" (2 Machabees 9, 28).

## **Antiochus V (Eupator): 164-162 B.C.**

Lysias disregarded the appointment of Philip and continued to act as regent. The Roman power in the East was steadily rising at this time; and since the battle of Magnesia, in 190 B.C., the Roman Senate was now the real ruler of Syria. They held as hostage since 186 B.C. Demetrius, son of Seleucus the elder brother and predecessor on the throne of Antiochus Epiphanes. Demetrius, twenty-three years old, petitioned for his father's kingdom. But it suited Roman policy to have an infant on the throne of Syria; and so the request of Demetrius was rejected. Lysias with a huge army of infantry and cavalry and eighty elephants departed for Jerusalem in 163 B.C. Machabeus prepared to meet him at the fortress of Bethsura, less than a mile from the Holy City, and the people "besought the Lord with lamentations and tears" (2 Machabees 11, 6). A miracle was granted; Lysias was defeated and put to flight. Lysias now perceived that the Syrians never could conquer the Jews; so he came to terms with Machabeus. By a written agreement of Antiochus V the Jews were allowed to follow their own laws and customs; to worship the true God; to retain their Temple and practise their religion in freedom. Two Roman legates, Quintus Memmius and Titus Manius wrote to the Jews confirming the concessions made by the king of Syria, but demanding that full details of the agreement should be sent in writing to them. Lysias attacked the Akra, and besieged Jerusalem: there could be no real freedom of worship until there—Judea—it included Ptolemais (the Acre of later times) and all Palestine. Machabeus went to Antioch: made peace with Philip from Antioch: and took control of Syrian affairs. This treaty was later broken by the prince Macharius who "governor of the Gerrenians (i.e., Gerara)" (2 Machabees 13, 1).

## **Demetrius I (Soter): 162-150 B.C.**

Demetrius escaped from Rome and with eight friends reached Tripolis on the Syrian coast in a Carthaginian ship. The army revolted to him and assassinated Antiochus and Lysias; and Demetrius became king of Syria.

Again the peace was disturbed by apostate Jews led by Alcimus (a Hellenized form of the Hebrew name 'Eliacim'), who had been named high priest by the Syrians after the death of Menelaus. When Judas Machabeus would not admit him Alcimus went to Antioch and accused Judas of anti-Syrian activities. Demetrius sent an army under the command of Bacchides. Arrived in Palestine, Alcimus and Bacchides soon had faithful the scribes and Assideans; but these soon had cause to regret their folly—Alcimus arrested and slew sixty of them. Bacchides established Alcimus in control after much bloodshed; and leaving a troop of Syrian soldiers to support him, the Syrian general returned. But Judas made it impossible for Alcimus to remain in Palestine; so the latter went again to win sympathy at the court of Demetrius.

This time Demetrius appointed Nicanor military governor of Palestine with orders to crush the Machabean party and make Alcimus high priest. Nicanor fixed his headquarters at Jerusalem. For a time he favoured the orthodox party and was a close friend of Judas Machabeus. Alcimus reported this to the king; and Demetrius ordered Nicanor to send Judas prisoner to Antioch without delay. Then Nicanor had perforce to make war on his friend. The battle was fought on the southern frontier of Samaria. Defeat for Judas seemed certain; but again the prayer of Judas and his followers obtained a miracle. Nicanor was defeated and slain; his army was routed.

The victories of Judas were gained by the special help—often miraculous help—of divine Providence. Judas now sought to preserve by human means the freedom won by divine means. He made a treaty with the Roman Senate. From a human point of view this appeared to be a prudent and a necessary policy: "...whom they (the Romans) had a mind to help to a kingdom, those reigned: and whom they would they deposed..." (1 Machabees 8, 13). From a religious point of view, however, and in the perspective of history as well, it was a weakening and a surrender. Of necessity the result of it was the absorption of the small nation of the Jews into the world empire of Rome. The alliance is written in the fine legal phrasing of Roman diplomacy (1 Machabees 8, 23-30); the two peoples contract as equals; but it was the league of the eagle and the dove nonetheless. From this date (161 B.C.) the glory of the Machabean era begins to wane.

"In this same year Demetrius again sent Alcimus and Bacchides with an army against Judas." Desertions had reduced the forces of Judas to eight hundred men; and these tried to dissuade their leader from giving battle. Judas rallied them, however; and they fought bravely. For a whole day the Jews held out against overwhelming odds. Judas and the bravest of his soldiers routed the right wing—the stronger wing—of the Syrian army. But the Syrian left wing was victorious; and Judas was surrounded: "And Judas was slain, and the rest fled away" (1 Machabees 9, 18). His brothers, Jonathan and Simon, recovered the body of Judas, and buried it in Modin.

## **Jonathan**

The death of Judas was the signal for the rise of the Hellenizing party—led by Alcimus, and backed up by Bacchides. The Machabean party was hunted and persecuted; John, brother of Judas, was treacherously slain by Arabs. Jonathan was elected leader by the orthodox Jews: but pressed by

Bacchides he had to retreat to the desert of Thecua. In an undecisive battle near the Jordan, Bacchides narrowly escaped death and lost a thousand men. But the Syrians occupied and garrisoned Jerusalem, Jericho and several other towns; and took hostages of the leading Jewish families. In 160 B.C., Alcimus died of paralysis; Bacchides returned to Antioch; "and the land was quiet for two years" (1 Machabees 9, 57).

The Hellenizing Jews summoned Bacchides to Palestine again in 158 B.C. This time the Syrian army was defeated; and Bacchides avenged himself on the apostate Jews who had brought him. Jonathan sent peace proposals which Bacchides gladly accepted. The prisoners taken by the Syrians were restored; Jonathan was allowed to rule the nation.

## **Alexander I (Bala): 150-145 B.C.**

In 152 B.C., Alexander, son of Antiochus Epiphanes, captured Ptolemais and made war on Demetrius. This was Jonathan's opportunity; and he used it well. Demetrius made great concessions to the Jewish leader: he could raise and equip an army; he was admitted as an ally with equality of status; the Jewish hostages were released. Jonathan moved from Machmas to Jerusalem; and repaired and fortified the City and Temple. The Syrians fled the country in fear. The only fortress left in the hands of the Hellenizing Jews was Bethsura. Alexander in turn showered gifts on Jonathan; and appointed him high priest. Not to be outdone, Demetrius remitted the taxes; promised to surrender the Akra; gave the high priest complete control in civil and religious affairs. Jonathan, a good statesman with a long memory, was not moved by the concessions of Demetrius; he took the side of Alexander. It was well, because in 150 B.C. Demetrius and Alexander met in battle; Demetrius was defeated and slain; and Alexander succeeded him. He received Jonathan as an equal. Alexander married Cleopatra, daughter of Ptolemy VI (Philometor) of Egypt, so Jonathan was at amity with both of the neighbouring monarchs. In 148 B.C. Demetrius II (son of Demetrius I, whom Alexander had conquered) invaded Judea, but he was defeated by Jonathan.

In 146 B.C. Alexander was absent in Cilicia quelling a revolt when he discovered that his father-in-law, Ptolemy VI, had treacherously seized all the maritime towns of Syria; allied himself with Demetrius II, and seized the kingdom of Syria. Alexander returned at once and gave battle to the forces of Ptolemy. But slander and treachery had worked against Alexander; and he was defeated. He fled to Arabia where soon after he was assassinated. Not Ptolemy, however, but Demetrius II reaped the harvest, because three days after he received word of Alexander's murder Ptolemy himself was dead. Demetrius II became king of Syria, and married Cleopatra who had been the wife of Alexander (1 Machabees 11, 12).

## **Demetrius II (Nicator): 145-138 B.C.**

The Hellenizing party tried without success to defame Jonathan in the eyes of the new king of Syria. Jonathan was confirmed in the spiritual and temporal power.

A certain Tryphon, an ambitious and unscrupulous adventurer, now entered the political arena—putting forward Antiochus, the infant son of Alexander Bala, as candidate for the throne of Syria. Jonathan stood loyally by Demetrius, and an army of three thousand Jews saved the king's life and kept him on the throne. But Demetrius proved ungrateful. Jonathan then took the side of Tryphon, who defeated Demetrius in battle and put Antiochus VI on the throne. Antiochus VI confirmed Jonathan in power. Jonathan thought it opportune to renew the alliance with Rome, and also an

older alliance made with the Spartans of Greece during the high priesthood of Onias III (323-300 B.C.).

Demetrius II raised a fresh army and Jonathan led his forces into Syria to oppose him. Demetrius and his army fled by night. Jonathan could not overtake them, so he gave his attention to subjecting the Arabian tribes and the towns on the east coast of Palestine, and to restoring the Holy City.

Tryphon came to Judea with an army, and Jonathan, with forty thousand soldiers, prepared to meet him at Bethsan. Tryphon, foreseeing for himself certain defeat, made peace. Jonathan went with only a thousand men to take possession of the city of Ptolemais which Tryphon had promised to surrender to him. There Tryphon shamelessly had all Jonathan's followers slaughtered, and Jonathan himself taken captive.

## **Simon**

Of the five sons of Mathathias only Simon was left now. Tryphon invaded Judea again; Simon put himself at the head of the Machabean forces to resist him, and they rallied to him with enthusiasm. He fortified Jerusalem and captured Joppe. Tryphon bargained to surrender Jonathan, but he broke his word, and ended by murdering Jonathan and also Jonathan's two sons who had been sent as hostages for the release of their father. Tryphon then put to death the young king, Antiochus VI, and seized for himself the throne of Syria. Nothing could be expected from this wretch, so Simon reorganised his army and allied himself with the deposed king.

While Tryphon and Demetrius were warring for the crown of Syria, Simon freed his people from Syrian rule, besieged the Akra, captured and, in 142 B.C., "the yoke of the Gentiles was taken off from Israel" (1 Machabees 13, 41)—the Jews had at last secured political and religious independence.

Simon proved a wise and energetic ruler. He worked hard for the welfare of his people; justice was well administered; religion was promoted; the nation enjoyed security and peace: "And every man sat under his vine, and under his fig tree: and there was none to make them afraid" (1 Machabees 14, 12). He renewed the treaties with Rome and Sparta. In 140 B.C., the people by general acclamation conferred on Simon the twofold authority of high priest and prince—spiritual and temporal rule, and they made these combined dignities hereditary in his family.

In 139 B.C. Demetrius II was defeated and taken prisoner by the Parthians. His queen, Cleopatra, acted as regent for him. Tryphon still held most of Syria, and Cleopatra summoned to her aid her brother-in-law, Antiochus.

Antiochus made great promises in order to gain the support of Simon, and gave the Jews the right to mint their own money. He laid siege to Tryphon at Dor (between Caesarea and Carmel), and compelled him to flee the country. Simon sent an army of two thousand men, but for no apparent reason Antiochus refused their aid and broke off his alliance with Simon. Athenobius was sent by Antiochus demanding a thousand talents for the loss of Joppe and Gazara. Simon offered a hundred talents, but the offer was not accepted. Then Cendebeus, general of Antiochus, came with an army and began to lay Judea waste. Judas and John (sons of Simon) led the Jewish army against him, and, near Modin, Cendebeus was defeated and his army routed.

Simon reigned for seven years (142-135 B.C.). Ptolemy, his son-in-law, whom he had appointed governor of Jericho, ambitioned to rule the whole country. To this end he invited Simon and his

sons, Mathathias and Judas, to a banquet during which he slew them. Then he sent agents to Gazara to murder John, Simon's third son. Notified in time of the massacre at Jericho, John was prepared for his would-be assassins, and they were put to death. John succeeded his father as prince and high priest. He is known as Hyrcanus (135-106 B.C.).

"And as concerning the rest of the acts of John, and his wars and the worthy deeds, which he bravely achieved, and the building of the walls (of Jerusalem) which he made, and the things that he did: behold these are written in the book of the days of his priesthood, from the time that he was made high priest after his father" (1 Machabees 16, 23-24). The inspired historian finishes with these words; the history of the Old Testament ends here with the death of Simon.

## **The Fortunes of the Chosen People**

The fortunes of the Chosen People, from 135 B.C. until the Christian era began, may be briefly summarised from non-biblical sources: The history of Rome; Josephus: Antiquities, books 13 to 17; Wars, book 1.

John Hyrcanus conquered Samaria and Idumea. Within the Jewish nation the division between Hellenists and orthodox persisted and widened. The rival parties now became known as Sadducees and Pharisees. For a time Hyrcanus favoured the Pharisees, and by them and Pharisees, took the side of the Sadducees, and by this he lost favour with the mass of the people. Later he quarrelled with the Pharisees.

Aristobulus, son of John Hyrcanus (106 B.C.), took the title of king. Alexander Janneus, brother of Aristobulus (106-78 B.C.), was a bitter partisan and a monster of cruelty. He persecuted the Pharisees mercilessly. The people regarded him with mingled feelings of loathing and contempt. He appointed Antipater governor of Idumea—an appointment which had momentous consequences for the Jews.

Alexandra, widow of Alexander Janneus, ruled for nine years (78-69 B.C.)—Hyrcanus II, her eldest son, acting as high priest. She favoured the Pharisees, and these misused their influence to wreak vengeance on their rivals—the Sadducees. After her death Hyrcanus II was defeated in battle near Jericho by his brother, Aristobulus II (69-63 B.C.). Antipater, son of the governor of Idumea, persuaded Hyrcanus to ally himself with Aretas (or Harith) III, king of the Nabateans. In 65 B.C., an army of fifty thousand marched from Petra, drove Aristobulus from Jerusalem, and besieged him there. Aristobulus and Hyrcanus both appealed to Rome for aid. Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, general of Pompey, for a bribe of three hundred talents took the side of Aristobulus and ordered Aretas and Hyrcanus to raise the siege. Aretas and Hyrcanus were defeated in battle at Philadelphia (the old Rabbath-Ammon) in Trans-Jordan by Aristobulus.

In 64 B.C., Pompey conquered Syria, and made it a Roman province, and in 63 B.C. Aretas and Hyrcanus again appealed to the Roman conqueror. Pompey came to terms with Aristobulus, but annoyed by his vacillation—now servile, now defiant—Pompey finally made war on him.

Aristobulus gave himself up, but only after a siege of three months did the Jews surrender the Holy City to the Romans. Pompey entered the sacred buildings of the Temple—even the Holy of Holies. Aristobulus was brought prisoner to Rome. An annual tribute was laid on the country. Hyrcanus, by authority of Rome, became high priest and prince (not king) of the Jews (63-40 B.C.). In fact, however, Antipater the Idumean was the ruler of Palestine. After the downfall of Pompey in 48 B.C. Antipater by flattery gained the goodwill of Julius Caesar, who appointed him procurator of Judea.

The sons of Antipater, Phasaël and Herod (the Great) were appointed governors for Rome of Jerusalem and Galilee.

In 43 B.C. Antipater was poisoned, and Antigonus, son of Aristobulus, seized power. He captured Hyrcanus and Phasaël. He cut off the ears of Hyrcanus to make him unfit for the office of high priest. Phasaël committed suicide in prison. Herod escaped to Rome, where by his inherited ambition and craftiness he wormed himself into favour with Marcus Antonius and the Roman Senate. In 40 B.C., he was appointed king of the Jews by a decree (senatus consultum) of the Senate of Rome.

And this brings us to New Testament times and to the Christian era, for "in the days of Herod" (St. Matthew 2, 1) Jesus Christ, Our Divine Lord, "the end of the law" (Romans 10, 4) and the fulfilment of the prophecies (St. Matthew 5, 17), became Man and was born in Bethlehem of Juda.

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