

Why Aren't the Books of the Maccabees in the Tanach??

Part 1: Books 1 and 2

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Contents of the Apocrypha

- Esdras
- 2 Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- Rest of Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach, Ben Sira)
- Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah
- Song of the Three Children
- Story of Susanna
- The Idol Bel and the Dragon
- Prayer of Manasses
- **1 Maccabees**
- **2 Maccabees**

1 Maccabees - history of the Hasmonaean revolt

Probably written in the late 2nd to early 1st centuries BCE

Structure (16 chapters)

- Judaism is threatened by King Antiochus, followed by Mattathias' heroic response, ending with his death, 166-165 BCE (1:1-2:70)

- the deeds of Mattathias' son Judas, who recaptures the Temple, ending with his death in battle, 165-160 BCE (3:1-9:22)

- the deeds of Judas' brothers Jonathan and Simon, ending with the death of Simon. 160-135 BCE (9: 23-end)

1 Maccabees, 2: 1-28

In those days Mattathias the son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Mode'in. He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, Simon called Thassi, Judas called Maccabeus, Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, and said, 'Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to dwell there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? Her temple has become like a man without honour; her glorious vessels have been carried into captivity. Her babes have been killed in her streets, her youths by the sword of the foe. What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave. And behold, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have

been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned it. Why should we live any longer?' And Mattathias and his sons rent their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.

Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Mode'in to make them offer sacrifice. Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: 'You are a leader, honoured and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the gentiles and the men of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honoured with silver and gold and many gifts.'

But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: 'Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.'

When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Mode'in, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Pinchas did against Zimri the son of Salu.

Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: 'Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!' And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city. Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there, they, their sons, their wives, and their cattle, because evils pressed heavily upon them.

Bamidbar/Numbers 25: 1-13 (translation: New International Version)

¹While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ² who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. ³ So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.

⁴The LORD said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD's fierce anger may turn away from Israel.'

⁵ So Moses said to Israel's judges, 'Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor.'

⁶ Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁷ When Pinchas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand ⁸ and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; ⁹ but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

¹⁰ The LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ ‘Pinchas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honour among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. ¹² Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. ¹³ He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honour of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.’

Shemot/Exodus 32: 26 (translation: New International Version)

So [Moses] stood at the entrance to the camp and said, ‘Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.’ And all the Levites rallied to him.

Daniel 7: 24-27

As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time. Then the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and totally destroyed. The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

1 Maccabees, 4: 36-59 (translation: New Revised Standard Version)

Then Judas and his brothers said, ‘See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.’ So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. They tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law

directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshipped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed. Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

2 Maccabees - religious propaganda

Probably written between 125 and 63 BCE

Structure (15 chapters)

- Two letters to the Jews of Egypt, urging them to observe Hanukah, plus the author's preface (1-3)
- Background of the Hasmonaean revolt, including martyrdom stories (4-7)
- The story of the revolt, 166-164 BCE (8-15)

2 Maccabees, Chapter 7: 1-6, 24-39

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and cords, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, 'What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our fathers.'

The king fell into a rage, and gave orders that pans and cauldrons be heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out ... the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, 'The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song which bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, "And he will have compassion on his servants."' ...

... The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his fathers... Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native tongue as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: 'My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers.'

While she was still speaking, the young man said, ‘What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our fathers through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, He will again be reconciled with His own servants. But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgement of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of everflowing life under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgement of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that He alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation.’

The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord. Last of all, the mother died, after her sons. Let this be enough, then, about the eating of sacrifices and the extreme tortures.

Further reading

David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) [separate chapters on each of the four books]

Sylvie Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion against Antiochus IV* (University of California Press, 2014) [on 1 and 2 Maccabees]

Michael E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984)