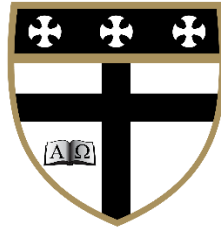


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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“The First and Second Maccabees (Apocrypha) as
Prologue for the New Testament”¹

by

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² Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
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INTRODUCTION

The motto for the Whitefield Theological Seminary is “For the Crown Rights of King Jesus,” which clearly acknowledges that Jesus Christ is, *inter alia*, a “king.” During the first century AD, this was a dangerous claim in ancient Judea. It eventually got Jesus executed!

Even today, Christians who make the same claim that “Jesus is king,” and thereby insist upon the application of truth, righteousness, and justice (i.e., general equity)³ *within this present political order*, carry the same cross and face the same dangers. “[I]t became a saying that **the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.**”⁴ Indeed, because of this very fact, the world is set at *variance* within itself. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth,” said Jesus, “**I came not to send peace, but a sword.**”⁵

Therefore, New Testament Church, like the story of the ancient Jews in First and Second Maccabees, is in spiritual warfare within the present social and political order. “Thus,” writes Augustine of Hippo in *The City of God*, “in this world, in these evil days, not only from the time of the bodily presence of Christ and His apostles, but even from that of Abel, whom first his wicked brother slew because he was righteous, and thenceforth even to the end of this world, **the Church has gone forward on pilgrimage amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God.**”⁶ Furthermore, concluded Augustine, under the spiritual conditions of persecution during its pilgrimage on earth, as recounted in the Book of Revelation,⁷ the church of Jesus Christ has a “military duty”— “**that**

³ NOTE: the words “(i.e., general equity)” added 4/19/2023).

⁴ Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), p. 91.

⁵ Matthew 10: 34-36 (“... For I am come to set a man **at variance** against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And **a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.**”)

⁶ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 663.

⁷ Romans 20:8 (“Gog and Magog”). Augustine says, “[t]he meaning of these names we find to be God, ‘a roof,’ Magog, ‘from a roof’—a house, as it were, and he who comes out of the house... the nations in which we found that the devil was shut up... the devil himself coming out from them and going forth...” *The City of God*, *supra*, p. 729.

is, [the Church] shall be straitened, and hard pressed, and shut up in the straits of tribulation, but shall not desert its military duty....”⁸

The books of the First and Second Maccabees, or the histories of the Jewish wars of the two centuries immediately before the birth of Christ, are the subject matter of this paper. They are treated here as the prologue to the New Testament, because, fundamentally, this history brings both the kingship of Jesus and the spiritual warfare within the present political order, into a better focus.

First and Second Maccabees allow us to see how Jesus’ claim to be “king of the Jews” was politically explosive and dangerous. Moreover, lest we forget, the churches of Jesus Christ are symbolically assemblies of “Jews” — a universal *ecclesia of Jews*, “not... outwardly.... [b]ut ... inwardly [and whose] circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit....”⁹

Thus, we Christian lawyers who are “inwardly Jewish” are naturally drawn to this history of the Jews and the Jewish wars, because we know that it not only prefigures the present-day condition of the Christian church— because we are drawn to the “truth”—but that the First Amendment (i.e., the inalienable right of conscience and religion)¹⁰ are deeply-rooted in the search for “truth.” And “[e]very one that is of the truth,”¹¹ said Jesus to Pontius Pilate, “heareth my voice.”¹² Here, we should understand that, in this answer given to Pilate, the “truth” denotes the fundamental nature and extent of Christ’s kingship and kingdom— it is a profound statement about His dominion and lordship!

⁸ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, pp. 729-730. And, yet, simultaneously, Jesus’s command is to be peacemakers—not militant hellraisers: (Matthew 5:9, stating “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”). See, also, Footnote 17 below. (But NOTE: the method of Jesus was not “violence,” but “passive resistance,” coupled with “civil justice” as defined in the example of Father Abraham in Gen. 18:18-19 (“*tzedakah* and *mishpat*”)— i.e., a strict “just war” principle carried out by governmental authority.

⁹ Romans 2: 28-29.

¹⁰ The First Amendment in the United States Constitution provides that Congress make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. It protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. The Second Amendment gives citizens the right to bear arms.

¹¹ See, e.g., Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 645 (“For by consulting the Gospel we learn that Christ is Truth”); Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, New York, N.Y.: Barnes & Noble Books (2007), p. 48 (“Your law is truth and you are truth”).

¹² John 18: 37.

Spiritual warfare that rages on in the world, since the beginning of time, until the Last Judgment of Christ, centers around the “truth” and thus the churches of Jesus Christ are at war over the “truth” in this world.

In this paper we shall examine a brief history of the warfare of the ancient Jews against Greco-Roman foreign powers, from the period, circa, 200 to 30 BC, construing First and Second Maccabees, together with Josephus’ *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The War of the Jews*. Throughout this period, these ancient Jews fought and struggled— sometimes righteously and sometimes in dishonor— under the Old Covenant, with the objective of purifying and preserving Jewish traditions.

Are we to assume that Jesus of Nazareth had nothing to say to these Jews about their political and social concerns upon his arrival? Of course, he did. Christ’s message was designed, in part, to address Jewish political and social concerns then present in first century Judea. And this is why I still believe this history, which is omitted from the Protestant bibles, is helpful in truly understanding the zealous, albeit peaceful, nature in which Jesus opposed the injustices of the Herodian temple elites and the Roman empire.

Jesus of Nazareth invented a new method of warfare— the most radical and potent weapon of all, that of *passive resistance* to lies, falsehood,¹³ and injustice,¹⁴ coupled with a genuine “agape” love towards one’s enemies (in this case, the ancient Romans),¹⁵ and a *willingness to accept martyrdom*.¹⁶ Jesus’ new method of warfare (i.e., passive resistance through agape love) unleashed the most potent political force in human history: the visible and invisible Early New Testament Church.¹⁷

¹³ See, e.g., Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), p. 90 (“The wickedness of the Roman power was far more hateful to the Christian than to the Jew. The Christian would not recognize the validity of that power....”)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 90-92, describing the political methods of the Early Christian Church, as follows:

Jesus’s method of passive resistance is by far the most economical of life and treasure of any mode of warfare that man can adopt. We have seen how the active resistance of the Jews to the Roman power lead to the death of millions and to the misery of millions more.

The difference between the Jews under the Old Covenant and the Christians under the New Covenant was that the latter New Covenant was multinational and universal, whereas the former Old Covenant was ethnocentric and provincial. The New Covenant represented a universal spiritual kingdom of “truth,” at its fellowship was “catholic” or universal.

Thus, the body of Jesus Christ was unified by “the promised Holy Spirit... given as the chief and most necessary sign of His coming on those who had believed, that every one of them spoke in the *tongues of all nations*; thus signifying that the *unity of the catholic Church* would embrace *all nations*, and would in like

While the Jews were resisting actively, the Christians were resisting passively. The wickedness of the Roman power was far more hateful to the Christian than to the Jew. The Christian would not recognize the validity of that power by so much as casting a grain of incense upon an altar. But the Christian did not wish to kill the Roman; he wished to convert him; and so he manifested his hostility to the Roman system, not by fighting the Roman, but by preaching to the Roman that his system was evil, and, if he wished to escape from that evil, he must turn from the worship of Caesar to the worship of Christ.

And when the Roman was angry with him the Christian suffered the full consequence of that anger, and in so suffering revealed to the Roman a moral greatness which turned the anger of the Roman into admiration, love, and worship. And the loss of life in this warfare of the Christian against the Roman was an nothing when compared with the loss of the Jews.

More Jewish lives were lost in the one year of Coziba’s insurrection, than Christian lives were lost in the three centuries of Christian persecution. And there was this radical difference,-- every Jew who died in arms made an enemy for the Jews. Every Christian who died unarmed made a friend for the Christians. So that it became a saying that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. The history of Jesus and the history of the establishment of Christianity give experimental proof of the soundness of His doctrine.

The method of Jesus is not only economical, but it is effective. If you wish to subdue a man to your will so that he may be your slave, you cannot do it by killing him, for a dead man is no man’s servant. You cannot do it by chaining him, for a man in chains has all he can do to carry his shackles. The only way to subdue a man is to win him. If you want him for your very own you must conquer something beside his hands and his feet; you must storm the citadel of his heart, and, instead of making him fear to disobey, you must make him love to obey. Now you can never make a dog love you by beating him; still less a man. In all God’s universe it is the law that like begets like,-- hate breeds hatred, and loving wins love. And Jesus, in the sublimity of His spiritual genius, gave expression by word and life to these very simple axiomatic principles, and by so doing put the world in the way of salvation.

As long as men hate one another and kill one another, so long will this world be a hell, and those who live in it, will not live at all, but all their days will be misery and death.

manner speak in all tongues.”¹⁸ This body of Christ was also intermingled¹⁹ with ungodly persons, who are not “Jews inwardly,” and with persons who are not led by the Holy Spirit.²⁰ What distinguishes one from another, then, is the inward presence of the “Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”²¹

The “truth” of Christ, though, has no labels and boundaries, and it cannot be harnessed, re-packaged, and doled out in the name of “orthodox religion,” but it is simply universally revealed, as in Psalm 19 (“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.”) and in Roman 10 (“But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.”)

Therefore, if we stop, and pause, to consider that we are all the blessed sons of Noah, then Christ’s central message of agape revealed the central “truth” that the primary actors in the historic Jewish wars, as reflected in First and Second Maccabees— i.e., the Egyptian, the Jew, the Greek, the Persian, and the Roman— were **all brothers**, that is say, they were all the “blessed sons of Noah,” who were **fighting and killing each other for glory and political power**, while being blinded by their own fleshly lusts and passions. The New Testament Church thus drew into it all of the Jews and Gentiles upon the earth (i.e., first the Jew, next the Greeks and Romans, and, indeed, every nation upon earth). This was the central function of the “catholic” New Testament Church.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 660.

¹⁹ John 17:15 (I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”)

²⁰ See, e.g., the “Parable of the Wheat and the Tares,” Matthew 13: 24-30. (“Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”)

²¹ John 14:17. See also John 16:13 (“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”) And, finally, see John 17:17-19.

I am of the opinion that, the Apocryphal books of the First and Second Maccabees are not without spiritual importance to Reformed Protestant Christian theology on civil polity and political science,²² because **the noble objectives of these ancient Jews were “to recover to the people their former constitution.”**²³ That constitution was rooted in a fundamental law of Blessing and Curse (i.e., “Good vs Evil”):

HOLY BIBLE The Fundamental Law of Israel (“tzedakah and mishpat”) ²⁴	
Virtue (Good)	Blessing (Life)
Vice (Evil)	Curse (Death)

Likewise, the Church of England and the Puritans borrowed heavily from this constitutional model of “fundamental law.”²⁵ The Calvinist influence upon these Anglicans and Puritans is undeniably reflected in the system of written constitutions which were present in colonial New England, and eventually culminated into the Declaration of Independence (1776).²⁶ Indeed, “the democracy of Christianity is signally illustrated in the history of the Puritans, and in the effects

²² See, also, St Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, supra, pp. 158, 319, and 476. (“[T]hat God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominions and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence.”)

²³ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 391.

²⁴ Genesis 18:18-19.

²⁵ See generally, Goldwin Smith, *A Constitutional and Legal History of England* (New York, N.Y.: Dorset Press, 1990).

²⁶ See, e.g., Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics*, supra, pp. 241-244 (“In the early years of Charles I, a larger company of Puritans determined to migrate and establish a Puritan church and state in the land which God had provided for them... They were perfectly conscious of what they were doing and the far-reaching significance of their action. They believed that God was calling them to lay the foundations of a new and great Kingdom—a Kingdom in which God should be the absolute ruler and His word the only law.... It was the belief of the Puritan that was the motive power of the American Revolution. It was the stern conviction of the Puritan that not King George, but God, was the rightful sovereign in America, not the Parliament of England, but the people of the united Colonies, were the sole keepers of the purse and the only source of political power; and it was this conviction of the Puritan that sustained the people of the country through the long years of the Revolutionary War.”)

of their labors in America.”²⁷ To a very great degree, the struggle of the ancient Jews, as reflected in First and Second Maccabees, reflect the very constitutional principles of religious freedom that became a bedrock of Anglo-American fundamental law.

Hence, under Reformed Protestant theology, “Jesus’s method of passive resistance” is the everyday duty of every Christian believer, no matter what the circumstances; whereas, on the other hand, the duty of all Christian civil governors and civil magistrates— i.e., those who hold the civil sword— is to rightfully punish evildoers, through warfare, or other violent means, and so to establish civil justice.²⁸ This Reformed theological doctrine is affirmed in First and Second Maccabees, where we find this very doctrine carried out by Jewish martyrs and duly-appointed Jewish civil authorities.

The history of the Jews during the two hundred years immediately before Christ’s birth—a history that is omitted from the Protestant bible—is the subject matter of this paper, precisely because it sheds light upon the political conditions that were present in ancient Judea at the time of Christ’s birth.

Here we follow the train of historical events from the rebellion of the Jewish priest named Mattathias and the founding of the Hasmonean dynasty down to the rise of King Herod the Great, who reigned during the time when Christ was born. This history is important because it demonstrates the hopeless despair that is the result of reliance upon human ingenuity and Machiavellian politics. In many respects, the Jewish leaders and High Priests were no more wise, moral, or noble than their Greek or Roman overloads— indeed, they were just as worldly, self-centered, and careless.

When the Gospel of Matthew opens, the Jews of ancient Judea, as well as throughout the Jewish diaspora, had fallen to their lowest point since their

²⁷ William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852), p. 484.

²⁸ Romans 13:1-6 (“For he is the minister of God to thee for good... a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”) See, also, Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it should be Obeyed* (1523)(“Here you inquire further, whether constables, hangmen, jurists, lawyers, and others of similar function can also be Christians and in a state of salvation. Answer: **If the governing authority and its sword are a divine service, as was proved above, then everything that is essential for the authority's bearing of the sword must also be divine service.** There must be those who arrest, prosecute, execute, and destroy the wicked, and who protect, acquit, defend, and save the good. Therefore, when they perform their duties, not with the intention of seeking their own ends but only of helping the law and the governing authority function to coerce the wicked, there is no peril in that; they may use their office like anybody else would use his trade, as a means of livelihood. For, as has been said, love of neighbor is not concerned about its own; it considers not how great or humble, but how profitable and needful the works are for neighbor or community.”)

enslavement in Egypt. King Herod the Great, who was ethnically an Edomite but religiously Jewish, had executed the last surviving heirs of the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty. And he had effectively transferred Jewish sovereignty to the ancient Romans, while aggrandizing personal wealth and power for himself. As the client-king of the Roman empire, King Herod ruled ancient Judea with all of the support, authority, and power of the mighty Roman empire—the Roman legions, the Roman senate, and the Roman emperor.

Beginning with Judas Maccabeus, who entered into a compact with the Roman Republic on behalf of the Jews in, circa, 165-160 BC; up to the reign of Ethnarch and High Priest John Hyrcanus II, who made a compact with the Roman General Pompey the Great in 63 BC; up through the time of Herod the Great (72 BC – 4 AD), the ancient Jews opened a new chapter in their history: a client-state of the ancient Romans:

Daniel 7: 4 “the first beast”	Kingdom of Babylon
Daniel 7:5 “the second beast”	Kingdom of the Medes/Persians
Daniel 7:6 “the third beast”	Kingdom of the Hellenistic Greeks
Daniel 7: 7 “the fourth beast”	Kingdom of the Romans

Thus, Daniel’s prophecy on the “Son of man,” whose “everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away” and which shall contain “all people, nations, and languages,” is fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ, “Messiah the Prince,”²⁹ during the reigns of King Herod the Great (ancient Judea) and Caesar Augustus (Roman empire). The First and Second Maccabees, together with Josephus’ *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The War of the Jews* help us to bring Daniel’s prophecy into historical focus.

²⁹ Daniel 9:25-26.

Chapter One

“The Hasmonean Dynasty”³⁰

Now the Gospel of Matthew is concerned with the royal lineage of Jesus Christ and traces that lineage to King David,³¹ and commences this gospel with a description of the political intrigue then prevalent in both ancient Judea and the Greco-Roman world, stating:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet....

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his

³⁰ “The Hasmonean Dynasty,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_dynasty

The Hasmonean dynasty (/ˌhæzməˈniːən/; Hebrew: הַשְׂמוֹנִיָּמִים Ḥašmōna'īm) was a ruling dynasty of Judea and surrounding regions during classical antiquity, from c. 140 BCE to 37 BCE. Between c. 140 and c. 116 BCE the dynasty ruled Judea semi-autonomously in the Seleucid Empire, and from roughly 110 BCE, with the empire disintegrating, Judea gained further autonomy and expanded into the neighboring regions of Perea, Samaria, Idumea, Galilee, and Iturea.

The Hasmonean rulers took the Greek title *basileus* ("king" or "emperor"). Forces of the Roman Republic conquered the Hasmonean kingdom in 63 BCE and made it into a client state; Herod the Great displaced the last reigning Hasmonean client-ruler in 37 BCE....

The Hasmonean dynasty had survived for 103 years before yielding to the Herodian dynasty in 37 BCE. The installation of Herod the Great (an Idumean) as king in 37 BCE made Judea a Roman client state and marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty. Even then, Herod tried to bolster the legitimacy of his reign by marrying a Hasmonean princess, Mariamne, and planning to drown the last male Hasmonean heir at his Jericho palace. In 6 CE, Rome joined Judea proper, Samaria and Idumea into the Roman province of Judaea. In 44 CE, Rome installed the rule of a procurator side by side with the rule of the Herodian kings (specifically Agrippa I 41–44 and Agrippa II 50–100).

³¹ Matthew 1:1-17.

mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.³²

Matthew's gospel provides us with a description of King Herod's personality and character which other historians have corroborated to be probable and accurate.

For, indeed, “[f]orces of the Roman Republic conquered the Hasmonean kingdom in 63 BCE and made it into a client state; Herod the Great displaced the last reigning Hasmonean client-ruler in 37 BCE.”³³ And King Herod had ruthlessly ended the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty, and any chances of reestablishing that Hasmonean dynasty, when he ruthlessly executed *all of the surviving male members* of the Hasmonean family:

The fate of the remaining male members of the family under Herod was not a happy one. Aristobulus III, grandson of Aristobulus II through his elder son Alexander, was briefly made high priest, but was soon executed (36 BCE) due to Herod's jealousy. His sister Mariamne was married to Herod, but also fell victim to his jealousy. Her sons by Herod, Aristobulus IV and Alexander, were in their adulthood [and was] also executed by their father.

Hyrcanus II had been held by the Parthians since 40 BCE. For four years, until 36 BCE, he lived amid the Babylonian Jews, who paid him every mark of respect. In that year Herod, who feared that Hyrcanus might induce the Parthians to help him regain the throne, invited him to return to Jerusalem. The Babylonian Jews warned him in vain. Herod received him with every mark of respect, assigning him the first place at his table and the presidency of the state council, while awaiting an opportunity to get rid of him. As the last remaining Hasmonean, Hyrcanus was too dangerous a rival for Herod. In the year 30 BCE, charged with plotting with the King of Arabia, Hyrcanus was condemned and executed.³⁴

Thus, in addition to the Hasmonean dynasty, the birth of Jesus thus represented yet another political threat— i.e., a revived Jewish Davidic dynasty— to the Herodian

³² Matthew 2:1-5, 13.

³³ “The Hasmonean Dynasty,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_dynasty

³⁴ Ibid.

throne of ancient Judea. King Herod's response was to resort to violence in both cases: he tried to kill the baby Jesus by summarily decreeing that all Jewish baby boys under the age of two years old be murdered.³⁵

When Herod the Great assumed power in 37 BC, the Hasmonean dynasty had long created the political aspirations and hopes for political independence and an autonomous Jewish monarch amongst the Jewish people of ancient Judea. This created grave insecurities for King Herod, because "Jewish tradition [held] that the claiming of kingship by the later Hasmoneans led to their eventual downfall, since that title was only to be held by descendants of the line of King David.... Frequent dynastic quarrels also contributed to the view among Jews of later generations that the latter Hasmoneans were degenerate. One member of this school was Josephus, whose accounts are in many cases our sole source of information about the Hasmoneans...."³⁶

The Hasmonean dynasty³⁷ was founded about 170 years before the birth of Christ; and, as previously mentioned, it was officially ended in, circa, 37 B.C. by King Herod the Great.

The Hasmonean list of the leaders (including military generals, priests, governors, and kings) include the following:

THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY

Maccabees (rebel leaders)

1. **Mattathias**, 170–167 BC
2. **Judas Maccabeus**, 167–160 BC
3. **Jonathan Apphus**, 160–143 BC (High Priest from 152 BC)

³⁵ Matthew 2:16

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "The family name of the Hasmonean dynasty originates with the ancestor of the house, whom Josephus Flavius called by the Hellenised form Asmoneus or Asamoneus (Greek: Ἀσαμωνᾱϊός), said to have been the great-grandfather of Mattathias, but about whom nothing more is known. The name appears to come from the Hebrew name Hashmonay (חַשְׁמוֹנַי הַשְּׁמוֹנַי Hāšmōna'y). An alternative view posits that the Hebrew name Hashmona'i is linked with the village of Heshmon, mentioned in Joshua 15:27. Gott and Licht attribute the name to "Ha Simeon," a veiled reference to the Simeonite Tribe."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_dynasty

Monarchs (Ethnarchs and Kings) and High Priests

1. **Simon Thassi**, 142–135 BC (Ethnarch and High Priest)
2. **John Hyrcanus I**, 134–104 BC (Ethnarch and High Priest)
3. **Aristobulus I**, 104–103 BE (King and High Priest)
4. **Alexander Jannaeus**, 103–76 BC (King and High Priest)
5. **Salome Alexandra**, 76–67 BC (the only Queen)
6. **Hyrcanus II**, 67–66 BC (King from 67 BCE; High Priest, 76 BC)
7. **Aristobulus II**, 66–63 BC (King and High Priest)
8. **Hyrcanus II** (restored), 63–40 BC (High Priest from 63 BC; Ethnarch from 47 BC)
9. **Antigonus**, 40–37 BC (King and High Priest)
10. **Aristobulus III**, 36 BC (only High Priest)

The only two historical sources of this dynasty are First and Second Maccabees and Josephus' *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The War of the Jews*.³⁸ A summation of these works is provided below.

³⁸ See, e.g., William Whiston, *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1998).

Chapter Two

“The Book of First Maccabees: Judas Maccabeus”

The origins and history of the Hasmonean Dynasty are provided in the Apocrypha in the First and Second Maccabees.³⁹

a. Seleucid Hellenization as a Threat to Jewish Culture

The book of First Maccabees begins with the theme of Seleucid Hellenization and its mortal threat to Jewish civilization and religious autonomy.

This threatening Seleucid Hellenization pitted traditional orthodox Jews against those Jews who were eagerly Hellenized. The latter felt that the former's orthodoxy held the Jewish people back politically and culturally. The Jews were also divided internally between those who favored the Ptolemies in Egypt and those who favored Seleucids in Syria or Asia Minor.⁴⁰ In addition, the Jews were more and more religiously divided by two growing sects: the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

This history begins with Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) and his defeat of the Persians, his subsequent reign over many nations, and the subsequent rise of Hellenism in ancient Judea.⁴¹ “After Alexander, Judea was ruled by

³⁹ See, e.g., Hasmonean Dynasty, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_dynasty (“The major source of information about the origin of the Hasmonean dynasty is the books 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees, held as canonical scripture by the Catholic, Orthodox, and most Oriental Orthodox churches and as apocryphal by Protestant denominations, although they do not comprise the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible. The books cover the period from 175 BCE to 134 BCE during which time the Hasmonean dynasty became semi-independent from the Seleucid empire but had not yet expanded far outside of Judea. They are written from the point of view that the salvation of the Jewish people in a crisis came from God through the family of Mattathias, particularly his sons Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan Apphus, and Simon Thassi, and his grandson John Hyrcanus. The books include historical and religious material from the Septuagint that was codified by Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians. The other primary source for the Hasmonean dynasty is the first book of The Wars of the Jews and a more detailed history in Antiquities of the Jews by the Jewish historian Josephus, (37–c. 100 CE).[5] Josephus' account is the only primary source covering the history of the Hasmonean dynasty during the period of its expansion and independence between 110 and 63 BCE. Notably, Josephus, a Roman citizen and former general in the Galilee, who survived the Jewish–Roman wars of the 1st century, was a Jew who was captured by and cooperated with the Romans, and wrote his books under Roman patronage.”)

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Hasmonean Dynasty, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_dynasty

⁴¹ See, generally, Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 370 - 402 (“From the Death of Alexander the Great to the Death of Judas Maccabeus”).

the Ptolemies and the Seleucids for almost two hundred years.”⁴² During this historical period, the Jews engaged in a violent struggle for liberation against foreign Greek (and later Roman) domination of ancient Judea.

With his death marking the start of the Hellenistic period, Alexander's legacy includes the cultural diffusion and syncretism that his conquests engendered, such as Greco-Buddhism and Hellenistic Judaism. He founded more than twenty cities, with the most prominent being the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Alexander's settlement of Greek colonists and the resulting spread of Greek culture led to the overwhelming dominance of Hellenistic civilization and influence as far east as the Indian subcontinent. The Hellenistic period developed through the Roman Empire into modern Western culture; the Greek language became the lingua franca of the region and was the predominant language of the Byzantine Empire up until its collapse in the mid-15th century AD. Greek-speaking communities in central Anatolia and in far-eastern Anatolia survived until the Greek genocide and Greek–Turkish population exchanges of the early 20th century AD.⁴³

First Maccabees informs us that when Alexander perceived that his death was imminent, he “called his servants... and parted his kingdom among them.”⁴⁴

According to First Maccabees, the “kingdom of Egypt” was given to Ptolemee.⁴⁵ The “kingdom of the Greeks” was given to Antiochus Epiphanes.⁴⁶ However, historically, First Maccabees is quick summary designed to quickly bring the reader up to a particular moment in history, because roughly 125 years elapsed from the death of Alexander in 323 BC to the actual reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (181–164 BC, 163–145 BC) of Egypt and King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175 – 164 BC) of the Seleucid kingdom.

⁴² “Language of the New Testament,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_of_the_New_Testament

⁴³ “Alexander the Great,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great

⁴⁴ 1 Maccabees 1:6.

⁴⁵ 1 Maccabees 1:18.

⁴⁶ 1 Maccabees 1:9-16.

During this first 125-year period, King Seleucus Nicator made the Jews citizens and respected all of their religious rites, laws, and customs.⁴⁷ But ancient Judea was also dominated politically by King Ptolemy I Soter (303 to 282 BC) and Egypt. Seemingly, there was good relations between the Hellenized Egyptians and the Jews. King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC) had expressed an interest in the wisdom of the Hebrew scriptures and ordered that they be translated from the original Hebrew into Kione Greek. This translation became known as the Septuagint.

First Maccabees thus omits the first 125 years of the Hellenized Egyptian’s rulership over the Jews, but rather begins after Seleucid King Antiochus IV (175 – 164 BC) had come to power and expelled the Egyptians from ancient Judea.

b. King Antiochus IV Subdues Ancient Judea, circa 175 BC

First Maccabees thus begins with the reigns of Ptolemy VI and Antiochus IV. It informs us that Antiochus IV subdued Egypt and Ptolemy VI and then turned his attention toward the subjugation of the Jews in ancient Judea.⁴⁸

According to Josephus, King Antiochus IV, at least at the first, demonstrated restraint and had intended to permit the Jews to enjoy their religious customs and laws.⁴⁹ But when this same King Antiochus IV married Cleopatra, the daughter of Ptolemy, a league was made between the Kings of Egypt and Asia, and the province of ancient Judea was given to King Ptolemy as a dowry.⁵⁰ And this led to “Antiochus’ prohibition to the Jews to make use of the Laws of their country.”⁵¹

And after that Antiochus had smitten Egypt, he returned again in the hundred forty and third year, and went up against Israel and Jerusalem

⁴⁷ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 379 (“Chapter 3 How the Kings of Asia Honored the Nation of the Jews, and Made them Citizens of those Cities Which they Built”).

⁴⁸ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 380 (“...when Antiochus had beaten Ptolemy, he seized upon Judea....”).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-381.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

with a great multitude, and entered proudly into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof, and the table of the shewbread, and the pouring vessels, and the vials, and the censers of gold, and the veil, and the crowns, and the golden ornaments that were before the temple, all which he pulled off. He took also the silver and the gold, and the precious vessels: also he took the hidden treasures which he found. And when he had taken all away, he went into his own land, having made a great massacre, and spoken very proudly. Therefore there was great mourning in Israel, in every place where they were; so that the princes and elders mourned, the virgins and young men were made feeble, and the beauty of women was changed. Every bridegroom took up lamentation, and she that sat in the marriage chamber was in heaviness. The land also was moved for the inhabitants thereof, and all the house of Jacob was covered with confusion....

Moreover king Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, and every one should leave his laws: so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king. Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the sabbath.

For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Juda, that they should follow the strange laws of the land, and forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the sabbaths and festival days: and pollute the sanctuary and holy people: set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean beasts: that they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: to the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances.⁵²

The first chapter of First Maccabees goes on to describe the genocidal circumstances which the Greeks inflicted upon the Jews.

⁵² 1 Maccabees 1:20-49.

c. The Rise of Rebel Leader Mattathias, circa 170 BC

Amidst the catastrophe imposed upon Jewish culture under the reign of Antiochus IV, the Jewish priesthood—the sons of Aaron, the Levites—stepped up to fill the void in leadership. One such priest was Mattathias,⁵³ who had five sons, as follows:

- (1) Joannan (Caddis);
- (2) Simon (Thassi);
- (3) Judas (Maccabeus);
- (4) Eleazar (Avaran); and
- (5) Jonathan (Apphus).⁵⁴

Mattathias saw the blasphemies which King Antiochus had committed throughout Judea;⁵⁵ and, together with his five sons, had “gone down into the secret places in the wilderness,”⁵⁶ and led an armed revolt, in the form of guerrilla warfare, against the king.⁵⁷ Mattathias, it may be correctly observed, engaged in civil disobedience and self-defense.⁵⁸

Through this process of guerrilla warfare, Mattathias and his sons slowly “recovered the law out of the hand of the Gentiles.”⁵⁹ At the end of the second chapter of First Maccabees, Mattathias died and, as he was on his deathbed, he appointed his son Simon to be the governor and his son Judas Maccabeus to be military leader.

⁵³ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 389-391.

⁵⁴ 1 Maccabees 2:1-5.

⁵⁵ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 389 (“Now this Mattathias lamented to his children the sad state of their affairs, and the ravage made in the city and the plundering of the temple, and the calamities the multitude were under; and he told them that it was better for them to die for the laws of their country than to live so ingloriously as they then did.”)

⁵⁶ 1 Maccabees 2:31.

⁵⁷ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 380-391.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 390 (“But Mattathias said that he would not do it; and that if all the other nations would obey the commands of Antiochus, either out of fear, or to please him, yet would not he nor his sons leave the religious worship of their country....”).

⁵⁹ 1 Maccabees 2:48.

Their objective was “to recover to the people their former constitution.”⁶⁰ And, for all practical purposes, Judas Maccabeus— as a military general— appears to have assumed the supreme leadership role over ancient Judea.⁶¹

d. The Rise of Rebel Judas Maccabeus, circa 165 BC

Judas Maccabeus assumed the role of military general for the Jews and immediately won several minor battles against Gentile leaders Apollonius⁶² and Seron.⁶³ His several campaigns are set forth in Josephus’ *The Antiquities of the Jews*⁶⁴ and in First and Second Maccabees:

- Judas fought against “the children of Esau” and won;⁶⁵
- Judas fought against “the children of Ammon” and won;⁶⁶
- Judas fought against the “heathen that were at Galaad” and won;⁶⁷
- Judas fought against “[t]he heathen that are round about us are assembled together against us to destroy us...” and won;⁶⁸ and,

⁶⁰ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 391.

⁶¹ 1 Maccabees 3:1. See, also, Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 391 (“How Judas overthrew the forces of Apollonius and Seron, and killed the generals of their armies themselves; and how, a little while afterwards, Lysias and Gorgias were beaten, he went up to Jerusalem, and purified the Temple.”)

⁶² 1 Maccabees 3:10.

⁶³ 1 Maccabees 3:13; See, also, Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 391 (“How Judas overthrew the forces of Apollonius and Seron, and killed the generals of their armies themselves; and how, a little while afterwards, Lysias and Gorgias were beaten, he went up to Jerusalem, and purified the Temple.”)

⁶⁴ See, also, Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 391-398. (Chapter 7 “How Judas overthrew the forces of Apollonius and Seron, and killed the generals of their armies themselves; and how, a little while afterwards, Lysias and Gorgias were beaten, he went up to Jerusalem, and purified the Temple.” Chapter 8 “How Judas subdued the nations round about: and how Simon beat the people of Tyre and Ptolemais; and how Judas overthrew Timotheus, and forced him to fly away, and did many other things after Joseph and Azarias has been beaten.” And Chapter 9 “Concerning the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. How Antiochus Eupator fought against Judas, and besigned him in the Temple and afterwards made peace with him, and departed, of Alcimus and Onias”).

⁶⁵ 1 Maccabees 5:3.

⁶⁶ 1 Maccabees 5:7.

⁶⁷ 1 Maccabees 5:9.

⁶⁸ 1 Maccabees 5:10.

- Judas fought against “Ptolemais, Tyrus, Sidon, and all Galilee” who had conspired to “destroy” the Jews, and won.⁶⁹
- Judas fought in Bosra (Judas slew all the male children);⁷⁰
- Judas fought battles in Galaad, and won;⁷¹ and
- Judas fought battles in Galilee, and won.⁷²

Judas Maccabaeus also has great success against King Antiochus IV’s army as well.⁷³

During Judas’ leadership, King Antiochus IV prepares for his young son, King Antiochus V (Eupator) to succeed him, and appoints a man named Lysias to be his regent.⁷⁴

Lysias, as regent, then organized the local regional leadership, including Ptolemee, Nicanor, and Gorgias (the “kings friends”) to help subdue the Jews.⁷⁵

In the sixth chapter of First Maccabees, King Antiochus IV died, and his son Antiochus V (Eupater) succeeded him.⁷⁶ Lysias encouraged King Antiochus V to make a covenant of peace with the Jews,⁷⁷ but King Antiochus V later broke his covenant of peace.⁷⁸

King Antiochus V, through the regent Lysias, immediately sought to avenge his father and to execute judgment against the Jews ; and new military campaigns against the Jews begin.

⁶⁹ 1 Maccabees 5:15.

⁷⁰ 1 Maccabees 5:28.

⁷¹ 1 Maccabees 5:28-55.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 1 Maccabees 3: 55-60; 4:34-61.

⁷⁴ 1 Maccabees 3:32-33.

⁷⁵ 1 Maccabees 3:38-39.

⁷⁶ 1 Maccabees 6:16-17.

⁷⁷ 1 Maccabees 6:55-61.

⁷⁸ 1 Maccabees 6:62-63.

e. **The Rise of King Demetrius I to Challenge King Antiochus V**

Demetrius I, who was King Antiochus V's cousin and rival to the Seleucid throne, gave the Jews some hope.

Demetrius I (Greek: Δημήτριος Α', 185 – June 150 BC), surnamed Soter (Greek: Σωτήρ - "Savior"), reigned as king (basileus) of the **Hellenistic Seleucid Empire** from November 162 – June 150 BC. Demetrius grew up in Rome as a hostage, but returned to Greek Syria and overthrew his young cousin Antiochus V Eupator and regent Lysias. Demetrius took control during a turbulent time of the Empire, and spent much of his time fighting off revolts and challenges to his power from threats such as Timarchus and Alexander Balas.⁷⁹

Demetrius I returned from captivity in Rome and overthrows King Antiochus V and Lysias (regent).⁸⁰

f. **King Demetrius I Appoints Ungodly Jews to Govern Judea**

According to First Maccabees, King Demetrius I then began to cater to unprincipled, ungodly Jews who were opposed to Juda Maccabeus.

With King Demetrius's approval, a Jewish man named Alcimus, became the "high priest";⁸¹ and a Jewish man named Bacchides was made the governor.

Soon thereafter, Alcimus and other Hellenized Jews began to falsely accuse loyal orthodox Jews, including Judas Maccabeus and others, before the king.

⁷⁹"Demetrius I Soter," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demetrius_I_Soter

⁸⁰ 1 Maccabees 7: 1-4.

⁸¹ 1 Maccabees 7:5, 9.

Jewish leaders Bacchides and Alcimus immediately “assembled” a government “to require justice”⁸² but they did much harm to Judea.⁸³

g. Judas Maccabeus Commences Civil War Against Hellenized Jewish Leaders

As a consequence of King Demetrius I’s having installed Alcimus (high priest) and Baccides (governor) to high-level leadership positions in ancient Judea, Juda Maccabaeus starts a revolt, or a civil war, against his fellow Jewish brethren.

King Demetrius I sent his Seleucid military commander Nicanor to subdue Judas Maccabeus and his men.⁸⁴ But Judas successfully defeats Nicanor on the battlefield.⁸⁵

h. Jewish Alliance with the ancient Roman Republic

During this period, Judas Maccabeus became enamored with the Roman Republic, which was then a new, rising power, and he sought an alliance with it.⁸⁶ From about 165 BC to 37 BC, the Jews summoned the Roman Republic to join them in a strategic regional alliance against the Greek and Persian kingdoms that threatened both the Jews and Roman political interests. This began the tumultuous history of Roman influence in ancient Judea.

Judas Maccabaeus thus made a compact with the Romans that was calculated to help break the geopolitical power of King Demetrius I and to defeat the Greeks.⁸⁷ According to the eighth chapter of First Maccabees, the following terms of this Jewish-Roman compact were agreed upon:

17 So Judas chose Eupolemus son of John and grandson of Accos, and also Jason, Eleazar’s son. He sent them to Rome to establish

⁸² 1 Maccabees 7:12.

⁸³ 1 Maccabees 7:22.

⁸⁴ 1 Maccabees 7:26.

⁸⁵ 1 Maccabees 7:44-50.

⁸⁶ 1 Maccabees 8:1-2 (Judas was attracted to “the fame of the Romans”).

⁸⁷ 1 Maccabees 8: 18-32.

friendship, alliance, 18 and also to free the Jewish people from oppression. They observed that the Greek kingdom was completely enslaving Israel.

19 They took the long journey to Rome. They entered the senate chamber, and they spoke: 20 “Judas, called Maccabeus, along with his brothers and the Jewish people, has sent us to you to establish alliance and peace with you. We seek to be enrolled as your allies and friends.” 21 This proposal pleased the Romans. 22 This is a copy of the letter that they wrote in reply on bronze tablets, which they sent to Jerusalem to remain with them there as a memorial of peace and alliance:

23 May all go well with the Romans and with the nation of the Jews at sea and on land forever. May sword and enemy stay away from them. 24 If war comes first to Rome or to any of their allies throughout their territory, 25 the Jewish nation should act as their allies wholeheartedly, as the occasion may indicate to them. 26 They will not give or supply grain, weapons, money, or ships to an enemy that makes war on them. This is Rome’s decision. And they will keep their obligations without compensation. 27 In the same way, if war comes first to the nation of the Jews, the Romans will willingly act as their allies, as the occasion may indicate to them. 28 They will not give to their enemies any grain, weapons, money, or ships, just as Rome has decided. And they will keep these obligations and do so without deceit. 29 On these terms, the Romans make a treaty with the Jewish people. 30 If after these terms are in effect and either party determines to add or delete anything, they will do so at their discretion. Any addition or deletion that they may make will be valid.

31 Regarding the bad things that King Demetrius is doing to them, we have written to him, “Why have you made your yoke so heavy on our friends and allies the Jews? 32 If they appeal now again for help against you, we will defend their rights and fight you on both sea and land.”⁸⁸

Hence, the Jewish alliance with the Roman Republic commenced during the era of Judas Maccabeus, circa, 165 – 160 BC.

⁸⁸ 1 Maccabees 8:17-32.

i. King Demetrius I defeats Judas Maccabeus, circa 160 BC

Despite Judas Maccabeus' military genius and alliance with the Romans, he was caught off guard in a surprise attack by the King Demetrius I's military forces, which had greatly outnumbered Judas' fighting men.

According to the ninth chapter of First Maccabees, King Demetrius I sent Jewish leaders Bacchides and Alcimus back into Judea with "the chief strength of his host."⁸⁹ Judas Maccabeus and his militia were unprepared for the battle. Some of Judas' men fled. Some of his men encouraged Judas to surrender.

However, Judas Maccabaeus insisted upon fighting and thus exemplifying what he perceived to be noble and honorable Jewish manhood. Unfortunately, the great military champion Judas Maccabaeus was finally killed in battle.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ 1 Maccabees 9:1.

⁹⁰ 1 Maccabees 9:6-18.

Chapter Three

“The Book of Second Maccabees: Judas Maccabeus”⁹¹

The entire book of the Second Maccabees repeats the narrative of the life and legacy of Judas Maccabeus (? – 160 BC), but with slightly different factual accounts of what happened.

a. Public Letter from the Jews of Jerusalem to the Jews in Alexandria

Second Maccabees is an anonymous public letter from the Jews of Jerusalem to the Jews of Egypt. The subject of this letter is a commemoration of the heroic life and times of Judas Maccabeus. This letter is divided into fifteen chapters.

In this letter, the author of the Second Maccabees describes this book as an abridged version of the five-volume book written by “Jason of Cyrene.”⁹² The letter acknowledges shared hardships and struggle within the Hellenized Greek empire.

In the hundred fourscore and eighth year, the people that were at Jerusalem and in Judea, and the council, and Judas, sent greeting and health unto Aristobulus, king Ptolemeus’ master, who was of the stock of the anointed priests, and to the Jews that were in Egypt: insomuch as God hath delivered us from great perils, we thank him highly, as having been in battle against a king.... Blessed be our God in all things, who hath delivered up the ungodly.⁹³

The book of Second Maccabees thus opens with a story of how the Jews preserved their culture and religion, first through their priest Neemias; and, secondly, through the rediscovery of the writings of the prophet Jeremiah.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Second Maccabees ends with the death of Judas Maccabaeus, but Chapter 9 through 16 of First Maccabees continues the historical narrative through the life and times of Judas’ two brothers Jonathan and Simon (which is described in Chapter Four below).

⁹² 2 Maccabees 2:23.

⁹³ 2 Maccabees 1:10-11, 17.

⁹⁴ 2 Maccabees 1:19-36; 2:1-15.

A brief description of all the steps which the Jews in Jerusalem took to preserve their heritage and religion is mentioned here:

The same things also were reported in the writings and commentaries of Neemias; and how he founding a library gathered together the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning the holy gifts. In like manner also Judas [Maccabeus] gathered together all those things that were lost by reason of the war we had, and they remain with us....

Now as concerning Judas Maccabeus, and his brethren, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, and the wars against Antiochus Epiphancies, and Eupator his son, and the manifest signs that came from heaven unto those that behaved themselves manfully to their honour for Judaism: so that, being but a few, they overcame the whole country, and chased barbarous multitudes, and recovered again the temple renowned all the world over, and freed the city, and upheld the laws which were going down, the Lord being gracious unto them with all favour....

b. Onias, the Honorable High Priest of Jerusalem

Chapter three of Second Maccabees begins with the narrative of “the godliness of Onias, the high priest” of Jerusalem.

During this period, King Seleucus IV Philopator (187 - 175 BC), who was the father of Antiochus IV, reigned over the Seleucid empire.

High Priest Onias represented the very best of orthodox Judaism. According to the Second Maccabees, Onias

- had a great hatred of evil; and,
- had saved a large sum of money for distribution to widows and the poor.

A man named Simon, who was from the tribe of Benjamin and a governor of the Temple, had fallen out of favor with Onias.

In order seek vengeance against Onias, Simon went to one Apollonius⁹⁵— who was a friend of the young prince who would later become Demetrius I—to

⁹⁵ Apollonius: “Apollonius (Ancient Greek: *Απολλώνιος*) was a man of the Seleucid Empire who lived in the 2nd century BCE. Apollonius was a friend of the [future] Seleucid ruler Demetrius I Soter when the

inform him of the great amount of money which Onias had saved and which was stored in the Temple.

Apollonius also informed King Seleucus of the great wealth which Onias had stored, and the king sent a man named Heliodorus to collect the said monies from Onias.⁹⁶ Afterwards, Onias, the priests, and the Jews are very sorrowful and greatly distressed.⁹⁷

But God prevented Heliodorus from carrying out his orders, when a strange illness befell upon him.⁹⁸ Heliodorus repented and “testified... to all men the works of the great God.”⁹⁹

But Simon, who was previously governor of the Second Temple and who had fallen out of favor with High Priest Onias, continued to work mischief. He continued to slander Onias.¹⁰⁰ And both Apollonius and Simon continued their intrigue against Onias.¹⁰¹

Onias appealed to King Seleucus in an effort to keep the peace.¹⁰² King Seleucus did keep the peace, but that only lasted until he was succeeded by Antiochus IV (Epiphanes).¹⁰³

latter was a young man. When Demetrius, at the age of 10, was sent to Rome as a hostage in 175, Apollonius went with him, and supported him with his advice. Apollonius had been educated together with Demetrius, and their two families had been long connected by friendship. Apollonius of Tarsus, the father of Apollonius, had possessed great influence with Demetrius's father, the ruler Seleucus IV Philopator. **He is mentioned in 2 Maccabees 3 as the person who informed Seleucus of the great wealth held at the temple in Jerusalem.**” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollonius_\(Seleucid\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollonius_(Seleucid))

⁹⁶ 2 Maccabees 3:13.

⁹⁷ 2 Maccabees 3:15-22.

⁹⁸ 2 Maccabees 3: 27.

⁹⁹ 2 Maccabees 3:36.

¹⁰⁰ 2 Maccabees 4:1.

¹⁰¹ 2 Maccabees 4:1-4.

¹⁰² 2 Maccabees 4:5.

¹⁰³ 2 Maccabees 4:7.

c. High Priest Onias was betrayed by his own brother, Jason, who sought the High Priesthood for Himself

Onias' own brother, who was named Jason, sought the high priesthood for himself, and he appealed to the corrupt and brutal King Antiochus IV.

Jason also wanted to promote the Hellenization of Judea.¹⁰⁴

Jason then sent a man named Menelaus as an emissary to the king. But, interestingly, Menelaus also sought the High Priesthood for himself, and he betrayed Jason!¹⁰⁵ Hence, a double betrayal! “Then Jason, who had undermined his own brother, being undermined by another, was compelled to flee into the country of the Ammonites.”¹⁰⁶

This same Menelaus then stole the treasures out of the Second Temple. When High Priest Onias reprimanded Menelaus and his actions,¹⁰⁷ Menelaus had Onias murdered.¹⁰⁸ This unjust murder of the High Priest shocked the entire nation and shook the foundations of the Seleucid empire.¹⁰⁹

King Antiochus IV was moved to mourn and to regret the murder of Onias.¹¹⁰

A rebellious spirit rose up in the Jewish people following Onias' death.

Some of the Jewish zealots rose up in revolt, but they were violently suppressed.¹¹¹ “Thus they that followed the matter for the city, and for the people, and for the holy vessels, did soon suffer unjust punishment.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ 2 Maccabees 4:7-33.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Maccabees 4:23-25.

¹⁰⁶ 2 Maccabees 4:26.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Maccabees 4:33.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Maccabees 4:34.

¹⁰⁹ 2 Maccabees 4:34-36.

¹¹⁰ 2 Maccabees 4:37.

¹¹¹ 2 Maccabees 4:40-50.

¹¹² 2 Maccabees 4:48.

Nevertheless, despite his cruelty and wickedness, Menelaus “remained still in authority, increasing in malice, and being a great traitor to the citizens,” and in service to King Antiochus IV.¹¹³

Jason, who was the brother of the dead High Priest Onias, returned to Jerusalem with a thousand man-host and slew many Jews, but he “obtained not the principality.”¹¹⁴

d. King Antiochus IV subdues Jerusalem.

King Antiochus IV heard the news about Jason’s return to Jerusalem and his slaughter of many of his fellow Jewish brethren.¹¹⁵

Antiochus IV mistakenly believed that all of Jerusalem had revolted against his authority, and so “he took the city by force of arms.”¹¹⁶ There was again a great slaughter of men, women, children, and infants;¹¹⁷ and some forty thousand Jews were slain.¹¹⁸

“Menelaus, that traitor to the laws, and to his own country, being [King Antiochus’s] guide: and taking the holy vessels with polluted hands, and with profane hands pulling down the things that were dedicated by other kings to the augmentation and glory and honour of the place, he gave them away.”¹¹⁹

Antiochus IV looted the Second Temple, and “left governors to vex the nation.”¹²⁰ King Antiochus IV then sent Apollonius with an army to put down Jewish rebellion.¹²¹ And Apollonius “slew all them that were gone to the

¹¹³ 2 Maccabees 4:50.

¹¹⁴ 2 Maccabees 5:7.

¹¹⁵ 2 Maccabees 5:11.

¹¹⁶ 2 Maccabees 5:11-14.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ 2 Maccabees 5: 15-16.

¹²⁰ 2 Maccabees 5: 21-22.

¹²¹ 2 Maccabees 5:24-25.

celebrating of the sabbath, and running through the city with weapons slew great multitudes.”¹²²

Hence, under these conditions arose the resistance movement of Mattathias and the military leadership of his son, Judas Maccabeus.¹²³

e. King Antiochus IV attempts to destroy Jewish Culture

King Antiochus IV “sent an old man of Athens to compel the Jews to depart from the laws of their fathers, and not to live after the laws of God.”¹²⁴

A comprehensive system of Hellenization was set in place to oppress and suppress the Jews.¹²⁵ For example, the “Feast of Bacchus” was celebrated in Jerusalem.¹²⁶ The Jews were made to conform to “the manners of the Gentiles.”¹²⁷

Even in Egypt, King Ptolemee also issued “a decree” demanding the Hellenization of the Jews.¹²⁸ This Hellenization process was brutal and deadly.

For example, in the sixth chapter of Second Maccabees is the story of one honorable Jewish elder named Eleazar. “Eleazar, one of the principle scribes, an aged man” was targeted, oppressed, and made an example of, finally dying in honor and dignity as a martyr.¹²⁹

Likewise, in the seventh chapter of Second Maccabees is the story of a mother and her seven sons who were all martyred because they refused to conform to the Gentile laws and customs.¹³⁰

¹²² 2 Maccabees 5:26.

¹²³ 2 Maccabees 5:27.

¹²⁴ 2 Maccabees 6:1.

¹²⁵ 2 Maccabees 6:2-31.

¹²⁶ 2 Maccabees 6:7.

¹²⁷ 2 Maccabees 6:9.

¹²⁸ 2 Maccabee 6:8.

¹²⁹ 2 Maccabees 6:20-31.

¹³⁰ 2 Maccabees 7: 1-42.

f. Judas Maccabeus' Military Revolt

The eighth chapter of Second Maccabees thus describes the rise of Judas Maccabeus' military leadership in defense of the Jews.¹³¹ Judas commenced his guerrilla warfare against the Seleucid empire.

So Maccabaeus called his men together unto the number of six thousand, and exhorted them not to be stricken with terror of the enemy, nor to fear the great multitude of the heathen, who came wrongfully against them; but to fight manfully, and to set before their eyes the injury that they had unjustly done to the holy place, and the cruel handling of the city, whereof they made a mockery, and also the taking away of the government of their forefathers: for they, said he, trust in their weapons and boldness; but our confidence is in the Almighty God, who at a beck can cast down both them that come against us, and also all the world.¹³²

When Judas Maccabees revolted, Seleucid king summoned the merchants of the surrounding nations to come to the region in order to “buy the Jews,” upon their defeat in upcoming warfare.¹³³

g. King Antiochus IV's Sudden Illness and Repentance toward the Jews

In the ninth chapter of Second Maccabees, King Antiochus IV suddenly becomes very ill. During this illness, he began to consider whether his illness some form a divine punishment because of his evil deeds committed against the Jews.¹³⁴

Here therefore, being plagued, he began to leave off his great pride, and to come to the knowledge of himself by the scourge of God, his pain increasing every moment. And when he himself could not abide his own smell, he said these words, It is meet to be subject unto God, and that a man that is mortal should not proudly think of himself, as if he were God.¹³⁵

¹³¹ 2 Maccabees 8:1.

¹³² 2 Maccabees 8:1-19.

¹³³ 2 Maccabees 8:34.

¹³⁴ 2 Maccabees 9:1-11.

¹³⁵ 2 Maccabees 9:11-12.

King Antiochus IV then confesses his sins towards the Jews and commits to them full civil rights and equal citizenship; “he would make them all equals to the citizens of Athens.”¹³⁶ He commits to restoring the holy temple in Jerusalem “all the holy vessels with many more, and out of his own revenue defray the charges belonging to the sacrifices,”¹³⁷ and stating:

Antiochus, king and governor, to the good Jews his citizens wisheth much joy, health, and prosperity: if ye and your children fare well, and your affairs be to your contentment, I give very great thanks to God, having my hope in heaven.¹³⁸

King Antiochus IV (Epithanes) appointed his son Anthiochus V (Eupator) to be his successor and king.¹³⁹ He then asserted that his son will carry out his wishes toward the Jews. King Antiochus IV then dies, presumably fully redeemed in the eyes of the Jews.¹⁴⁰

h. King Antiochus V (Eupator) becomes King of Seleucid Empire

After King Antiochus IV’ death, his young son Antiochus V became king and ruled with a regent named Lysias. The Jews were on friendly terms with the Seleucid empire and were able to rebuild both the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

But many other Seleucid governors of smaller provinces did not wish to carry out King Antiochus IV’s previous orders, and they continually sought ways to oppress the Jews.¹⁴¹

“[T]he governors of several places, Timotheus, and Apollonius the son of Genneus, also Hieronymus, and Demophon... would not suffer [the Jews] to be

¹³⁶ 2 Maccabees 9:15-29.

¹³⁷ 2 Maccabees 9: 16.

¹³⁸ 2 Maccabees 9: 19-20.

¹³⁹ 2 Maccabees 9:25; 10:9-10.

¹⁴⁰ 2 Maccabees 9:29; 10:9-10.

¹⁴¹ 2 Maccabees 10:11-15; 12:1-2.

quiet, and live in peace.”¹⁴² Hence, the compact of peace between the Seleucid empire and Judea was slowly corroded over time.

Tragedy struck when the Greeks drowned 200 innocent Jews.¹⁴³

Judas Maccabeus and his militia were again called into action, and the Jews fought several successful battles.

King Antiochus V’s regent, Lysias, summoned his general, Nicanor, into action. Lysias “took sore displeasure for the things that were done” by Judas Maccabeus and his militia,¹⁴⁴ and gathered 4,000 men and came against the Jews.¹⁴⁵ But when Maccabeus defeated these 4,000 men in battle, Lysias fled Judea.¹⁴⁶

Judas Maccabeus then had great military and political leverage in Judea and in the region. King Antiochus V (Eupator), through his regent Lysias, then succumbed and granted the Jews’ demands.¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, a special military compact was made between the Roman Republic and the Jews.¹⁴⁸

King Antiochus V’ letter granted Jews cultural and religious rights.¹⁴⁹ The Romans also acknowledge Jewish cultural rights as well, thus adopting King Antiochus’ letter.¹⁵⁰ (NOTE: These were “covenants of peace” between the Jews, the Seleucid Greeks, and the Romans.¹⁵¹

¹⁴² 2 Maccabees 12:2.

¹⁴³ 2 Maccabees 12:4.

¹⁴⁴ 2 Maccabees 11:1.

¹⁴⁵ 2 Maccabees 11:2.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Maccabees 11:11-12.

¹⁴⁷ 2 Maccabees 11:15.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Maccabees 11:34-38.

¹⁴⁹ 2 Maccabees 11:22-33.

¹⁵⁰ 2 Maccabees 11: 34-37.

¹⁵¹ 2 Maccabees 12:1.

But, again, the Greek governors of several palaces would not allow the Jews to live quietly.¹⁵² These governors included:

- Timotheus;
- Apollonius;
- Hieronymus;
- Demophon; and,
- Nicanor, governor of Cyprus.

When the 200 Jews were drowned, as previously mentioned,¹⁵³ Judas Maccabeus and his militia were remobilized.

Judas Maccabaeus engaged in several battles and was victorious over all of his opponents. Before going into battle, he engaged in public prayer together with his troops. All of Judas' battles were treated as religious warfare and as carrying out the hand of God, to wit:¹⁵⁴

So when he had committed all to the Creator of the world, and exhorted his soldiers to fight manfully, even unto death, for the laws, the temple, the city, and the country, and the commonwealth, he camped by Modin: and having given the watchword to them that were about him, Victory is of God....¹⁵⁵

Judas was deeply religious and he passionately believed that he had been anointed and called by God to execute his wrath and judgment upon the earth.

i. Demetrius I kills King Antiochus V (Eupator) and Destabilizes Judea

King Seleucus' son, Demetrius I, killed Lysias and his cousin King Antiochus Eupator.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² 2 Maccabees 12:12-1-4.

¹⁵³ 2 Maccabees 12:4.

¹⁵⁴ 2 Maccabees 12: 14-15.

¹⁵⁵ 2 Maccabees 13:14-15.

¹⁵⁶ 2 Maccabees 14:1.

King Demetrius I then revoked the previous covenants of peace with the Jews.

- Nicanor was made governor of Judea¹⁵⁷
- Alcimus was made high priest.¹⁵⁸

At first, Governor Nicanor was friendly with Judas Maccabeus.¹⁵⁹ But Alcimus did not like this friendship, and persuaded King Demetrius against Nicanor's friendliness towards Judas Maccabeus. Governor Nicanor slowly turned against Judas Maccabeus, and so Maccabeus fled.¹⁶⁰

Governor Nicanor then commenced a brutal campaign of Hellenization and sought to make an example of a high-ranking, well-respected Jewish person for all of Judea to take note. Nicanor found such an example in a Jewish man named Razi. Razi was a respected Jewish elder and "a father of the Jews."¹⁶¹ "So Nicanor willing to declare the hate that he bare unto the Jews, sent above five hundred men of war to take him [i.e., Razi]: for he thought by taking him to do the Jews much hurt."¹⁶² But Razi committed suicide rather than be taken by Nicanor.¹⁶³

Then "Nicanor in exceeding pride and haughtiness determined to set up a publick monument of his victory over Judas and them that were with him," even before they engaged in battle."¹⁶⁴

But Judas Maccabeus comforted his own Jewish soldiers and shared with them a great vision that he had where he saw Onias the High Priest and Jeremy the Prophet give him a "sword of gold" and said, "Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with the which thou shalt would the adversaries."¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ 2 Maccabees 14:12.

¹⁵⁸ 2 Maccabees 14:13.

¹⁵⁹ 2 Maccabees 14: 23-25.

¹⁶⁰ 2 Maccabees 14: 30.

¹⁶¹ 2 Maccabees 14: 37.

¹⁶² 2 Maccabees 14: 39-40.

¹⁶³ 2 Maccabees 14: 41-43.

¹⁶⁴ 2 Maccabees 15:5.

¹⁶⁵ 2 Maccabees 15:16.

Upon hearing the words of Maccabeus' vision, the Jewish soldiers were highly inspired to fight.¹⁶⁶ Maccabeus and his men subsequently smote 35,000 men, and slew Nicanor. This was a great victory for Judas Maccabeus and the Jews, and it sealed his legendary status amongst the Maccabean Jewish army. The book of Second Maccabees is then concluded: Judas Maccabeus is hence memorialized and given a legendary status.

In the ninth chapter of First Maccabees, we learn that Judas Maccabees is eventually severely outnumbered and defeated by King Demetrius I's army.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ 2 Maccabees 15:17.

¹⁶⁷ 1 Maccabees 9.

Chapter Four

“The War of the Jews, 160- 37 BC”

After Judas Maccabeus’ death in 160 BC, his brother Jonathan Apphus, 160–143 BC (High Priest from 152 BC)), replaced him as military leader.¹⁶⁸

When High Priest Alcimus was stricken with a disease and died,¹⁶⁹ Judea’s governor Bacchides returned to see King Demetrius I in Syria, thus giving Jonathan and his men time to regroup.

Later, Jonathan defeated governor Bacchides in battle.¹⁷⁰

A compact of peace is then reached between Bacchides and Jonathan.¹⁷¹ And Jonathan then “destroyed the ungodly [Jewish] men out of Israel.”¹⁷²

a. Alexander, the son of Antiochus V, challenges and defeats King Demetrius I

King Antiochus V’s (Epiphanes) other son, Alexander, arose to challenge King Demetrius I for the Seleucid throne.

Under these conditions, King Demetrius I sent an olive branch, and tried to befriend, Jonathan of the Jews.

King Alexander also reached out to befriend Jonathan of the Jews.¹⁷³

Hence, the Jews were again caught between two dangerous political rivals, and this was the circumstance:

- The Jews did not trust King Demetrius I;

¹⁶⁸ 1 Maccabees 9:31.

¹⁶⁹ 1 Maccabees 9:55-56.

¹⁷⁰ 1 Maccabees 9:68-69.

¹⁷¹ 1 Maccabees 9:70-71.

¹⁷² 1 Maccabees 9:73.

¹⁷³ 1 Maccabees 10:1- 45.

- The Jews were willing to give Alexander a chance to rule; “with Alexander they were well pleased....”;¹⁷⁴
- Alexander’s forces soon were gathered together to go to war with King Demetrius I;¹⁷⁵
- Alexander’s military forces defeated King Demetrius I’s host in battle;¹⁷⁶
- King Demetrius I was killed;¹⁷⁷
- Alexander became known as “King Alexander Balas”;
- King Alexander Balas sent an ambassador to King Ptolemee VI of Egypt, and offered to marry Cleopatra Thea, the daughter of King Ptolemee VI, and to form an alliance;¹⁷⁸
- Afterwards, Jonathan met with King Alexander Balas and King Ptolemee VI; the two kings acknowledged Jonathan as the undisputed leader of the Jews; and, later, Jonathan returned to Jerusalem with peace and gladness;¹⁷⁹
- Immediately, Jonathan’s enemies—i.e., certain jealous Jews—brought false charges against Jonathan before the newly-installed King Alexander Balas. King Alexander Balas refused to hear or accept those false claims.¹⁸⁰

Hence, King Demetrius I was no dead. A new king, Alexander Balas, was not ruler of the Seleucid empire. This new king favored Judas Maccabees’ younger brother, Jonathan, to be the ruler and leader of the Jews. But the peace in ancient Judea remained fragile.

¹⁷⁴ 1 Maccabees 9:47.

¹⁷⁵ 1 Maccabees 9:48.

¹⁷⁶ 1 Maccabees 9:49.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Maccabees 9:50.

¹⁷⁸ 1 Maccabees 9:51-58.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ 1 Maccabees 9:66.

b. King Ptolemy VI of Egypt and King Alexander Balas of Seleucid Syria suddenly went to war against each other

The fragile geopolitical peace was finally broken when Ptolemee VI King of Egypt suddenly conspires to overthrow King Alexander Balas.¹⁸¹

Although King Alexander Balas was married to Cleopatra Thea, who was the daughter of King Ptolemee VI, the said King Ptolemee nevertheless desired to end that marriage and to give his daughter in marriage to King Demetrius II Nicator (son of Demetrius the elder who was slain).

King Ptolemee VI and King Alexander then go to war with each other;¹⁸² and King Ptoleme prevailed in the battle.¹⁸³

Meanwhile, King Alexander fled to Arabia,¹⁸⁴ where Zabdiel the Arabian took off King Alexander's head.¹⁸⁵

Soon thereafter, King Ptolemee VI died. This power vacuum left King Demetrius II Nicator (the younger) as the undisputed king over both Greece and Egypt.¹⁸⁶ Cleopatra Thea served as his co-regent wife.

In ancient Judea, the ungodly Jews then catered to the new King Demetrius II Nicator,¹⁸⁷ and they turned against Judas Maccabeus's younger brother Jonathan. These ungodly Jews tried to turn the new king against Jonathan.

But King Demetrius II decided to promote and befriend Jonathan, and he confirmed Jonathan as the High Priest of Judea.

¹⁸¹ 1 Maccabees 11:1.

¹⁸² 1 Maccabees 11:15-16.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ 1 Maccabees 11:17.

¹⁸⁶ 1 Maccabees 11:19.

¹⁸⁷ 1 Maccabees 11:21.

Moreover, King Demetrius II agreed to relieve Judea of many tributary burdens.¹⁸⁸

Demetrius II ruled the Seleucid Empire for two periods, separated by a number of years of captivity in Hyrcania in Parthia, first from September 145 BC to July/August 138 BC, and again from 129 BC until his death in 125 BC.

His brother Antiochus VII ruled the Seleucid Empire during the interim period between his two reigns.¹⁸⁹

But intrigue against King Demetria II soon began, as King Alexander Balas' young son, Antiochus VI, had been groomed to overthrow King Demetrius II Nicator (the younger).¹⁹⁰

King Demetrius II was soon dethroned.¹⁹¹ The region of Judea was again destabilized.

c. Diodotus Tryphon, as Regent to Antiochus VI, Rises to Power

King Antiochus VI (“a young child”),¹⁹² was established as king.¹⁹³ His administration was apparently secured through a regency directed by Diodotus Tryphon.

Antiochus VI did not actually rule. Either already in 145 or in early 144 BC he was nominated by the general Diodotus Tryphon as heir to the throne in opposition to Demetrius II, and remained the general's tool.

In circa 142/141 BC, the young king died. While some ancient authors make Diodotus Tryphon responsible for the death of the king, others write that he died during a surgery.

¹⁸⁸ 1 Maccabees 11:28-29.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ 1 Maccabees 11:39-40.

¹⁹¹ 1 Maccabees 11:55.

¹⁹² 1 Maccabees 11:54.

¹⁹³ 1 Maccabees 11:54-57.

King Antiochus VI, perhaps through Tryphon, had befriended Jonathan.¹⁹⁴ He reconfirmed Jonathan as the High Priest of Judea. And Jonathan's brother, Simon, was made the military captain of Judea. At the same time, Jonathan as High Priest reaffirmed the covenants of friendship and peace with the Roman Republic.¹⁹⁵

According to the First Maccabees, Diodotus Tryphon conspired to kill the child King Antiochus VI, to wit: "Now Tryphon went about to get the kingdom of Asia, and to kill Antiochus the king, that he might set the crown upon his own head."¹⁹⁶ Tryphon slew "the young king Antiochus."¹⁹⁷ Tryphon crowned himself the king of Asia.¹⁹⁸

A brief description of Tryphon's biography helps to elucidate this history, to wit:

Diodotus Tryphon (Greek: Διόδοτος Τρύφων), nicknamed "The Magnificent" (Greek: Ὁ Μεγαλοπρεπής) was a Greek king of the Seleucid Empire. Initially an official under King Alexander I Balas, he led a revolt against Alexander's successor Demetrius II Nicator in 144 BC. He rapidly gained control of most of Syria and the Levant. At first, he acted as regent and tutor for Alexander's infant son Antiochus VI Dionysus, but after the death of his charge in 142/141 BC, **Diodotus declared himself king.** He took the royal name Tryphon Autocrator (Greek: Τρύφων Αὐτοκράτωρ) and distanced himself from the Seleucid dynasty. For a period between 139 and 138, he was the sole ruler of the Seleucid empire. However, in 138 BC Demetrius II's brother Antiochus VII Sidetes invaded Syria and brought his rule to an end.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ 1 Maccabees 11:57-58.

¹⁹⁵ 1 Maccabees 12: 1-20.

¹⁹⁶ 1 Maccabees 12:39.

¹⁹⁷ 1 Maccabees 13:31.

¹⁹⁸ 1 Maccabees 13:32.

¹⁹⁹ "Diodotus Tryphon," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diodotus_Tryphon

The High Priest of Judea, Jonathan—younger brother of Judas Maccabaeus— was soon captured inside the gates of Ptolemais and slain with the sword.²⁰⁰

The Jews of ancient Judea were again in disarray.

d. **Simon, brother of Judas Maccabaeus and Jonathan, becomes High Priest and Governor of Judea**

Simon Thassi, 142–135 BC (Ethnarch and High Priest), the brother of Judas Maccabaeus and Jonathan Apphus, took the helm of Jewish leadership, becoming both governor, leader, and High Priest.²⁰¹

Soon thereafter, Simon vowed to “avenge my nation.”²⁰²

Simon first negotiated, but then he decided to go to war, with Diodotus Tryphon.²⁰³

Simon built upon Judea’s strongholds and defenses,²⁰⁴ as he prepared for war with Tryphon.²⁰⁵ Simon also made his son John—the grandson of Mattathias—the captain of all the hosts of Judea.²⁰⁶

Now the Jews gained an unexpected ally in the dethroned King Demetrius II, who gathered together forces to fight Tryphon.²⁰⁷

But Arsces, the king of Persia, intercepted and captured Demetrius II.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ 1 Maccabees 12:48.

²⁰¹ 1 Maccabees 13:1-8; 42.

²⁰² 1 Maccabees 13:6.

²⁰³ 1 Maccabees 13: 14-22.

²⁰⁴ 1 Maccabees 13: 33-37.

²⁰⁵ 1 Maccabees 13: 42-44.

²⁰⁶ 1 Maccabees 13:53.

²⁰⁷ 1 Maccabees 14:1.

²⁰⁸ 1 Maccabees 14:2.

However, Demetrius II's brother, Antiochus VII Sidetes, carried out the plans to make war against King Tryphon.

Under Simon's leadership, the Jews again renewed their friendship with the Roman Republic.²⁰⁹

Simon and King Tryphon exchanged diplomatic communications, but King Tryphon was only more perplexed and displeased with Simon.

King Antiochus VII Sidetes and King Tryphon declared war with each other.

Under these conditions, the aging Simon called his two eldest sons, Judas and John, and appointed them to leadership positions and directs them to go and fight.²¹⁰

But tragically Simon and two of his sons, Mattathia and Judas were slain in the conflict.

Simon's son John became High Priest, warded off the enemies, and led Judea, and this history was "written in the chronicles of his priesthood."²¹¹

Hence the Books of the First and Second Maccabees covers only the first five leaders of the Hasmonean Dynasty, to wit: Mattathias, Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan Apphus, Simon Thassi, and John Hyracanus I.

THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY **(First and Second Maccabees)**

Maccabees (rebel leaders)

- 1. Mattathias, 170–167 BC**
- 2. Judas Maccabeus, 167–160 BC**
- 3. Jonathan Apphus, 160–143 BC (High Priest from 152 BC)**

Monarchs (Ethnarchs and Kings) and High Priests

- 11. Simon Thassi, 142–135 BC (Ethnarch and High Priest)**

²⁰⁹ 1 Maccabees 14:16-17.

²¹⁰ 1 Maccabees 16:1-4.

²¹¹ 1 Maccabees 16:24.

12. **John Hyrcanus I**, 134–104 BC (Ethnarch and High Priest)
13. **Aristobulus I**, 104–103 BE (King and High Priest)
14. **Alexander Jannaeus**, 103–76 BC (King and High Priest)
15. **Salome Alexandra**, 76–67 BC (the only Queen)
16. **John Hyrcanus II**, 67–66 BC (King from 67 BCE; High Priest, 76 BC)
17. **Aristobulus II**, 66–63 BC (King and High Priest)
18. **John Hyrcanus II** (restored by the Roman General Pompey the Great), 63–40 BC (High Priest from 63 BC; Ethnarch from 47 BC)
19. **Antigonus**, 40–37 BC (King and High Priest)
20. **Aristobulus III**, 36 BC (only High Priest)

The remaining leader of the Hasmonean dynasty are covered in Josephus's *The War of the Jews*.²¹²

²¹² See, e.g., William Whiston, *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1998).

Chapter Five

“The Last Eight Leaders of the Hasmonean Dynasty And the Rise of Herod the Great”

The Gospel of Matthew opens during the time period of Herod the Great,²¹³ but it does not provide us with any historical context of Herod’s reign. To attain that context, we must look to the historian Josephus’ *The Wars of the Jews*.²¹⁴

The Last Eight Leaders of the Jewish Hasmonean Dynasty in ancient Judea

1. **Aristobulus I**, 104–103 BC (King and High Priest)
2. **Alexander Jannaeus**, 103–76 BC (King and High Priest)
3. **Salome Alexandra**, 76–67 BC (the only Queen)
4. **Hyrcanus II**, 67–66 BC (King from 67 BCE; High Priest, 76 BC)
5. **Aristobulus II**, 66–63 BC (King and High Priest)
6. **Hyrcanus II** (restored), 63–40 BC (High Priest from 63 BC; Ethnarch from 47 BC)
7. **Antigonus**, 40–37 BC (King and High Priest)
8. **Aristobulus III**, 36 BC (only High Priest)

- Herod the Great executed all of the last surviving male members of the Hasmonean Dynasty, even executing three of his own sons,²¹⁵ who were born to his wife Mariamne, a sister of Hasmonean High Priest Aristobulus III.²¹⁶

The Herodian Dynasty in ancient Judea

1. **Antipater the Idumaen** (47 – 44 BC)
2. **Herod the Great** (72 BC – 1 BC) * **Jesus Christ is born.**
3. Phasel (Governor of Jerusalem) (47 – 40 BC)
4. Pheroras (Governor of Perea)(20 BC to 5 AD)

²¹³ Matthew 2:1-23.

²¹⁴ See, e.g., William Whiston, *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1998), pp. 655-716.

²¹⁵ Ibid. [Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*], pp. 694-698.

²¹⁶ “Herod the Great,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great

5. Herod Archelaus (Ethnarch of Judeah)(4 – 6 AD)
6. Herod Antipas (Tetrach of Galilee)(4 – 39 AD)
7. Philip the Tetrach (Tetrach of Batanala)(4- 34 AD)
8. Salome I (Tetrach of Jabneh)4 – 10 AD)
9. Tigrans V of Armenia (6-12 AD)
10. Herod Agrippa (37 – 44 AD)
11. Herod of Chalcis (41- 48 AD)
12. Herod Agrippa (48 – 100 AD)

King Aristobulus I (104 – 103 BC) was the first Jewish king in ancient Judea since King Zedekiah, who was captured and killed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. Josephus summarizes his reign as follows: “How Aristobulus was the first that put a diadem about his head; and, after he had put his mother and brother to death, died himself, when he had reigned no more than a year.”²¹⁷

Josephus states that he was the first Jew in "four hundred and eighty three years and three months" to have established a monarchy since the return from the Babylonian Captivity. Aristobulus was not only the first king from the Hasmonean lineage, but the first of any Hebrew king to claim both the high priesthood and kingship title. The Sadducees and the Essenes were not concerned about Aristobulus taking the title of king, but the Pharisees were infuriated; They felt that the kingship could only be held by the descendants of the Davidic line. The Pharisees began a massive rebellion, but Aristobulus died before any attempt to depose of him could occur.

The major historical sources of his life are Josephus's *Wars of the Jews* and *Antiquities of the Jews*.²¹⁸

Thus, Aristobulus “changed the government into a kingdom,” which led to fierce protests from family members and others, leading to the execution of his own mother.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Josephus, “The Wars of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 658.

²¹⁸ Source: “Aristobulus I,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristobulus_I

²¹⁹ Josephus, “The Wars of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 658-659.

King Alexander Jannaeus (103 to 76 BC) assumed the throne at the age of 22 and reigned for 27 years as the second Hasmonean king.²²⁰ He, too, was both High Priest and King. He successfully waged war against Egypt and King Ptolemy IX Lathros. He also successfully waged an internal civil war amongst his fellow Jewish brethren.²²¹ He had a reputation for being bloody, ruthless, and tyrannical.

Alexander Jannaeus (Greek: Ἀλέξανδρος Ἰανναῖος Aléxandros Iannaîos; Hebrew: יַנַּא'י Yanna'y; born Jonathan יְחִנְנִיָּהוּ) was the second king of the Hasmonean dynasty, who ruled over an expanding kingdom of Judea from 103 to 76 BCE. A son of John Hyrcanus, he inherited the throne from his brother Aristobulus I, and married his brother's widow, Queen Salome Alexandra. From his conquests to expand the kingdom to a bloody civil war, Alexander's reign has been generalised as cruel and oppressive with never-ending conflict. The major historical sources of Alexander's life are Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish War*.²²²

Josephus concludes his biography of King Alexander, stating, “by making such expeditions at unseasonable times, and forcing his body to undergo greater hardships than it was able to bear, he brought himself to his end.”²²³ One may rightly say that King Alexander Jannaeus, who was the second Hasmonean king, engaged in Machiavellian politics, and that he did whatsoever he believed was necessary to hold power for twenty-seven years.

Queen Salome Alexandra (76 – 67 BC) is known for her tolerance and protection of the Pharisees, who had previously been oppressed by her husband King Alexander Jannaeus, before he died in 76 BC. Her own brother had been president of the Pharisees. During her reign, the Pharisees became an elite and ruling class within ancient Judea. Much of this had to do with the fact that Queen Alexandra was a pious woman. On this very point, Josephus writes:

Now Alexander left the kingdom to Alexandra his wife, and depended upon it that the Jews would now very readily submit to her; because she had been very averse to such cruelty as he had treated them with, and had opposed his violation of their laws, and had thereby got the

²²⁰ Josephus, “The Wars of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 659-661.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Source: “Alexander Jannaeus,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Jannaeus

²²³ Josephus, “The Wars of the Jews,” *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 661.

good will of the people. Nor was he mistaken as to this expectations; for this woman kept the dominion, by the opinion that the people had of her piety; for she chiefly studied the ancient customs of her country, and cast those men out of the government that offended against their holy laws.

And as she had two sons by Alexander, she made Hyrcanus, the elder, high priest, on account of his inactive temper noway disposing him to disturb the public. But she retained the youner, Aristobulus, with her as a private person, by reason of the warmth of his temper.

And now the Pharisees joined themselves to her, to assist her in the government. These are a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately. Now, Alexandra hearkened to them to an extraordinary degree, as being herself a woman of great piety towards God.

But these Pharisees artfully insinuated themselves into her favor by little and little, and became themselves the real administrators of the public affairs....²²⁴

During Queen Alexandra's reign, "the *Sanhedrin* was reorganized according to [the Pharisees] wishes and became a *supreme court* for the administration of justice and religious matters, the guidance of which was placed in the hands of the Pharisees."²²⁵

Salome Alexandra, or Shlomtzion (Greek: Σαλώμη Ἀλεξάνδρα; Hebrew: שַׁלְמֹנְטִיּוֹן, Šəlōmšīyyōn; 141–67 BCE), was one of three women to rule over Judea, the other two being Athaliah and Devora [Prophetess Deborah].²²⁶ The wife of Aristobulus I, and afterward of Alexander Jannaeus, she was the last regnant queen of Judea, and the last ruler of Judea to die as the sovereign of an independent kingdom.²²⁷

²²⁴ Ibid., pp. 661-662.

²²⁵ Source: "Salome Alexandra," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salome_Alexandra

²²⁶ Since Deborah was a "prophetess" and a "judge," this does not automatically qualify her to be called Queen. This is especially true, since Israel had not yet founded or established the Office of a King within its constitution. Later, the Prophet Samuel had forewarned against establishing a Kingship in Israel.

²²⁷ Source: "Salome Alexandra," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salome_Alexandra.

At the time of the birth of Christ, the Pharisees were still a dominant Jewish sect within the Sanhedrin (i.e., Jewish court) in ancient Judea. They were the chief interpreters of Jewish customary and constitutional law. Their primary function was to preserve the integrity of orthodox Judaism and the ancient Mosaic constitution.

High Priest and King John Hyrcanus II (67 – 66 BC), who was the elder son of Queen Alexandra Salome, had difficulty holding power as king, perhaps due in large measure to his humble character. He was no Machiavellian politician. He did not serve as king for very long. He had been a High Priest for nearly a decade before becoming king of Judea.

John Hyrcanus II (/hər'keɪnəs/, Hebrew: יוחנן הרקנוס Yohanan Hurqanos) (died 30 BCE), a member of the Hasmonean dynasty, was for a long time the Jewish High Priest in the 1st century BCE. He was also briefly King of Judea 67–66 BCE and then the ethnarch (ruler) of Judea, probably over the period 47–40 BCE....

Hyrcanus had scarcely reigned three months when Aristobulus II rose in rebellion. Hyrcanus advanced against him at the head of his mercenaries and his followers. The brothers met in a battle near Jericho with many of Hyrcanus' soldiers going over to Aristobulus II, and thereby gave the latter the victory.

Hyrcanus took refuge in the citadel of Jerusalem; but the capture of the Temple by Aristobulus II compelled Hyrcanus to surrender. A peace was then concluded in which Hyrcanus was to renounce the throne and the office of high priest, but was to enjoy the revenues of the latter office.²²⁸

Although King Hyrcanus was deposed by his younger brother and lost the crown, he would later find an ally in Emperor Pompey of the Roman Republic, who later restored him to the throne.

King Herod the Great's father, an Idumean named Antipater, was instrumental in bringing King Hyrcanus back to the throne. Aristobulus did so through his influence with the Romans, Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great.²²⁹

²²⁸ Source: "Hyrcanus II," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyrcanus_II

²²⁹ Josephus, "The Wars of the Jews," *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 662-664.

King Aristobulus II (66 – 63 BC), who was the younger son of Queen Alexandra Salome, was also both High Priest and King. He led a successful revolt to remove his older brother John Hyrcanus II from the kingship.

Aristobulus shared his late father's views on religion and politics. He entertained designs upon the throne, even during the life of his mother. He courted the nobles and military party by constituting himself the patron of the Sadducees and bringing their cause before the queen. The many fortresses which the queen placed at the disposal of the Sadducees, ostensibly for their defense against the Pharisees, constituted in reality one of the preparatory moves of Aristobulus for the usurpation of the government. The queen sought to direct his military zeal outside Judea, and sent him (70-69) against Ptolemy Mennaeus; but when the undertaking failed, Aristobulus resumed his political intrigues. He left Jerusalem secretly and betook himself to his friends, who controlled the largest number of fortified places, with the intention of making war against his aged mother. But the queen died at the critical moment, and he immediately turned his weapons against his brother Hyrcanus, the legitimate heir to the throne.²³⁰

King Aristobulus II was later taken prisoner by Pompey and the Roman Republic, which, in turn, restored his older brother Hyrcanus II to the throne.²³¹ Pompey became the arbitrator between the dispute between the two brothers, Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II.²³² The party favoring Hyrcanus II favored allowing the Roman general Pompey into the city of Jerusalem, whereas the party favoring Aristobulus II did not.²³³ In the end, Pompey took Jerusalem by force, bound Aristobulus II, and imprisoned him in Rome. Pompey then established Hyrcanus II as Rome's client-governor for ancient Judea.²³⁴ From that moment in history, through the

²³⁰ Source: "Aristobulus II," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristobulus_II

²³¹ Josephus, "The Wars of the Jews," *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, pp. 662-664.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

next several centuries, the Romans governed ancient Judea through client rulers, governors, and kings.²³⁵

As previously mentioned, Hyrcanus II was restored between 63- 47 BC), after he had appealed to Pompey, leader of the Roman Republic for support.

When Pompey arrived in Syria in 63 BCE, both brothers and a third party that desired the removal of the entire dynasty (according to some sources, these may have been the representatives of the Pharisees), sent their delegates to Pompey, who delayed making a decision. **He favoured Hyrcanus over Aristobulus, deeming the elder, weaker brother a more reliable ally of the Roman Empire.**

Aristobulus, suspicious of Pompey's intentions, entrenched himself in the fortress of Alexandrium, but when the Roman army approached Judea, he surrendered and undertook to deliver Jerusalem over to them.

However, since many of his followers were unwilling to open the gates, the Romans besieged and captured the city by force, badly damaging city and the temple.

Aristobulus was taken to Rome a prisoner and Hyrcanus restored as high priest in Jerusalem.²³⁶

But despite the help from the Romans, Hyrcanus was later taken prisoner and held captive to Babylon by the Parthians, who sought to install Aristobulus II's son, Antigonus II, to the throne. The Parthians were successful in achieving this objective.

As previously stated, King Antigonus II Mattathias (40 to 37 BC) was the son of Aristobulus II and the nephew of Hyrcanus II. He was an energetic and rebellious zealot who entertained ideas of dethroning his uncle Hyrcanus II.

Antigonus was the second son of Aristobulus II, and together with his father, were carried off to Rome as prisoners by Pompey in 63 BCE. Antigonus eventually escaped and returned to Judaea in 57 BCE....

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Source: "Hyrcanus II," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyrcanus_II

He visited Julius Caesar, who was in Syria in 47 BCE, and complained of the usurpation of Antipater²³⁷ and Hyrcanus II.

In 42 BCE, he attempted to seize the government of Judaea by force with the assistance of his brother-in-law, Ptolemy, but was defeated by Herod....

The excessive taxation wrung from the people to pay for the extravagances of Mark Antony and Cleopatra had inspired a deep hatred against Rome. Antigonus gained the allegiance of both the aristocratic class in Jerusalem and the leaders of the Pharisees.

The Parthians, who invaded Syria in 40 BCE, preferred to see an anti-Roman ruler on the throne of Judaea. When Antigonus promised them large sums of gold as well as five hundred female slaves, the Parthians put five hundred warriors at his disposal. After Antigonus, with Parthian help, conquered Jerusalem, Hyrcanus was sent to Babylon after having his ears mutilated, which rendered him unfit for the office of High Priest of Israel. Herod fled from Jerusalem, and in 40 BCE **Antigonus was officially proclaimed king and high priest by the Parthians....**

²³⁷ Antipater was the father of Herod the Great. See, e.g., “Antipater I,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antipater_the_Idumaeen”

Antipater I the Idumaean[a] (born 113 or 114 BCE,[1] died 43 BCE) was the founder of the Herodian Dynasty and father of Herod the Great. According to Josephus, he was the son of Antipas[b] and had formerly held that name.

A native of Idumaea, a region southeast of Judah in which the Edomites settled during the classical period, Antipater became a powerful official under the later Hasmonean kings and subsequently became a client of the Roman general Pompey the Great when Pompey conquered Judah in the name of Roman Republic.

When **Julius Caesar defeated Pompey, Antipater rescued Caesar in Alexandria, and was made chief minister of Judea**, as Judah became known to the Romans, with the right to collect taxes. **Antipater eventually made his sons Phasaelus and Herod the governors of Jerusalem and Galilee**, respectively.

After the assassination of Caesar, Antipater was forced to side with Gaius Cassius Longinus against Mark Antony. **The pro-Roman politics of Antipater led to his increasing unpopularity among the devout, non-Hellenised Jews.** He died by poison.

The diplomacy and artful politics of Antipater, as well as his insinuation into the Hasmonean court, paved the way for the rise of his son Herod the Great, who used this position to marry the Hasmonean princess Mariamne, endear himself to Rome and become king of Judea under Roman influence.

Following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Parthians, Herod fled quickly from Masada to Rome, where he was nominated in 40 BCE as the new king of Judea (Latin: *Rex socius et amicus populi Romani*, allied king and friend of the Roman people) by the Senate on the recommendation of the triumvir Mark Antony.

On Herod's return to Judaea from Rome in 39 BCE he opened a campaign against Antigonus and laid siege to Jerusalem. In the spring of 38 BCE, Herod wrested control of the province of Galilee and eventually all of Judea other than Jerusalem. Due to the approach of winter, Herod postponed his siege of Jerusalem, where Antigonus and the remnants of his army took refuge, until spring. Herod and a supporting Roman army were kept out of Jerusalem for 3–5 months but the Romans did eventually capture the city. The supporters of Antigonus fought until the Romans reached the inner courtyard of the Temple. Antigonus was taken to Antioch and executed, ending Hasmonean rule [in 37 BC].²³⁸

This is how the Roman Republic, and later the Roman empire, gained a firm foothold into ancient Judea— through a method of slow and quiet diplomacy, and of strategy of divide and conquer, playing one Jewish group off against another, until the whole of Judea fell into Roman hands. After Julius Caesar defeated Pompey, and became Roman dictator for life, Antipater joined Julius Caesar's faction. Caesar made Antipater "procurator of Judea; as does Antipater appoint Phasaelus to be governor of Jerusalem, and Herod governor of Galilee."²³⁹ *The politics of Jesus of Nazareth must be placed within this context and backdrop.*

Now King Herod, who was ethnically an Idumean but religiously a Jew, represented a changing of the guard in the geopolitical leadership from the Greeks to the Roman empire. "Herod the Great, was a Roman Jewish client king of Judea, referred to as the Herodian kingdom."²⁴⁰

Herod's rule marked a new beginning in the history of Judea. Judea had been ruled autonomously by the Hasmonean kings from 140 until 63 BCE. The Hasmonean kings retained their titles, but became

²³⁸ Source: "Antigonus II," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antigonus_II_Mattathias

²³⁹ Josephus, "The Wars of the Jews," *Josephus: The Complete Works*, supra, p. 669.

²⁴⁰ Source: "Herod the Great," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great

clients of Rome after the conquest by Pompey in 63 BCE. Herod overthrew the Hasmonean Antigonus in a three-year-long war between 37 and 34 BCE, ruled under Roman overlordship until his death ca. 4 BCE, and officially passed on the throne to his sons, thus establishing his own, so-called Herodian dynasty.²⁴¹

Significantly, one of the first things King Herod the Great did when coming to full power was to dismiss the priests associated with the Hasmonean dynasty, and elevate priests from Jewish families that came from the diaspora.²⁴²

For instance, one of King Herod's most ferocious acts was to have the last scion of the Hasmonean dynasty, who was the High Priest, killed, because Herod feared his political influence and popularity with the Jewish people, to wit:

To secure himself against danger from [the last scion of the Hasmonean royal house and High Priest, Aristobulus III (53 – 36 BC)] Herod instituted a system of espionage against him and his mother. This surveillance proved so onerous that they sought to gain their freedom by taking refuge with Cleopatra. As told by the Roman Jewish historian Josephus, their plans were betrayed and the disclosure had the effect of greatly increasing Herod's suspicions against his brother-in-law. As Herod dared not resort to open violence, he caused him to be drowned while he was bathing in a pool in Jericho during a banquet organized by Aristobulus' mother.²⁴³

Thus, Herod the Great created a ruling religious class of Jewish priests that was loyal to both the Herodian kings and the Roman empire.²⁴⁴ This means that the Jewish priesthood during the time of Christ's birth, and for the next three decades during his lifetime, was Herodian and pro-Roman. The political implications of Jesus's spiritual kingdom—though misunderstood at the time by Jewish and Roman authorities—was a direct threat to King Herod and the Herodian-Roman political system in Judea.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Source: "How Jewish was Herod," *The Torah*, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/how-jewish-was-herod>

²⁴³ Source: "Aristobulus III of Judea," Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristobulus_III_of_Judea

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

The Gospel of Matthew’s description of King Herod the Great, and the historical account of the times in which Jesus was born, are credible, since they correlate perfectly with the historical records and secular descriptions of the same personalities and time period.

The Gospel of Matthew, for instance, states that “when [King Herod] saw that he was mocked of the wise men, [he] sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.”²⁴⁵ This description of Herod the Great correlates with the historical records of his other devious tendencies and drastic measures to secure his own political position, authority, and influence. Herod the Great’s reputation was so dangerous, that even Joseph and Mary, the proud parents of Jesus, did not trust Herod’s son, Herod Archelaus (Ethnarch of Judea)(4 – 6 AD), and refused to return to Judea, but instead settled in Galilee, in the town of Nazareth.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Matthew 2:16.

²⁴⁶ Matthew 2:20-23.

CONCLUSION

There is no wonder why Jesus of Nazareth himself rejected the worldly nature of the Hasmonean and Herodian monarchies. When he was born, the last Jewish kings had been killed, captured, or destroyed, whether we utilize the date 586 BC, when King Nebuchadnezzar captured King Zedekia; or whether we use the date 37 B.C., when Idumean King Herod had finally destroyed the last Hasmonean Jewish Antigonus II Mattathias. As an Idumean, King Herod was a descendant of the Edomites (the lineage tracing its roots to Esau, the brother of Jacob or Israel). The Greek name for Edom was Idumean. “During the 2nd century BC, the Edomites were forcibly converted to Judaism by the Hasmoneans, and were incorporated into the Jewish nation.”²⁴⁷

King Herod, then, had no legitimate blood lineage to the throne of David, whether through the tribe of Judah or any other of the twelve tribes of Israel. In a word, no self-respecting Jew who understood these things could easily accept Herod as a legitimate king of Judea. Herod had been elected by the Roman Senate and forced upon the Jewish people through cut-throat diplomacy, assassination, intrigue, and military might.²⁴⁸

The first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, which “is the gospel written by a Jew to Jews about a Jew,”²⁴⁹ clarified the Davidic lineage of Jesus of Nazareth, recounting 42 generations.²⁵⁰ For, indeed, it is clear that even none of the Hasmonean kings and ethnarchs could claim the same royal lineage as Jesus of Nazareth. We know, then, that given the tumultuous intrigue of the Hasmonean dynasty (175 – 37 BC), as recounted in First and Second Maccabees and in Josephus’ *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*, that Jesus’ right to the throne of Israel, as argued by the Apostle Matthew in the Gospel of Matthew, would likely have been hotly contested by the Hasmonean heirs—resulting in yet another chapter of political intrigue, in-fighting, and civil war.

By the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, Herod the Great had already captured the Second Temple (i.e., the Herodian Temple), circa 516 – 70 AD. The Jewish Sanhedrin was beholden to King Herod and the Roman empire. Some of the Jews of the first century, A.D., must have anticipated that the new Messiah or

²⁴⁷ Source: “Edom,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edom>

²⁴⁸ Source: “Herod the Great,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great

²⁴⁹ King James Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), p. 1233.

²⁵⁰ Matthew 1:1-17.

Christ would carry on the military strategies and political traditions of Mattathias, Judas Maccabeus, and King Antigonus II Mattathias. They were looking for the Second Temple to be restored, and for a Davidic king to be re-enthroned, in the same manner in which they had previously existed in Jewish history, as recounted in First and Second Maccabees, and in Josephus' *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*.

Jesus of Nazareth, however, instituted a kingdom more eternal and much vaster than his Jewish or Roman contemporaries could have ever imagined. This is why he informed the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate, saying:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence....

Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.²⁵¹

“Sanctify them,” said Jesus, “through thy truth: thy word is truth.”²⁵² “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come,” said Jesus, “he will guide you into all truth....”²⁵³ A kingdom of truth, superior to all other earthly political dominions, then, is what Jesus brought to the earth.

But perhaps, the most radical and potent weapon of all, that of *passive resistance* to falsehood²⁵⁴ coupled with a genuine “agape” love towards one’s enemies (in this case, the ancient Romans),²⁵⁵ and a *willingness to accept martyrdom*,²⁵⁶ unleashed the most potent political force in human history: the visible and invisible New Testament Christian Church.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ John 18:36-37.

²⁵² John 17: 17.

²⁵³ John 16:13.

²⁵⁴ See, e.g., Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92, describing the political methods of the Early Christian Church, as follows:

This political force — i.e., the early New Testament Church— universalized the Jewish religion; changed the Jews' fundamental method of engaging their enemies from warfare to agape love; and insisted that death through passive resistance was preferable to life in submission, fear, and slavery. Christian historians and theologians universally agree that Christ's peaceful method of passive resistance and agape love proved, over time, to be far more effective than vengeance, militarism, and war.

Jesus's method of passive resistance is by far the most economical of life and treasure of any mode of warfare that man can adopt. We have seen how the active resistance of the Jews to the Roman power lead to the death of millions and to the misery of millions more.

While the Jews were resisting actively, the Christians were resisting passively. The wickedness of the Roman power was far more hateful to the Christian than to the Jew. The Christian would not recognize the validity of that power by so much as casting a grain of incense upon an altar. But the Christian did not wish to kill the Roman; he wished to convert him; and so he manifested his hostility to the Roman system, not by fighting the Roman, but by preaching to the Roman that his system was evil, and, if he wished to escape from that evil, he must turn from the worship of Caesar to the worship of Christ.

And when the Roman was angry with him the Christian suffered the full consequence of that anger, and in so suffering revealed to the Roman a moral greatness which turned the anger of the Roman into admiration, love, and worship. And the loss of life in this warfare of the Christian against the Roman was an nothing when compared with the loss of the Jews.

More Jewish lives were lost in the one year of Coziba's insurrection, than Christian lives were lost in the three centuries of Christian persecution. And there was this radical difference,-- every Jew who died in arms made an enemy for the Jews. Every Christian who died unarmed made a friend for the Christians. So that it became a saying that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. The history of Jesus and the history of the establishment of Christianity give experimental proof of the soundness of His doctrine.

The method of Jesus is not only economical, but it is effective. If you wish to subdue a man to your will so that he may be your slave, you cannot do it by killing him, for a dead man is no man's servant. You cannot do it by chaining him, for a man in chains has all he can do to carry his shackles. The only way to subdue a man is to win him. If you want him for your very own you must conquer something beside his hands and his feet; you must storm the citadel of his heart, and, instead of making him fear to disobey, you must make him love to obey. Now you can never make a dog love you by beating him; still less a man. In all God's universe it is the law that like begets like,-- hate breeds hatred, and loving wins love. And Jesus, in the sublimity of His spiritual genius, gave expression by word and life to these very simple axiomatic principles, and by so doing put the world in the way of salvation.

As long as men hate one another and kill one another, so long will this world be a hell, and those who live in it, will not live at all, but all their days will be misery and death.

THE END