

# Chapter 17

## Last Things

(178 BCE to 37 BCE)

*Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary<sup>1</sup>*

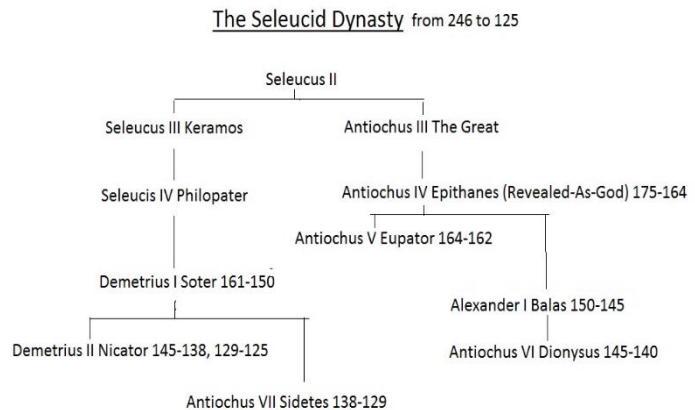
### Corrupt Judean priests and Greek god-kings (178 – 168 BCE)

Around 178 BCE Antioch's Seleucus IV appointed one Heliodorus as his minister in charge of the temples in Judea<sup>2</sup>. This made Heliodorus responsible for collecting the tax revenues. There is a description in 2 Maccabees 3 of a visit by Heliodorus to Jerusalem with this purpose in mind. He met with the High Priest Onias, who tried unsuccessfully to persuade Heliodorus not to raid the temple. In this account, Heliodorus was finally prevented from taking money from the temple by divine intervention and was converted to the faith of Yahweh. Heliodorus turned against his master, and after his return is said to have assassinated Seleucus and seized the throne for himself. - earning a possible reference in the final revelation in the Book of Daniel.<sup>3</sup>

But Seleucus brother, Mithradates, was no longer held in Rome. With help from the king of Pergamon<sup>4</sup>, he recovered his brother's throne in 175 BCE. Mithradates took the throne name of Antiochus IV and had coinage struck with the epithet 'Epithanes' (meaning 'Revealed-As-God') inscribed around the perimeter.

Jason, the younger brother of the High Priest, offered to secure for the new king a much improved tax revenue if only the king would appoint him High Priest in his brother's place. Antiochus IV readily agreed. Jason was an enthusiastic Helleniser; the author of 2 Maccabees stated that Hellenism reached a highpoint with the introduction of foreign customs through the 'boundless wickedness' of the impious Jason, 'no true High Priest'. The priests no longer had any enthusiasm for their duties at the altar; they despised the temple and neglected the sacrifices; but they eagerly contributed to the expenses of the wrestling school 'whenever the opening gong called them'. They placed no value on their hereditary duties, but cared above everything for Hellenic honours.<sup>5</sup>

In bidding for the right to be High Priest, Jason had created a precedent. Four or so years later, Jason sent an official, Menelaus, to Antioch on state business. Menelaus, probably a member of the clan of Bilgah, had aspirations to the priesthood<sup>6</sup>. Just as Jason had done earlier, Menelaus took the opportunity to offer Antiochus an even better tax yield if he was appointed High Priest; and he got the job, ousting Jason who, despite everything, was thought by a significant number of Judeans to have been



<sup>1</sup> Daniel 9:17b

<sup>2</sup> The Heliodorus Stele in the Israel museum records this appointment.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Dan 11:20 "Then shall arise in his place one (Seleucus?), who shall send an official for the glory of the kingdom (Heliodorus?); but within a few days he shall be broken, though not in anger or in battle."

<sup>4</sup> An area around today's Bergama in modern Turkey

<sup>5</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:13-15

<sup>6</sup> Uriel Rappaport in his article on Menelaus in ABD describes the difficulties associated with correctly identifying Menelaus background. He may have been the brother of Simon who was 'Captain' of the temple guard. Josephus and others may have confused this Simon with Simon the High Priest. If he had been of the high priestly Zadokite family – as Onias was – then his assumption of the office would not have been seen as so improper by his co-religionists, although his subsequent behaviour would still have revolted them.

appointed by God to the priesthood. Menelaus failed to raise the sums he had promised and so resorted to bribing Seleucid officialdom and later, so it was rumoured, to the murder of the old high priest Onias III, then living near Antioch, when these activities were threatened with exposure<sup>7</sup>. But exposed they were and, although Menelaus survived, an official was executed.

In Egypt, in 170 BCE, the widowed Cleopatra died. Power in Alexandria was seized by two palace officials, neither Greek nor Egyptian, but foreign slaves who had risen to high office. They let it be known that they intended to extend their territory northward. Hearing of this, Antiochus 'Revealed-As-God' marched south, crushed the Egyptian army on their border, marched up river to Memphis, where his nephew, the young 'mother-loving' Ptolemy VI, was in control. St Jerome says that 'Revealed-As-God' had himself crowned by Egyptian priests there. If so, it may have been a personal indulgence in theatre rather than considered policy, since he subsequently declared that he 'respected' his nephew as the king of Egypt. At this time Rome was involved in the third Macedonian war and her general, Publius Lucius Crassus, was having difficulty containing the ambitions of Perseus, the young and talented son of Phillip V of Macedon. Had things been easier for them in Macedonia, Rome might well have sought to constrain Antiochus IV at this point; but they did not do so on this occasion.

'Mother-Loving' Ptolemy VI declared himself to have come of age and therefore in no need of regents. It is possible he reached some sort of agreement with his uncle. Meanwhile in Alexandria, the people had revolted against the incompetent leadership that had brought these foreigners into so much power in their country and they put the younger brother of 'Mother-Loving' on the throne. This Ptolemy acquired the nickname of Physcon meaning 'Sausage'. Naturally he married his sister and naturally she was called Cleopatra after her mother.

'Revealed-As-God' seems not to have been much concerned by this. Most of Egypt was at least nominally ruled by his nephew. The area controlled by 'Sausage' and his sister was little more than the delta area around Alexandria. It was sufficient for the security of his empire that Egypt was incapacitated and divided. He left a small garrison in the border town of Pelusium so he could easily return should he choose to, and leaving the Egyptian mess behind, set out to return to Antioch.

Passing Jerusalem on his way on his way home, 'Revealed-As-God' decided to raid the temple himself in order to secure what Menelaus had promised but failed to deliver. The penetration of the innermost parts of the temple, the seizure of precious religious vessels and the removal of temple funds were regarded as an evil act by most Judeans.

But concerned as they were about foreign acts of barbarism, the more religious Judeans were even more dismayed by the cancer at the heart of their own religion - in the temple priesthood itself. One response was the formation of a reform group, the Essenes, whose concern was to promulgate the teaching of the scripture and to promote the leading of a moral life in obedience to God's commandments and away from the temple which had become, in their view, infested by a wicked priesthood. The Essenes are thought to be the group whose monastery and training centre at Qumran near the Dead Sea would come to hold a library of scrolls of Judean scripture - a small fraction of which was discovered in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Another response may have been an outburst of apocalyptic theology, of which the book of Enoch is an example. Those traditional Judeans who retained the faith became increasingly pessimistic concerning the chances that they could justify their claim to be God's chosen people in this world.

### **The Abomination of Desolation (167 BCE)**

A triumvirate of siblings now ruled Egypt - Ptolemy VI (Mother-Loving), his brother, known as 'Sausage', and their sister Cleopatra II. The situation was clearly unsatisfactory. Rome was invited to resolve the matter and decided to divide Egypt into two provinces with each brother ruling over a part.

This arrangement did not stick. Antiochus learnt in 168 BCE that the two brothers had decided to come together and jointly rule the whole of Egypt. New defences began to be erected in Alexandria which, had they been completed, would have made its capture much more difficult. So Antiochus 'Revealed-As-God' decided on a pre-emptive move and marched to Memphis, apparently unopposed. From there he proceeded downstream towards Alexandria.

Rome had, by this time, effectively won the 3<sup>rd</sup> Macedonian War and now felt able to respond to Alexandria's pleas for assistance, something she had not been willing to do earlier. So now, whilst Antiochus was still on the outskirts of Alexandria, he was met by a Roman delegation led by Gaius Popillius Laenas who demanded the immediate withdrawal of all of Antiochus' forces from Egypt. When

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<sup>7</sup> There may be a reference to this murder in Daniel 9:26 "an anointed one will be cut down when the city is no longer his".

Antiochus equivocated, the envoy drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and said that unless he had a definitive answer from Antiochus before he stepped out of the circle then Antiochus would be at war with Rome. Perhaps recollecting how Rome had defeated and punished his father, Antiochus capitulated. A 'line in the sand' had been drawn which stopped the invasion – and gave posterity the phrase.

A rumour spread abroad that Antiochus had not just been humiliated but had been killed. Sensing a potential opportunity, Jason, the dispossessed Judean High Priest, returned to Jerusalem with a force of supporters and attempted to depose Menelaus. Jason might have succeeded but his ruthless slaughter of his opponents turned sections of the population against him<sup>8</sup>. According to the second book of Maccabees, Antiochus thought that Judea was in revolt and 'raging like a wild animal' he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down any they met in the street and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of the young and the old, of women and children.<sup>9</sup> Menelaus was re-installed as High Priest. The author of 2 Maccabees may have been exaggerating, but there is little doubt that considerable bloodshed took place either then or later when Antiochus sent Apollonius, his tribute collector, to Jerusalem at the head of an army of mercenaries<sup>10</sup>. The walls of Jerusalem were pulled down leaving just a small citadel, the Akra, in which Menelaus, his supporters and the governing forces secured themselves. The brutality was probably unnecessary and unwise, but Antiochus may have decided that he needed to show cruel force in order to forestall other rebellions developing in the wake of his humiliation. His reaction was characteristic of his unstable personality - at one moment generous, at the next tyrannical. Polybius, the contemporary Greek historian quipped that he was not Antiochus Epithanes, but Antiochus Epimanes (Antiochus the "utterly mad"). Some scholars consider that Menelaus and his supporters proposed and initiated the persecution as part of their struggle for power, and that the emotionally unstable Antiochus simply agreed.

'Revealed-As-God' decided to establish a uniform religious cult throughout his empire and accordingly wrote to his subject peoples saying that they should all give up their particular customs. Most people seem to have agreed. The author of 1 Maccabees wrote that "*Many, even from Israel gladly adopted his religion. They sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath*"<sup>11</sup> He may have been more specific in Judea's case, requiring the Judeans to "*defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised*"<sup>12</sup> The policy was implemented against the advice of some of his officials and was contrary to the instinct and policies of the religiously tolerant Greeks, but Antiochus insisted and sent officers to enforce his decree. All Torah scrolls were seized and burnt, all temple sacrifices were abolished, and anyone who persisted in these banned activities was put to death. The temple was converted to a temple for Zeus<sup>13</sup>.

In the book of Daniel, these appalling events would be called the 'Abomination of Desolation'.<sup>14</sup> Jerusalem was rife with factions; pro-Seleucid and pro-Ptolemaic parties, Hellenisers, Nationalists and Hasideans – the last being a group of pious Jews who may have spawned the Pharisees. Onias IV, the son of the last legitimate Zadokite priest left Jerusalem for Egypt where he founded a temple at Leontopolis. Either the 'one temple' idea must have weakened, or the level of despair amongst the more religious Judeans must have been very great for such an act to be contemplated and executed.

Apion, an Egyptian writer and contemporary of Josephus recorded a Greek fable which had its origin in Antiochus' desecration of the temple. The fable says that Antiochus discovered imprisoned in the temple a Greek man who was being fattened up for sacrifice. He would be taken out to a certain wood, ritually killed and his entrails eaten by the Judeans who would vow eternal enmity against the Greeks.<sup>15</sup> The story may have been concocted as a defence of Antiochus actions, but its persistence in some indigenous Egyptian circles may illustrate the extent of the animosity between the native Egyptians and the Judean settlor community.

### **Daniel: the prayer**

Chapter 9 in today's book of Daniel consists mainly of a prayer that was written after the

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<sup>8</sup> Oxford p 435-6

<sup>9</sup> 2 Maccabees 5. 11-14

<sup>10</sup> 1 Maccabees 1: 29-35.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:43

<sup>12</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:46-49

<sup>13</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:54-64 and 2 Maccabees 6:1-11

<sup>14</sup> Daniel 11:29-31

<sup>15</sup> Josephus. Against Apion 2.8 (89-96)

“Abomination of Desolation”. It was written in good Hebrew that, unlike the other Hebrew texts in Daniel, shows no signs of being a translation from the Aramaic. Aspects of the language will be familiar to many attending Christian worship today: -

*“Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled...*

*Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. Incline your ear, my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. Lord hear. Lord forgive; Listen Lord and act and do not delay! For your own sake, my God, because your city and your people bear your name!”<sup>16</sup>*

### **The Maccabean Insurgency; 166 –160 BCE**

In Jerusalem, some of the population – including an important part of the nobility – were Hellenisers and had converted to the Greek religion. They were the leading citizens in Jerusalem, and they may have accepted, if not supported, Antiochus’ action. Others complied under compulsion. Some preferred martyrdom. When one of Antiochus’ officers demanded a pagan sacrifice at Modin, the old priest there refused. Together with his sons, the priest Mattathias took to the hills. By the time of the old man’s death in 166, they had brought together those who wished to see religious liberty restored and those who wished to put an end to Greek oppression. They launched a series of successful guerrilla raids first under Mattathias and later under his son Judas, known as ‘Maccabee’ (The Hammer). The family was descended from Hasmonay, so they have become known as Hasmoneans after their ancestor as well as Maccabeans after the nickname given to Judas. Their initial targets were mainly the Hellenisers, the Jewish aristocracy who supported the regime. Later they attacked the institutions of government. The Hasmoneans were almost certainly regarded by the authorities as terrorists fuelled by misguided religious fundamentalism. This view would have been shared even by some Judeans, not only by the Hellenisers, but also by many practising Yahwists who held to their religious traditions. The traditional Yahwist view of authority going back to the days of Jeremiah was one of acceptance. They took the view that no-one would have authority over them unless that was the will of God; and that therefore to oppose authority was to oppose God.

Outside Jerusalem, however, the insurgency probably enjoyed much popular support. In view of the risk that Alexandria might exploit the situation, Antioch could not ignore this rebellion so close to the Egyptian border. Antioch sent larger and larger forces to meet the Hasmonean challenge. The last two attempts were organised by Lysias who was the guardian of the son of the Seleucus. In the final attempt Lysias himself took charge of the field operation. The aim of all these initiatives was to break through the countryside, where the Hasmoneans had local support, and then to invest a significant force in Jerusalem, where they could expect support from the Hellenisers. But Judas Maccabee frustrated every attempt.

In 164 Antioch made an offer – the Judeans could practice the Torah and return to their former life, but the temple was to remain in Seleucid control. This offer was accepted by most Judeans. For some of them, perhaps, as for all the Judeans in the Diaspora, the temple was no longer of such fundamental significance. A long line of corrupt priests had undermined its perceived holiness long before Antiochus’ desecration. For them the insurgency was all about being able to practise their religion in the way that, outside Jerusalem, they had been doing under a succession of foreign rulers. As they had recovered the right to do this, it was now time to build the peace and return to their farms and villages.

But the Hasmonean command rejected the compromise. They took the temple by force against no more than token resistance and confined Menelaus and the garrison to the Akra. They cleansed the temple and rededicated it. There is a tradition that states that the first sacrifices in the rededicated temple took place three years to the day after the desecration by Antiochus. Whatever the timing, the event is the basis of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, or ‘rededication’ - also known as the Feast of Lights because of the lighting, each day, of one more candle on an eight-branched menorah. It is celebrated now for eight days in December.

In the same year, Antiochus IV died and was succeeded by the 9-year-old Antiochus V. Ruling in his place was his erstwhile guardian, now regent, Lysias. Seleucus’ son Demetrius remained confined in Rome despite the fact he was now useless as a hostage for the good behaviour of the new power in

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel 9:4b-5a & 17b-19

Antioch. He asked the senate to recognise his superior claim to the throne and restore the Seleucid empire to him, but the Senate refused. The Romans apparently felt it would be better for them if the Seleucid territories were ruled by a boy rather than a man<sup>17</sup>. Roman policy generally favoured weakness in the leadership of potentially rival empires.

Judas Maccabee followed his cleansing of the temple with an attack on the Akra, the garrison fortress in Jerusalem, and the stronghold of Menelaus. Lysias felt compelled to rescue his garrison and assembled a large army for the purpose. They invaded Judea from the south and overcame the resistance of the reduced Hasmonean forces. When they reached Jerusalem, they besieged Judas in the temple: the prospects for Judas must have looked grim at this stage. But then Lysias learnt that Antiochus IV had, before his death, allegedly appointed another of his generals, Philip, as the guardian of his son and that Philip was approaching Antioch to claim the regency. Unable to fight on two fronts, Lysias was forced to come to an agreement with Judas, raise the siege and return to Syria. Lysias removed Menelaus from power. According to 2 Maccabees, he even had him executed as “*the cause of all the trouble*”.<sup>18</sup> Lysias formally ceded power over the temple – a power that he had already substantially lost in practical terms. In Menelaus’ place he appointed Alcimus as high priest, a more diplomatic and supposedly pious man. Lysias thus kept his army intact and was able to meet Philip and defeat him in battle in 163 BCE.

Alcimus, for all his supposed piety was not a descendant of Zadok, whose family claimed to be the line from which all true high priests of the temple should come. It will be recalled that Onias IV, who was a member of that family and the son of the last Zadokite high priest, had set up the new temple at Leontopolis. Thus in 163 BCE there were at least three temples in which Yahwists who wished to sacrifice could do so – the Judean temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritan temple at Mt Gerizim and the Egyptian temple at Leontopolis.

Meanwhile Demetrius, after another rejected appeal to the senate, took matters into his own hands and escaped from Rome. He appears to have been well received as he returned home and was able to challenge Lysias and his charge, Antiochus V. Demetrius defeated them in 161 BCE and both Antiochus V and Lysias were executed. Demetrius confirmed the appointment of Alcimus as High priest, presumably because he believed that his generally ameliorative policies were succeeding in winning the people away from the insurgency. Alcimus’ piety and amelioration were however fairly limited. At one point he had a group of Hasideans murdered despite the fact that they had said they were prepared to leave the resistance and recognise Alcimus’ claims to the priesthood.

Demetrius was not content to risk the possibility that Judas’ group might recover its strength and he sent a large army under Nicanor to sort the problem out. Judas and Nicanor met and attempted a negotiated settlement. The negotiations failed due, according to Judas’ supporters, to Nicanor’s bad faith. The two armies met in battle. It may be that Judas’ strategy was to ‘decapitate’ his opponent’s forces by a focused attack on Nicanor personally. If so, Judas was successful for Nicanor was killed, his demoralised army dispersed and its elements harried by irregular forces sympathetic to Judas in the surrounding countryside.

Rome was not pleased that their ex-prisoner Demetrius was now in control of a large part of the Seleucid Empire. Accordingly, Roman diplomats let it be known that an approach from Judas Maccabee to Rome would be favourably received. Judas responded and a treaty was negotiated. In negotiating with Rome, Judas demonstrated that the Maccabean agenda had become a secular one – an independent Judea under their leadership. Judas’ emissaries had not returned to Judea before Demetrius struck at Judas again, sending his army back with a new general to replace Nicanor. Judean records of subsequent events claim that most of Judas’ troops deserted him and he was left with just 800 men to face Demetrius’ forces. It may have been that whilst many would have given their lives for their religion, few would do so when the objective was political. Whether that is true or not, Judas lost this battle, his life and the Hasmoneans lost their military force and their best general.

In the alliance he had formed with Rome, Judas had moved the insurgency into a political phase, and his brother Jonathan was an astute politician.

### **Daniel: The Visions (169-164)**

The visions of Daniel (chapters 7 – 12) were composed between 169, when Antiochus had plundered the temple, and the dark days following 167, when the temple was desecrated and converted for the worship of Zeus, although the assembling of the stories together with the visions and the editing

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<sup>17</sup> Appian *Syrian Wars* 8.46 (Appian was a Roman historian working in the early second century CE in Rome and in Alexandria. He may have been of Greek extraction, born on Alexandria)

<sup>18</sup> 2 Maccabees 13:4-8

of the final book probably occurred later. Whilst the death of Antiochus IV in 164 was anticipated in many of these writings it appears not to have taken place<sup>19</sup>. The visions were the work of one or more pious Judeans who were living through a period in which the priesthood had become corrupted by greed and the practise of their faith had been made punishable by death. Their hope was for an intervention by divine beings who would restore the righteous after a period of intense oppression. Together the visions are an apocalyptic work in that they claim to be a revelation of part of God's plan for the history of the world, although they do not describe the end of all time; when they refer to the 'time of the end' they are referring to the end of the period during which there could be no sacrifices in the temple.

There are connections of language and theme between the first story and the first vision. The unusual verb '*daqaq*' (meaning to 'break into pieces') occurs in just nine biblical verses - all in Daniel - of which five are in the first story and three in the first vision. Either these texts were by the same author or the second author was creating a deliberate link. Like the first story, the first vision was a dream requiring interpretation - only this time it was Daniel who had the dream. In place of the story's statue made of four parts, the vision has four beasts - a lion with eagle wings, a bear able to stand upright like a man, a winged leopard with four heads, and a terrible monster with ten horns<sup>20</sup>. In both story and vision these are allegorical representations of the great empires. The Assyrian empire was represented by the head of gold and the lion with eagle wings; the Medes by the silver chest and the bear; the Persians by the bronze lower torso and the four-headed leopard, whilst the Greek empires were represented by the iron legs with feet partly of clay and the ten-horned monster. This four-empire scheme - Assyrian, Medes, Persian and Greek - was common throughout the Near East. The inclusion of the Medes, who only dominated Persia, and the existence of the same four in the Persian work '*Zand-I Vohuman Yasn*', suggest that this scheme had its origin in the Persia of the Seleucid empire.<sup>21</sup>

In the visions the dream was interpreted by a heavenly being who explained that the ten horns represented the ten Greek kings. The last ruler would therefore have been Antiochus IV whose oppression of Judean religion could justify his depiction as having iron teeth with which it crushed and devoured its victims, trampling underfoot whatever was left.

The compiler of Daniel linked the first vision with the story of Nebuchadrezzar's dream and thereby linked the stories generally. In the vision, the four beasts emerged from the great sea<sup>22</sup>, after it had been stirred up by the four winds. The fourth beast in particular was: -

*"terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and bronze claws<sup>23</sup>. It fed on part of what it tore to pieces and trampled on the rest with its feet. It was worse than all the other beasts that preceded it. It had ten horns. (The Syrian Greek kings)"*

Later, another author would insert: -

*I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them (Antiochus IV again); to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. (Probably contemporaries of Antiochus<sup>24</sup>) There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly."*

The references to this little horn were probably inserted after the desecration of the temple, of which disaster the rest of the text appears to know nothing.

At this point the author moves from prose to poetry employing imagery that may owe something to the ancient Canaanite myths in which Dan'el features.

*As I watched,  
thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne,*

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<sup>19</sup> The various estimates of the duration of the desecrated temple vary but they are all a little over the traditional three years to the day.

<sup>20</sup> At some time the attributes of these beasts were scrambled. Thus it is probable that originally it was the lion and not the bear that was told to 'devour many bodies', and the bear and not the lion that stood on two feet like a man.

<sup>21</sup> The theme was repeated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE Fourth Sibylline oracle.

<sup>22</sup> The image of the beast rising from the sea is developed in the Book of Revelations chapter 13

<sup>23</sup> The bronze claws occur in some MMS, and also in verse 19. They are needed for the tearing!

<sup>24</sup> Porphyry (3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE) suggested they were Artaxias of Armenia, Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VII all defeated by Antiochus IV between 169 and 166 CE. See Hartman and Di Lella (1977) p. 216.

...  
*His throne was fiery flame with wheels of blazing fire*  
...  
*Thousands of thousands were serving him*  
*and ten thousand times ten thousand were attending him.*  
*The court sat in Judgement. The books were opened.*

*Then the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.*

...  
*and as I watched,*  
*I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven.*  
*And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.*  
*To him was given dominion and glory and kingship,<sup>25</sup>*

In the Canaanite myth, the ‘Ancient One’ is El, the ancient of days, and ‘one like a human being coming with the clouds’ may be the Canaanite ‘Baal, the rider on the clouds’ who challenged the primeval chaotic sea monster and defeated her. Here the battle was replaced by a courtroom scene, but the outcome remained the same - the destruction of the monster that emerged from the sea. Interpretation was aided by “one who was standing by” who said that the four kingdoms will have power for a time, but in the end the dominium will be given to “the people of the holy ones of the Most High” (i.e. the faithful community of Israel). Does this mean that the one who came with the clouds of heaven and to whom dominium was given was an allegorical representation of the faithful community and not a divine being? Elsewhere, in the Hebrew sections of Daniel, the being *who was somewhat like a man* was sometimes identified as the angel Gabriel; so perhaps a heavenly being was intended here too. Both interpretations, allegorical and heavenly, are possible; perhaps both were deliberately suggested.

There is no reference to the desecration of the temple in the main text (excluding the insertions with regard to the little horn), so the original text was probably composed between 169 and 167, with the insertion being added a few years later in the light of that disaster.

From Chapters 8 onwards the Masoretic text used a Hebrew translation of the original Aramaic. It is confused by a corrupted text and several later insertions so that it is difficult to isolate the original vision. As in chapter 7, the author sees the history of the empires of the Medes, Persians and Greeks in terms of allegorical animals – this time a Ram and a Goat with various growths of horns. The Goat (Alexander) destroyed the Ram (the empire of the Medes and Persians) and then grew four horns (the four Greek empires), one of which (the Seleucid empire) grew mightily towards the south and east.

*It grew as high as the host of heaven and it threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them.*

Here too an influence may be traced to the Canaanite myths; this time to the story of Ashtar, the morning and evening star, who aspired to sit on Baal’s throne<sup>26</sup>. There may also be a reference to Isaiah 14, where an earlier king was mocked for thinking he could take power over the stars - stars that were the object of much popular religion<sup>27</sup>.

The ‘horn that grew mightily’ even thought it could challenge the power of the Prince of the Armies (another name for Yahweh); for it *took away the daily sacrifice and defiled the sanctuary*. Antiochus IV (Revealed-As-God) was therefore the intended allusion.

Whilst trying to understand what he had seen, Daniel overheard two holy ones discussing the duration of the desecration of the sanctuary and learnt it was to be for 2300 evenings and mornings. Then Daniel was instructed by a divine being who was *somewhat like a man* (and who was here identified as the angel Gabriel<sup>28</sup>) that the vision referred to the time of the end (of the present desolation)<sup>29</sup>. The divine

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel 7-14a

<sup>26</sup> In the myth, Baal is dead and Asherah cries out ‘Let Ashtar the tyrant be king’ and immediately Ashtar goes up to Zaphon (the Canaanite holy mountain) and sits on Baal’s throne. But the throne is too big, so Ashtar goes down and rules on earth instead – all of it. See ANET p 140.

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 14:3-20. See especially verse 13

<sup>28</sup> Daniel 8:16. Whilst here it is the angel Gabriel that is described as being ‘somewhat like a man’, in Chapter 10, the archangel Michael was also so described. Perhaps the description applies to all angels.

<sup>29</sup> Not the end of all time. Both the Hebrew used and the context indicates it was the end of a particular event – in this case the desecration of the temple.

being explained the references to the Medes and Persians, and to the Greeks, and then said: -

*“At the end of their rule, when the transgressions have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance shall arise, skilled in intrigue.*

...

*By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall be great. Without warning he shall destroy many and shall even rise up against the Prince of princes. But he shall be broken, and not by human hands.*

*The vision of the evenings and mornings is true, but you must keep it a secret since there are many days to go.”*

*I, Daniel, was dazed and ill for several days... I was dismayed by the revelation, but did not understand.<sup>30</sup>*

In reality the temple was desecrated sometime in 167 BCE and rededicated in 164; the period of desecration was therefore around 3 years. The 2300 ‘evenings and mornings’ may be shorthand for 2300 evening and morning sacrifices which would have taken place over 1150 days – or just over 3 years. If the author’s objective in writing this story of Daniel’s vision was to re-assure his people that despite their present difficulties, God would ensure the destruction of their enemies ‘*in the end*’, he needed a convincing reason for not publishing this story until after the rededication of the temple. The angel’s injunction provided the justification he needed. Thus this vision was probably written after 164 BCE.<sup>31</sup>

The vision was clear enough, so what the writer could not understand, and therefore could not communicate through his hero Daniel, was the reason that his God permitted such an appalling desecration of the temple. It was the topic that he attempted to address next.

Chapter 9 in today’s bible began with the prayer that was discussed above in the context of the ongoing defilement of the temple. Whilst still at prayer, Daniel was visited again by Gabriel who comes to ‘*teach him how to understand*’. To do this he started with a reference to Jeremiah’s prophesy of seventy years for the duration of the exile. These were to be interpreted as seventy weeks of years, or 490 human years so that they covered the whole time from the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar until the restoration of worship in the cleansed and rededicated temple to which the author looked forward<sup>32</sup>:

*“Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city  
to put an end to transgression,  
to put a seal on sin,  
to atone for wickedness,  
to bring in everlasting righteousness,  
to seal up vision and prophecy  
and to anoint the Holy of Holies.*

The writer laid out some of his understanding of history against this background, but crucially stated that the last week (i.e. the last 7 human years) began with murder of the ‘Anointed One’, probably a reference to the pious Onias III who was killed by agents of Menelaus around 171. Thus the end of this period of exile and tribulation would come one week of years later – in 164 BCE. In the mean-time there would be ‘half a week’ ( three and half years) in which the sacrifices will be stopped. Then the devastator will suffer the fate assigned to him. The author therefore could reassure his people that their sufferings, severe as they were, were part of the punishment decreed for the sins of their distant ancestors and that this period was nearly at its end.

The author reset the scenario for the final vision. For this vision, Daniel was placed on the banks of the Tigris in the time of Cyrus king of Persia when he was visited by a *man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming*

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel 8:23-25

<sup>31</sup> Hartman (2005) follows Ginsberg in proposing a serial composition for this passage in which the basic vision (the Ram and the Goat) was composed before 167, with the passages referring the desecration of the temple being added later and the references to the ‘evening and mornings being later still – after the rededication.

<sup>32</sup> See Leviticus 26:18 where God threaten to punish his unrepentant people 7 times over. Of course, with our present knowledge of dates, we know that the time from the destruction of the temple until its rededication in 164 was around 420 years, but the author probably had neither the ability nor the intention to be chronologically accurate.

*torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.* This divine being explained that he had come from battling against the king of Persia to tell Daniel what was to come. He said he had to go back to fight the Prince of Persia and then go on to deal with the prince of Greece. In all this the divine being was assisted only by *Michael your Prince*.

This was followed by an extended description of the author's understanding of history from the time of the Persians to the time of the desecration of the temple, when: -

*“Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered - everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever...”<sup>33</sup>*

This passage is remarkable in that it contains an explicit reference to the resurrection of the dead - the clearest and least contentious of such references in the Hebrew Bible. The question of the resurrection of the dead would be a cause of dispute amongst Jews and Christians in the years to come. The publication of this work may have opened up a discussion on the afterlife which was reflected in the alterations Jesus ben Sira made to his grandfather's work.<sup>34</sup>

Once the final redaction of the Book of Daniel was accomplished, sometime in the middle of the second century BCE, all the books that today form part of the the Hebrew Bible were completed. Sacred writing in the Judean tradition would continue well into New Testament times, but those texts would not be regarded as canonical in all Christian traditions.

### **Enoch; the Dream Visions (165-161)**

The Dream Visions were probably written around 165-161 BCE. The Visions told in apocalyptic language the story of the world from the fall, through the deluge, right up to the day of Judgement. The last historical event referred to was the Maccabean revolt.

The first dream vision was a nightmare that Enoch had whilst sleeping in his grandfather's house. He recounts the nightmare to his son Methuselah, saying that he saw the sky collapse and be ripped away, falling to the earth. And when the sky hit the earth, the earth was swallowed up into a deep abyss, with mountains suspended over mountains, hills sinking into hills and great trees ripped up by their roots and cast into the abyss.

The second dream vision described the Maccabean revolt thus: -

*But behold lambs were born to these white sheep, and they began to open their eyes and to see, and to cry to the sheep. They cried to them, but they did not listen to what they said to them, but were exceedingly deaf, and their eyes were exceedingly blind. And I saw in a vision how the ravens flew upon the lambs, and dashed the sheep to pieces and devoured them. And I saw till horns grew upon those lambs, and the ravens cast down their horns; and I saw still there sprouted a great horn on one of their sheep, and their eyes were opened. ... And those ravens fought and battled with it and sought to lay low its horn, but they had no power over it.<sup>35</sup>*

In this vision, people are represented by animals, angels by people, Jerusalem by a house and the temple by a tower. The 'blinded sheep' of Judah were seen as being so sinful that God relinquished direct charge of them and handed them over to seventy shepherds – the foreign kings and oppressors of Judah. But at the day of Judgement: -

*... those seventy shepherds were judged and found guilty, and they were cast into that fiery abyss. And I saw at that time how a similar abyss was opened up in the middle of the earth, full of fire, and they brought those blinded sheep there. They were all judged and found guilty and*

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel 12:1-3

<sup>34</sup> Ecclesiasticus 7: 17 Here 'Be very humble for in your misfortune he leaves you' is changed to "Be very humble for the recompense for the godless is fire and worms." Also 48:11 where "Blessed he who sees you" is extended to "Blessed those who see you, and those who have fallen asleep in love, for we too shall certainly have life."

<sup>35</sup> Enoch 90:6-9 & 12

*cast into this fiery abyss, and they burned; now this abyss was to the right of that house. And I saw those sheep and their bones burning.*

*And I stood up to watch till they folded up that old house; and carried off all the pillars... And I watched till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house, greater and loftier than the first, and set it up in the place of the first...and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first. And I saw all the sheep that had been left, and all the beasts on the earth, and all the birds of the heaven, falling down and doing homage to those sheep and making petition to them and obeying them in everything....*

*And I saw till all their generations were transformed, and they all became white bulls; and the first among them became a lamb, and that lamb became a great animal and had black horns on its head; and the Lord of the sheep rejoiced over it and over all the oxen. And I slept in their midst; and I awoke and saw everything.<sup>36</sup>*

The Apocalypse of Weeks which followed divided history into periods, which the author called weeks, starting with Enoch's birth. The weeks were arranged as a chiasmus.

- Week 1: The first judgement on the Watchers; as described in the book of Watchers
- Week 2: The first judgement on humanity in the time of Noah.
- Week 3: The establishment of the righteous; Abraham and his descendants.
- Week 4: The revelation to Moses
- Week 5: The building of the first temple
- Week 6: The destruction of the first temple
- Week 7: The Revelation to Enoch
- Week 8: The righteous are given a sword to deal with the wicked
- Week 9: Last Judgement on humanity
- Week 10: Last Judgement on the watchers!

The seventh week was thus the post-exilic period up to the author's time. *At its close shall be elected the elect righteous of the eternal plant of righteousness to receive sevenfold instruction concerning all his creation'. (Enoch 93:10).* This instruction is thought to refer the book of Enoch itself. In the 8<sup>th</sup> week the righteous were given a sword. Some scholars believe that this was a reference to Judas Maccabee and his men.<sup>37</sup> The vision then moves from a parable of history to a parable of the future. At the end of the week it was envisaged that a new pure temple will be built for God. In the 9<sup>th</sup> week, earth and its evil was to be judged and destroyed. In the 10<sup>th</sup>, the angels were to be judged and the fallen angels destroyed. After that, the old heaven would pass away: -

*And a new heaven shall appear,  
And all the powers of the heavens shall give sevenfold light.  
And there shall be many weeks without number forever,  
And all shall be in goodness and righteousness,  
And sin shall nevermore be mentioned.<sup>38</sup>*

The book was written whilst the rebellion was still going on. It held out the promise of a glorious outcome to those who could read and interpret the message; the language was such that their enemies should find the message impenetrable.

### **The Rebellion Continues (160 - 150 BCE)**

Following Judas Maccabee's defeat and death, his brother Jonathan became leader of the liberation movement. His immediate task was to rebuild popular support for the movement and to re-establish some sort of armed wing. He seems to have been successful in both. One of his first challenges was to face a Seleucid assault deliberately launched on a Sabbath in the hope that the Judeans would not

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<sup>36</sup> Enoch 90:25-30 & 38-39

<sup>37</sup> Others hold that it is a description of God's kingdom before the final judgement; see Cambridge p. 338.

<sup>38</sup> Enoch 93:16-1

defend themselves<sup>39</sup>. They did, re-interpreting scripture to fit the needs of the day. Since the Judeans won, this was taken as a sign that Yahweh approved the new interpretation.

In 159, the High Priest Alcimus appointed by the Seleucid ruler suffered a rather painful death. This too was taken as a sign that Yahweh was with the Hasmonians. Bacchides, the general who had defeated Judas, began to withdraw his military presence from Judea following Alcimus' death. No attempt was made to replace the High Priest: perhaps the Seleucids felt that any appointment would only stir up problems for them with one faction or another and that anyway they would prefer a state without strong religious leadership.

By 155, Jonathan had established himself in Michmash, where he seems to have been acknowledged both by the local people and by the Seleucids to be in a position of some authority. Indeed, his influence with the people came to be recognised by the Seleucids as more useful than the support they could get from the Hellenisers who still controlled Jerusalem.

In 152, Demetrius' claim to the Seleucid throne was challenged by the pretender Alexander Balas, who claimed to be a son of Antiochus IV<sup>40</sup>. Both would have liked the support of Judea. Jonathan Maccabee skilfully played one off against the other. Demetrius was in need of troops and he authorised Jonathan to raise an army. Thus equipped, Jonathan entered Jerusalem and rebuilt the walls – although the Akra still remained outside his control.

In response Alexander Balas agreed to confirm all that Demetrius had given, but in addition he appointed Jonathan as High Priest and gave him the status of being one of the 'King's Friends'. Jonathan assumed the High Priesthood during the festival of Sukkot. Although Demetrius continued to try and persuade Jonathan to support his rule, Jonathan remained loyal to Alexander – a judgement that proved correct when Alexander defeated and killed Demetrius in 150.<sup>41</sup>

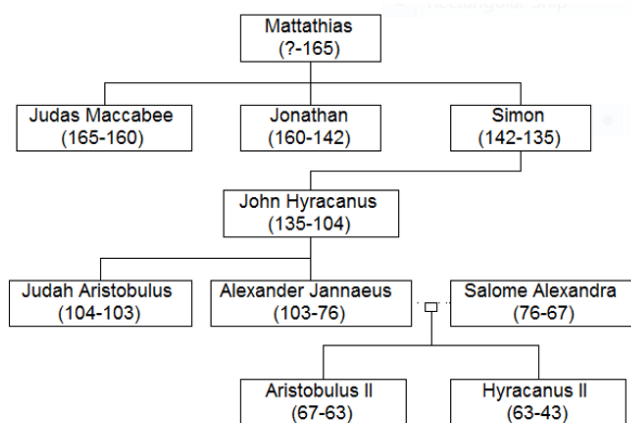
At the time that Jonathan was anointed High Priest, there had been no High Priest from the line of Zadok for 20 years. (Josephus suggests that the office was vacant for 6 of these years (Antiquities 20:10), but elsewhere he suggests that Jonathan's brother Judas may have held the role for some of that time.) Whilst Jonathan was not of the family that some believed to have been chosen by God to serve in the temple, he was at least the grandson of a priest - the priest who had started the rebellion against those who had desecrated the temple. There may have been some who disapproved of Jonathan's elevation to the High Priesthood, but their protests had little impact in Antioch where Jonathan rose to the rank of 'kinsman of the king'.

The rebel movement which had set out to destroy all things Greek in the name of religion now had its leader a man who was the great friend of the Seleucid Greeks. And the Seleucid Greeks now had, as their man in Jerusalem, the son of the 'terrorist' they had spent much time and blood attempting to eliminate.

It may have been that around this time another history of the Jewish people was written – one that broadened the acceptable Temple Priests to include all priestly families.

### The Book of Jubilees (ca 150 BCE)

'*The Book of the Division of the Times for their Jubilees and their Weeks*' may originally have been written in Hebrew, but the full text now exists only in Ge'ez. It is part of the scriptures of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but it is not included in any other Bible and indeed was lost to the West



The Hasmonean Dynasty 165 – 43 BCE

(Family members who did not rule are omitted)

<sup>39</sup> Oxford p 442.

<sup>40</sup> In fact, Alexander Balas was unrelated to the Seleucid dynasty. He appears to have been the creation of Heracleides (a former minister of Antiochus IV) whose brother Timarchus had been executed by Demetrius I Soter.

<sup>41</sup> Greenford, L. J. in Oxford p 443

until rediscovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Several fragments of it have been discovered amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran. The book may predate the founding of the community of Qumran since, whilst the implicit teaching of the book is mostly consistent with that of the Qumran community, it does not support the separation from the rest of the Judean population that other texts written by the community require.

The book included a passage which appears to refer to the Dream Visions in Enoch in which it declares that Enoch was the first to write a testimony concerning the generations of the earth, the first to divide that history into weeks and that all this was vouchsafed to Enoch in a dream<sup>42</sup>. Jubilees can be dated to a time after 165 BCE - the earliest plausible date for Enoch's Dream Visions. Palaeographic analysis of Jubilee scrolls found in Qumran suggest that some of the copies of Jubilees were prepared around 100 BCE, consistent with a second century date for the composition of the original work.<sup>43</sup>

The author was probably a non-Aaronite priest. The book was much concerned with the law. It opened and closed with the law of the Sabbath. The laws concerning tithes, circumcision, the blood prohibition, and the avoidance of impurity were re-worked and emphasised.

Sacrifice was an important topic for the author, but he insisted that sacrifice had taken place long before Aaron's time. He told of a sacrifice made by Adam when he left Eden; and of Enoch when he was permitted to return there as a reward for his testimony against the Watchers. Abraham was quoted as instructing Isaac extensively on the correct procedure for sacrificial slaughter – what cuts should be prepared and how, the use of oil and fruit and drink with the offering, how it should be salted and what woods should be used in the fire. He increased the tithes from one tenth to two tenths. In these writings it was Levi, not Aaron, who was the divinely ordained priest. It was Levi who was clothed with the garments of priesthood and upon whom '*the portion of the Lord*' fell. Here, in contrast to the Testament of Jacob in Genesis 49, there is no criticism of Levi for the revenge he took on the people of Shechem following the 'dishonouring' of his sister Dinah: on the contrary, his action is taken to be exemplary for '*if there is any man in Israel who desires to give his daughter or his sister to the gentiles, he shall surely die*'<sup>44</sup>

The author may have been an Essene. The belief that the 364-day solar calendar (as opposed to the common 354-day lunar calendar) was the divinely appointed calendar was a key point for the Essenes as it was for this author. He antedated all the festivals back to the time of the patriarchs and set them in their correct dates according to the solar calendar. The Passover was no longer a festival set-up to commemorate the fact that Yahweh passed over the Israelite houses whilst destroying the firstborn of Egypt; rather it was the meal they happened to be eating at the time that the Lord passed over.

Jubilees was written as if the main text was dictated by an 'Angel of the Face' on Yahweh's instruction and then written down by Moses. This was introduced by a section in which Yahweh supposedly dictated directly to Moses explaining why this was to be done; it was in order that the generations may know that when Yahweh punishes the people it is because of the evil they have done in deserting the covenant that was made on Mount Sinai. "*The people should understand*."<sup>45</sup>

The Angel divided history into periods of 49 years – the Jubilees that give the book its name. Each Jubilee consisted of '7 weeks of years'. In this usage, a week is seven years. The importance of 7 and the multiple of 7 sevens was emphasised again in the span of the history described in the book: it covered the first 49 Jubilees – from creation to the interview between the angel and Moses.

The Angel's words often followed the texts from Genesis and Exodus fairly accurately, sometimes verbatim, but some material was omitted, other material expanded and occasionally the angel added comments of his own – usually to emphasise a law. The work focused principally on the lives of the Patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Material dealing with their lives accounts for two thirds of the angel's dictation.

The organisation of the angels is very similar to that found in the Enoch writings.

### The dictation

The Angel of the Face began his dictation with a variant on the Priestly account of creation. He extended the events of the first day to include the creation of; -

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<sup>42</sup> Jubilees 4:19-20

<sup>43</sup> J C Vanderkam's article on Jubilees in ABD.

<sup>44</sup> Jubilees 32 1-8

<sup>45</sup> Jubilees 1:6. The English text used here is based on the translation by the reverend G H Schotte published in 1888.

*The angels of the face,  
the angels that cry 'Holy'  
the angels of the spirit of fire  
the angels of the spirit of the clouds of darkness and of hail and frost  
the angels of the abysses and of thunder and lightning  
the angels of the spirit of cold and heat and of winter, spring, summer and autumn  
and the spirits of all the works that are in heaven, on earth and in all the depths  
of darkness and light, of dawn and evening...<sup>46</sup>*

Animals were created on the fifth day. A single human being, Adam, incorporating both the male and female was created on the sixth. The seventh was the first Sabbath. Eve was created out of the flesh of Adam in the second week, and this was given as the reason why women were regarded as unclean for two weeks after the birth of a girl, although only one after a boy...

The phenomenon of the talking serpent in the Garden of Eden was rendered ordinary by the explanation that all animals could talk before the expulsion from Eden; animals lost this ability as a consequence of the serpent's association with the eating of the forbidden fruit.

The angel tells Noah the names of all of the wives of Eve's children. The descendants of Adam are traced through six generations to Enoch, the first person to learn to write. According to the angel it was Enoch who wrote of the '*signs of heaven according to the order of their months; so that the sons of men might know the time of year*'. Enoch's son was Methuselah, whose son was Noah. After Noah's birth Adam died having lived almost 1000 years, or 'one day', for it was written that '*a thousand years is like one day in the testimony of heaven*'<sup>47</sup>. The author thereby reconciled Adam's longevity with the Genesis statement that Adam will die on the day that he eats the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

According to the Angel of the Face it was about this time that some other angels of the Lord found the daughters of men so attractive that they took wives from amongst them and had sons by them who were giants – and injustice, corruption and unrighteousness spread across all creation. When the Lord saw the corruption of the earth he decided to destroy it all - except for Noah.

*But with the angels whom he had sent upon the earth he was greatly enraged and determined that he would root them out of all their power. He said to us [the angels of the face] that we should bind them in the depths of the earth. And they are so bound....<sup>48</sup>*

But the offspring of these angels were demons who led astray the sons of Noah and deceived them and destroyed them. Noah prayed to God for help.

*And our God said to us that we should bind them all. But the angel of the spirits, Mastema, came and said; "Oh Lord Creator. Leave some of them for me, that they can hear my voice and do the things that I tell them; for if you do not, I shall be unable to impose the power of my will upon the children of men; for they are here for corrupting, destroying and leading astray before the judgement; for the wickedness of the children of man is great. And [God] said, "Leave one tenth of them for him; but take nine tenths of them down to the place of judgement" "<sup>49</sup>*

Mastema is a name of Satan, as was made clear 3 verses later. Once more we find a text which seeks to resolve the problems of monotheism by the use of Persian ideas. In this case Mastema's powers were limited, and could only be exercised with divine permission. Mastema was used by the author to resolve a number of difficult passages in Genesis and Exodus – passages such as the fight that Moses has with a heavenly being on his way to Egypt: in Jubilees, this is not Yahweh but Mastema<sup>50</sup>.

In the 39<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, in the seventh year of the second week of years, Abram was born. Abram learnt to write when only two years old and he began to understand the errors of the world. Abram rejected the idols of his father and his birthplace and, urged by an angel, left his home and travelled to the land of Canaan. The text follows the Genesis story up to the birth of Ishmael, at which point Abram

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<sup>46</sup> Jubilees 2:1b

<sup>47</sup> Jubilees 4:28; an argument that may be based on psalm 90:4 "for a thousand years pass before your eyes like yesterday, like a watch in the night".

<sup>48</sup> Jubilees 5:5

<sup>49</sup> Jubilees 10:6-8

<sup>50</sup> Jubilees 48:2

celebrated the festival of the grain harvest and, a little later, the festival of tabernacles – despite the fact that, according to Nehemiah, that festival was first celebrated in post-exilic Jehud. After the grain harvest, the Lord appeared to Abram directly, changed his name to Abraham and made a covenant with him commanding him to circumcise himself and his entire male household as an eternal sign of that covenant. The angel comments that each new-born male who was not circumcised by the 8<sup>th</sup> day “*is not of the covenant...He has no sign on him and is for destruction... For all the angels of the face and all the angels of glorification were created that way.*”<sup>51</sup> It may seem strange to us that the author discusses angels’ foreskins, but it should be remembered that angels in the Old Testament were often hard to distinguish from ordinary men.

Mastema re-entered the story when there was word in heaven that Abraham was faithful to God despite every temptation. So, like the accuser in Job, Mastema approached God and said, “*Abraham loves Isaac his son above all things ...Tell him to bring him as a burnt offering on the altar; and then you see if he will obey you.*” In this version of the story, Abraham obeyed. At the crucial moment when Abraham had the sacrificial knife in his hand and Isaac was bound on the sacrificial pyre, the angel said, “*I stood before God and Mastema, and the Lord said “Tell him not to lay his hand upon the boy”*”<sup>52</sup>. And the Angel, the very one who was dictating the story, intervened to save Isaac’s life.

The story of the Patriarchs continued following the Genesis accounts. Abraham died when he was 175 years old; that is after three Jubilees (147 years) and four weeks of years (28 years).

*For the days of the lives of the first fathers were nineteen Jubilees, but after the flood they decreased...becoming speedily old...on account of the sufferings and wickedness of their ways, except for Abraham. ...All the generations that arise from then until the great judgement die speedily before completing two jubilees.*<sup>53</sup>

He went on to predict a time when the heads of children would be covered with grey hair and the people would be oppressed by sinful Gentiles because of their iniquity; but when the people had reached this extremity, the children would once more seek the laws and commandments of the Lord, and as they grew in righteousness, so their lives would extend until once more they approached a thousand years.

After Abraham’s death, the focus moved to Jacob, Abraham’s grandson. The angel told of Jacob’s wooing of Rachel and the trick played on him by Laban who substituted Leah for Rachel in the marriage bed, ‘*for it is not the custom with us to give the younger before the elder*’. Here the angel comments that in this Laban was following the divine command for such an act is forbidden by the ‘*Tablets of Heaven*’ and anyone who does this sins before the Lord.<sup>54</sup>

When Jacob returned to the land of his fathers with his wives and children, he camped near Shechem, and there his daughter Dinah was abducted by the prince of Shechem, who begged Jacob for her hand. But the brothers Simeon and Levi felt that their sister had been dishonoured and so they massacred all the men of Shechem – they killed them ‘*in torments*’. In Genesis, the two brothers were punished for their violence by Jacob, but here the angel approved the brother’s action.<sup>55</sup>

Shortly afterwards, so the angel dictated, Levi had a dream in which he and his offspring were appointed priests forever. His father clothed him in the garments of a priest and Jacob made a festival with his family at which Levi presided over two sessions of sacrifices in each of which Jacob offered a tenth of all that he owned. The angel commented that thereafter a law was ordained in heaven concerning the giving of a second tenth – a law which was to remain in effect for all eternity.

Then Jacob had a dream in which an angel showed him the seven tablets of heaven, which he was able to remember and write down when he awoke.

The angel next told the story of Joseph, with some additional details. For example, when Jacob’s family heard the fabricated story of Joseph’s death, Bilhah, Rachael’s maid, and Dinah, Jacob’s only daughter, both died of grief. After this, the angel said, the sons of Jacob took wives for themselves and the angel reported the names of them all. When Jacob died after having gone down to Egypt, the angel tells us he gave all his books to Levi to guard them and renew them ‘*to this day*’.

The story of Joseph in Egypt was told in much the same way as it appears in Genesis, although when the angel came to describe the Exodus the angel brought Mastema into the account once more.

<sup>51</sup> Jubilees 15:18-19; some texts omit verse 19.

<sup>52</sup> The story is to be found in Jubilees 17:15- 18:16.

<sup>53</sup> Jubilees 23:7-10

<sup>54</sup> Jubilees 28:1-9

<sup>55</sup> Jubilees 30:6

But first, the angel reminded Moses of his birth story and his escape to Sinai.

*And you know what he (God) spoke to you at Sinai, and what prince Mastema desired to do with you as you returned to Egypt at the feast of Tabernacles. Did he not seek to kill you with all his power, and to save the Egyptians from you...?*

People in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE clearly had as much difficulty with Yahweh's attempt to kill Moses on his way back from the desert as modern commentators do. Mastema continued to be deeply involved in the story. As the plagues come over Egypt, Mastema struggled against Moses. And finally: -

*Mastema was not ashamed amid all the signs and wonders, and he became powerful and cried to the Egyptians that they should pursue you with all their power and with their horses, chariots and the mass of their people. And I stood between the Egyptians and you...*

*And the Lord led them (the Israelites) through the middle of the sea, as if it were dry land, but the Lord our God cast all the people he had caused to pursue Israel into the midst of the sea, into the depths of the abysses, ... because the Egyptians had thrown the Israelite's children into the river by the hundreds...*

*And on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> days, Mastema was bound and chained behind the children of Israel so that he could not oppose the children of Israel. But on the 19<sup>th</sup> day we released him so that he could help the Egyptians to pursue the children of Israel ... and he became powerful according to the Lord our god, so that the Lord could smite the Egyptians and hurl them into the sea<sup>56</sup>.*

Thus were the Egyptians destroyed. Mastema may not have known that he was doing the Lord's will as he was hardening the Egyptians hearts, but he was. He was the tool by which the Lord lured the Egyptians to their deaths and ensured the liberation of the Israelites.

*...on the fifteenth day we bound him, so that he could not oppose the children of Israel on the day they asked for utensils and clothing from the men of Egypt – utensils of silver, gold and iron – in order to despoil the Egyptian.*

The Angel concluded his dictation with a recitation of the detail of the law of Sabbath,

*so that the children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, as it is written on the Tablets in Heaven, which he gave into my hands so that I should write for you the laws of the times, and the different times in the division of days.*

And so the Book ended.

Why did the author feel it to be necessary to write a new version of the Epic? It seems he needed to dispel any idea that the laws, signs and festivals were late additions to the cult. On the contrary, all of these things had existed from the beginning; the laws were inscribed on the Tablets of Heaven; the first sacrifice was undertaken by the first man; the festivals were celebrated by the Patriarchs; the angels themselves wore the sign of circumcision. The author is insisting that this was not a religion that had evolved, and therefore could change further; no, this was the only true religion and it was as it always had been – a fixed and unchanging expression of the divine will. There were other motives as well. In practical terms, the author tightened the marriage laws, preventing marriage outside the cult, re-interpreted difficult passages from Scripture, and broadened the legitimate temple priesthood to include all Levites (Aaron is nowhere mentioned in this text.) It seems that the Torah had by this time become accepted as 'Scripture' and therefore was unchangeable. Thus he had to write a new document which took the form of a commentary or '*Pesher*' on the original text. A commentary enables a writer to change the meaning of an original text without repudiating that text. In this case the author set the text as the dictation of the angel most involved in history to give it the maximum authority possible short of claiming it as a direct revelation from God. Since it was the convention of his time that the age of prophecy was past, claims of direct revelation could have been rejected.

Jubilees was an attempt to re-interpret scripture to meet the needs of the author's time. Many other attempts were made in his day, and they continue down to our present time.

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<sup>56</sup> Jubilees 48:2 - 15

## Qumran

It is probable that the Jewish sects of the Essenes and the Sadducees – ‘Zadok-ees’ – were formed in the early part of the second century BCE<sup>57</sup>. Both sects were discontented with the way the temple was being run. The Essenes are held by many to be the sect behind the community at Qumran, and thus the librarians of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The scrolls themselves state that their community arose in the ‘age of wrath’<sup>58</sup> when a king named Antiochus was on the throne<sup>59</sup>: this can only be Antiochus IV and the ‘age of wrath’ the crisis caused by the struggle between the Hellenisers and the more pious Jews. The archaeological evidence from excavations in Qumran, places the establishment of a community there at around 150-140 BCE, whilst the Damascus Document tells of a period during which the movement comprised a group who were like blind men ‘groping for their way’ until they found an inspirational leader<sup>60</sup>, the first or only ‘Teacher of Righteousness’. The archaeology and the texts together suggest a group that came together around 165 and first set up their monastery in Qumran around 145. They were to continue there until their community was over-run by the Romans around 70 CE.

Their commentary on Habakkuk described a conflict between the community’s leader known as the Teacher of Righteousness, and the Wicked Priest. Names were not given, but:

*The Wicked Priest ...was called by the true name at the beginning of his course, but when he ruled Israel, he became arrogant, abandoned God, and betrayed the statutes for the sake of wealth. He stole and amassed the wealth of the men of violence, who had rebelled against God...<sup>61</sup>*

The title Wicked Priest (*ha-kohen ha-rasa*) may be a pun on *ha-kohen ha-ros* – the Hebrew for ‘High Priest’. Some suggest therefore that the ‘Wicked Priest’ was not an individual but a title applied to a series of holders of the office of High Priest, one of whom met with the approval of the group, but who lost their support when he became the ruler. Such a view is taken by the authors of the Groningen Hypothesis.<sup>62</sup> The high priests in their ‘List of the Wicked’ include Judas Maccabee, Alcimus, Jonathan Maccabee, Simon Maccabee, John Hyrcanus I and Alexander Jannaeus, none of whom were descendants of Zadok<sup>63</sup>. If the references are taken to be to a single person, then Jonathan Maccabee is the ‘consensus’ candidate, although Alexander Jannaeus outdoes him in terms of raw wickedness.

The person to whom the title ‘Teacher of Righteousness’ was given in the Damascus document and elsewhere has not been identified with any named individual. He was described as a priest and treated as a prophet and the leader of the community in Qumran. An interesting possibility stems from Josephus’ statement that there was no High Priest for the seven years before Jonathan’s assumption of the role.<sup>64</sup> This is often taken to mean that there was no High Priest officially appointed by the Seleucid authorities, as it is hard to believe that the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement were not enacted in these years<sup>65</sup>. If there was a locally accepted priest of Zadokite descent in this role, then Jonathan would have usurped the position, possibly causing the righteous High Priest to set up a community with his followers in the Judean desert.

The community styled itself the ‘Sons of Zadok’<sup>66</sup> – perhaps emphasising their belief that only the descendants of Zadok could be High Priests. They held strongly to the old traditions of temple

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<sup>57</sup> Josephus first refers to the three Jewish sects - the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes - in Antiquities 13:5:9 shortly after having dealt with Jonathan’s appointment as high priest in 13:5:4

<sup>58</sup> Damascus Document I:5. Vermes (1998); ‘The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls’ p 127. The same document talks of the foundation of the community being 390 years after the conquest of Jerusalem, but we know from Daniel and other roughly contemporary texts that the Judeans may have been muddled about the reigns of the Persian kings and this time estimate cannot be regarded as reliable.

<sup>59</sup> Nahum Commentary I, The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls p 474

<sup>60</sup> Damascus Document I:10

<sup>61</sup> 1QpHab 8:8-

<sup>62</sup> García Martínez, Florentino, and van der Woude, A.S. 1990. "A ‘Groningen’ Hypothesis of Qumran Early Origins and Early History." *Revue de Qumrân* 14: 521-542.

<sup>63</sup> 1QpHab 8:8-12:10

<sup>64</sup> Antiquities 20:10. (238). In this Josephus was following the pro-Hasmonean 1 Maccabees.

<sup>65</sup> J Murphy O’Connor’s article on the ‘Teacher of Righteousness’ in ABD

<sup>66</sup> IQS v, 7-9. Note that ‘*zadok*’ in Hebrew can be translated as ‘righteous’.

worship, as ordained in the Temple Scroll which is believed to have been written around 400 BCE and was regarded by the community as the sixth book of the Torah. But they preferred to live apart from the temple which they perceived to have been corrupted by the illegitimate High Priests of their time. They were fanatical observers of the Law of Moses, although they interpreted some of the laws in original ways.

The Qumran community maintained and copied an extensive library of material including manuscripts of most of the books that would later form the Hebrew Bible, some books that would later be relegated to the Apocrypha, some non-biblical spiritual texts which pre-date the formation of the community, their own writings (including a letter to Jonathan) and many 'Peshers' – interpretations of scripture made relevant to current events. Up to the time of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the source text for the Hebrew Bible was a copy of the Masoretic text that dated from about 800 CE. The Qumran material thus offered texts that were 1000 years earlier. The scrolls show that more than one version of many of the biblical books were in common circulation. Apparently this caused no particular difficulty to the community and may indeed have been welcomed. The dissimilarities of the multiple copies of many of the texts indicate that some scribes felt free to improve the texts they were copying when that seemed appropriate. It was not until after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans that the Jewish authorities attempted to establish a single official version of the biblical texts. The scrolls have assisted modern translators in resolving some of the difficulties they previously had with the traditional texts. They also confirmed that Hebrew was not widely understood outside priestly circles from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE onwards and that Aramaic and Greek translations were often used.<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, one of the differences between the community of Qumran and the temple authorities was in the calendar used. Jonathan retained the ancient Lunar Calendar of 12 months of 29 or 30 days resulting in a year of 354 days; this was corrected once every 3 years by inserting an extra month. The community held to a Solar calendar of 12 months of 30/31 days (52 weeks of 7 days) resulting in a year of 364 days<sup>68</sup>.

This difference enabled 'The Wicked Priest' to attack the community on their Day of Atonement (but not his), with the intention of causing them to 'stumble on the day of fasting'<sup>69</sup>

### **The winning of Independence (150 – 104 BCE)**

In 145 Ptolemy VI (Mother-Loving) decided to exploit the weakness of Alexander Balas and seek to add the Seleucid empire to his own. He formed an alliance with the son of Demetrius and the two of them invaded Syria whilst Alexander Balas was busy putting down an uprising in Cilicia. Jonathan Maccabee granted the Ptolemaic Greeks safe passage through the territory he controlled. The invasion was successful and Ptolemy had himself crowned in Antioch. When Alexander returned from Cilicia, he attempted to regain his kingdom in a battle near Antioch, but lost and fled to Nabatea where he was murdered. Ptolemy died shortly afterwards, probably of wounds sustained in the battle, and thus Demetrius' son recovered his father's throne, taking the name Demetrius II. He was to rule for a few years before losing the Syrian kingdom to his younger brother Antiochus VII. (He would recover a reduced version of the empire around 129/130 BCE but, never popular, would lose it again and be killed about 4 years later)

Meanwhile, Jonathan took the opportunity to lay siege to the Akra, the Seleucid garrison in the heart of Jerusalem. Demetrius II no doubt resented this, but could do no more than negotiate a settlement in which the Seleucid garrison remained in the Akra and Jonathan's power in Judea was enlarged by the addition of several adjacent territories.

Demetrius II was not as generous as Alexander had been, so that when a challenge to the throne was made by one Tryphon on behalf of Alexander's son, Jonathan gave Tryphon his full support. But Tryphon's real objective had probably been to acquire the throne for himself rather than for Alexander's son and he probably perceived that Jonathan would oppose him in this. He lured Jonathan into a trap that resulted in Jonathan's capture and the death of his bodyguard.

Leadership of the Judeans now fell to another Maccabee brother, Simon. Simon resisted all Tryphon's military attacks and negotiated his brother's release; but Tryphon broke the bargain and murdered Jonathan. This led Simon into seeking an arrangement with Demetrius II, who granted Simon

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<sup>67</sup> The Library of Qumran pp 80-88

<sup>68</sup> The traditional Ethiopian calendar, to this day, uses a year comprising 12 months of 30 days and a thirteenth month of 5 or 6 days to give a 365-day year (366 in leap years). Ethiopian time is biblical, with the first hour starting at dawn.

<sup>69</sup> Scrolls 1QpHabXI:5-7

a peace agreement and the remission of all tribute, thus securing a glimpse of independence.

The date was 142 BCE. It was a measure of Simon's success that, from this time, people began to date legal contracts as being made according to the year of Simon's reign<sup>70</sup>. The following year Simon finally accepted the surrender of the residents of the Akra – merely by waiting for them to give up, for Jonathan had effectively sealed off the enclave from all outside supplies. With the fall of the Akra, the power of the Hellenising element in Judea's aristocracy was brought to an end. In 140 BCE the assembled people declared Simon "High Priest, Commander in Chief and Leader of the Nation". No external approval was deemed necessary – at least not by the author of 1 Maccabees, who recorded this event.<sup>71</sup>

Despite his success, Simon was murdered along with two of his sons in 135 BCE. But the murderer did not find all Simon's sons and one, John Hyrcanus, escaped to Jerusalem. The murderer was Simon's son-in-law who was seeking to gain the favour of the new Seleucid Monarch, Antiochus VII Sidetes<sup>72</sup>, another son of Demetrius I. When John appeared in Jerusalem he seems to have received popular support. By contrast, the murderer (who named himself Ptolemy after the Egyptian Greek dynasty) failed to gain the support he hoped for and fled to Jericho where he secured himself inside the nearby fortress, known as Dagon, taking John's mother and his remaining brethren with him as hostages. When John attempted to take the fort, Ptolemy is said to have tortured John's mother in full sight of invading troops, forcing John to withdraw.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, John was confirmed as the new ruler John Hyrcanus I. He would carry the banner of the Hasmonean dynasty for the next 30 years. He renewed the alliance with Rome, but Antiochus VII Sidetes was unimpressed and tested the new leader with an invasion of Judea and a siege of Jerusalem. Faced with a shortage of food within the city, John expelled all those who could not serve as defenders; but Antiochus would not let these through his lines, so eventually they had to be re-admitted. The siege ended with a negotiated settlement in which John had to agree to a renewal of vassalage which included leading a contingent of Judean troops in support of Antiochus, a reduction in his territory and renewed tribute. Despite this, Antiochus Sidetes was also known as a Benefactor. It may be that, once having secured control of Judea, he was respectful of Judean customs and religion and possibly contributed financially to the temple. When this Antiochus was killed in battle in 129/8 BCE, the Seleucid leadership entered into a period of internal conflict which permitted many of their vassal states to withdraw. Judea, the Itureans of Lebanon, the Ammonites, and the Arabian Nabateans all broke away from Seleucid control at this time.<sup>74</sup> John himself may have attempted once more to deal with the murderer of his father. He secured control of Jericho, but the self-styled 'Ptolemy', having killed John's mother, escaped to Rammoth Amman, today's capital of Jordan, but then known by the Greek name of Philadelphia.

With the death of Antiochus VII, Judea became at last an independent state, no longer paying tribute and free to execute her own foreign policy. Ever since acquiring the trappings of a state in the eighth century BCE, Judah (or Jehud or Judea) had been under the domination of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian or Greek overlords. Though she may have attempted to seek liberation before, and from time to time refused to pay tribute, the prevailing power had always brought her back under its domination. Now, for the first time, she was no-one's vassal and moreover was probably recognised as such by Rome, the regional super-power. Whilst it is difficult both to date and to determine the full effect of John's embassies to Rome, it appears that the Senate passed two decrees concerning Rome's relation with Judea in response to his approaches, and these probably supported Judean independence<sup>75</sup>. It was in the interest of Rome that Judea should be independent and not part of any of the Greek empires, each of which Rome sought to weaken. John emphasized his independence by becoming the first Hasmonean leader to issue his own coinage. The coins were inscribed with archaic Hebrew script, not the contemporary Aramaic, and read "Johanan, the High Priest, Head of the Council of the Judeans." John did not claim any secular leadership role other than that of chairman of the governing council, contenting himself with the substantial powers of High Priest. In his time, he rebuilt Jerusalem's walls, a fortress to the north of the Temple, and raised and maintained a professional army using money, it is alleged, that he took from David's tomb<sup>76</sup>.

Continuing internal difficulties amongst the Seleucids gave John the opportunity to extend his

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<sup>70</sup> 1 Maccabees 13:41-42

<sup>71</sup> 1 Maccabees 14:41

<sup>72</sup> So-called in recognition of 'Side', his home town.

<sup>73</sup> Josephus; Antiquities 13.7.4 (228) – 13.8.1 (235)

<sup>74</sup> Gaalyahu Cornfeld. Daniel to Paul: Jews in Conflict with Greco-Roman Civilization. p 50

<sup>75</sup> H. Jagersma. A History of Israel from Alexander the Great to Bar Kochba. (Minneapolis.: Fortress Press, 1986), p 84.

<sup>76</sup> Josephus. Antiquities 13.8.4 (249)

territory into parts of Syria, Samaria, Moab and Idumea using his mercenary army to deliver his ambitions. In Samaria he captured Shechem and Gerizim and the ‘nation of the Cutheans’ who dwelt around the Samaritan temple.<sup>77</sup> It may be that the Cutheans were driven into exile as a result, for Josephus declares that the temple was subsequently deserted. Following his conquest of Edom, John required the population to choose between exile and conversion to Judaism – a conversion that required the circumcision of the males. The future Herod the Great, who would later be installed by the Romans as ruler of Judea, traced his family’s connection with Judaism to this event.<sup>78</sup>

Towards the end of his career, John commanded his sons Aristobulus and Antigonus to lay siege to the capital of Samaria. The siege lasted a year and was eventually successful despite the assistance delivered by Antiochus IX to the beleaguered city. It is alleged that the city was raised to the ground and its citizens carried off to slavery, although some argue that only the Macedonian settlers were enslaved.

John ruled his country for 30 years and died peaceably in 104 BCE, having led his countrymen into independence and increasing economic success. He re-established Jerusalem’s religious and secular authority in the territories of the former Israel.

Two documents from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE shed some light on the contemporaneous relationship between the Diaspora and Judean homeland.

1. A letter sent in 124 BCE from “The Judeans in Jerusalem and those in Judea” (that is from John or one of his officials) to the Judean community in Egypt. It encouraged them to keep the festival of Hanukkah, the festival established to celebrate the Hasmonean’s rededication of the temple. Records of the festival being held in Egypt do not begin before this date. The letter is preserved as the opening section of 2 Maccabees.
2. A five volume history of the Hasmonean revolt from about 15 years before the persecution until Judas Maccabee’s victory 161 BCE. It was written by a Libyan Judean called Jason who lived in Cyrene. Although this document has been lost, a condensed version is incorporated into the core section of 2 Maccabees.

The Diaspora saw itself as an extension of the Judean nation practising a form of religion called, for the first time, Judaism. The period of Judean independence opened with a period of moderately prolific writing, both in the Diaspora and in the homeland. There were two histories of the recent past, an anthology of spiritual writings and three satirical stories resulting in unexpected triumphs for the Judeans. The histories, known as 1 and 2 Maccabees, give an insight into the way the tumultuous events of the years leading up to independence were viewed by those who lived through them. They covered overlapping but different time spans and were written from different perspectives and with different purposes: the modern nomenclature is confusing in that it is probable that the book known as 2 Maccabees was the first to be completed.

## **2 Maccabees (130-124 BCE)**

The main purpose of this book was to tell the story of the re-dedication of the Temple and to encourage its celebration in the festival of Hanukkah. The history it included ran from the start of the reign of Antiochus IV (175 BCE) until the unsuccessful attempt of Demetrius I to retake Jerusalem in late 161 - a period of around 15 years. It did not include Demetrius’ successful second attempt, which resulted in the death of Judas Maccabee.

It was a collection of documents assembled by a Greek-speaking Jewish author. It incorporated the letter sent in 124 BCE from John Hyrcanus to the Alexandrians concerning the celebration of Hanukkah and another earlier letter covering the same subject in more detail, but not universally regarded as authentic<sup>79</sup>. Starting in the third chapter, the bulk of the work was taken up by a condensed version of the History written by Jason of Cyrene, abridged by the collator and supplemented with material of his own.

It is certainly possible for Jason of Cyrene’s history to have been available at the time that the letter was written, for the last event described in the history – Judas’ defeat of Demetrius’ army - occurred no later than 160 BCE. Josephus believed that Ptolemy I had settled Judeans in Cyrene and Josephus

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<sup>77</sup> Josephus. *The Wars of the Jews* 1.2.6 (63) and *Antiquities* 13.9.1 (256)

<sup>78</sup> Oxford p. 446. Josephus describes this in *Antiquities* 13.9.1(257-8)

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Fischer, in his ABD article on the Books of Maccabees argues that the letter is authentic, being independently confirmed by the Babylonian Talmud.

quoted Strabo as stating that the city was inhabited by ‘citizens, husbandmen, strangers and Judeans’ in the time of Sulla (early first century BCE)<sup>80</sup> by which time Cyrene had become the capital of the Roman Province in what is now Libya. Jason was thus probably a Greek speaking Judean whose family had lived in the Judean community in Libya – a community that had been established several generations before his time in order to provide a group of citizens through whom loyalty to Alexandria could be assured. Some speculate that Jason himself could have been Jason son of Eleazar, whom Judas Maccabee sent as an emissary to Rome.<sup>81</sup> If so, this might explain why the book ended where it appears to have done (on the basis of the condensed extract used), and would suggest that Jason could have lived through the events he described.

Because the book was much concerned with the preservation of the temple traditions, it is unlikely that it would have been compiled after Pompey’s entry into the temple in 63 BCE. It was probably earlier since discontent with Maccabean rule, resulting in the six-year Jewish Civil War, was already widespread in the early years of the first century BCE. It is improbable that such a pro-Maccabean work would have been written after the beginning of the civil war. The cruelties that accompanied the ending of this war were on a par with those which justified the Maccabean revolt. If it is accepted that the purpose of this collection of writings was to establish the festival of Hanukkah in Alexandria, then the most likely date would be earlier still - 124 BCE or shortly thereafter.

### The text

The main body of the first letter referred to the attempt by Jason, ‘*no high priest*’, to regain the high-priesthood from Menelaus by force - the event that had precipitated Antiochus’ fear that his dismissal out of Egypt by the Romans had provoked an uprising in Judea, which in turn had led to the ‘Abomination of Desolation’.

*In the extreme troubles that came upon us in the years after the revolution that Jason and his company initiated in the holy ground and in the kingdom, burning the gate and shedding innocent blood, we prayed to the Lord and we were heard. We offered sacrifice and grain offering, and we lit the lamps and set out the loaves. And we now ask you to keep the festival of booths in the month of Chislew, in the one hundred eighty-eighth year.<sup>82</sup>*

The resulting Maccabean revolution succeeded in recovering the temple in 164. The Judeans had cleansed and re-consecrated the temple and wished their fellow Judeans to join in the celebrations. The rest of the book could be regarded as a kind of ‘attachment’ to this letter, providing supporting material for the letter’s request.

In the other (earlier) letter, addressed to Aristobulus<sup>83</sup> and the Judeans in Alexandria, there is an interesting description of the use of Naphtha to provide fire in association with temple ritual. Nehemiah had apparently heard that the old pre-exilic priests had hidden the temple fire, and when commissioning the second temple he ordered the new priests to go and collect it.

*And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but only a thick liquid, he ordered them to dip it out and bring it. When the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and on the things laid upon it. When this had been done and some time had passed, and when the sun, which had been clouded over, shone out, a great fire blazed up, so that all marvelled.<sup>84</sup>*

Presumably it was felt appropriate that something similar be incorporated in a ceremony that celebrated the re-commissioning of the temple. The author recalls that Jeremiah had told those who were being deported to take some of this fire with them; maybe Jeremiah himself took some to Egypt. There is a comment that Jeremiah also took the Ark when he left Jerusalem, and hid it in a cave declaring the place shall remain secret “*until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy*”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Josephus: Antiquities 14:7:2 (115) and Against Apion 2:4 (44)

<sup>81</sup> 1 Maccabees 8:17. See R. Doran’s introduction (section B:2) to his commentary on 2 Maccabees in the Oxford Bible Commentary.

<sup>82</sup> 2 Maccabees 7b-8. The year 188 was 124 BCE.

<sup>83</sup> Aristobulus, an Alexandrian Jew, dedicated a work on the Pentateuch to Antiochus VI (180-145 BCE)

<sup>84</sup> 2 Maccabees 1:20b-22

<sup>85</sup> 2 Maccabees 2:4-8. This is consistent with the Ethiopian view that the Ark was initially taken to the

The book contained two different accounts of the death of the unstable Antiochus IV. In the first he allegedly died in Persia after being lured into a marriage ceremony with the goddess Nanaea<sup>86</sup> during which priests opened a trap door above his head, hurled stones down upon him, cut him into pieces and tossed his head to the crowds outside. In second version, Antiochus heard the news of the defeat of his troops in Judea whilst retreating from a failed raid on Persepolis in distant Persia. Mad with rage, he ordered his charioteer to drive non-stop to Jerusalem so that he could turn that city into a mass grave. But the Lord struck him with an incurable pain in his bowels and agonising internal tortures. Falling out of the chariot, he was dragged along, every joint wrenched out of place. He had a lingering death in the sight of his army; his eyes teeming with worms, his flesh rotting away, the stench of his decay sickening his whole army. It is alleged that, in his agony, he promised he would adorn the Temple, restore the sacred vessels and even himself convert to Judaism proclaiming to all the world the power of the God of the Judeans.<sup>87</sup>

After the letters, the author introduced his material by emphasising the scale of the work he had undertaken. In his summary of the contents, he mentions *‘the celestial manifestations that encouraged those who fought bravely for Judaism’*. This is the first recorded use of the word ‘Judaism’, coined presumably as a contrast to Hellenism since Hanukkah is a commemoration of the restoration of the temple for Judaism after its temporary loss to the forces of Hellenism.

The author began his condensed version of Jason of Cyrene’s history with a description of the attempt by Heliodorus to take money from the Jerusalem temple. He continued with Jason’s acquisition of the High Priesthood by bribery, and followed that by an account of the similar machinations of the equally corrupt Menelaus. He described the second invasion of Egypt by Antiochus IV, with added associated heavenly portents, and wrote about Antiochus’ entry into the temple *‘guided by Menelaus’*, and his seizure of the temple treasure.

The desecration of the temple was described, but placed in the context of the author’s belief in the power of God and Israel’s special relationship to the Lord. He explained: -

*Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognise that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. In fact, it is a sign of great kindness not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately.*<sup>88</sup>

The author pointed out that the Lord allowed other nations to carry on in their impious ways until the full measure of their transgressions required severe punishment, but he did not treat his own people in that way.

The steadfast adherence to the Law, even to the point of death under torture, was given as the right course of action for any virtuous Judean. Several examples were given - perhaps from Jason’s work, perhaps from other sources. In one a woman and her seven sons were arrested and tortured to make them eat pork<sup>89</sup>, but: -

*After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, “Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?” He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, “No.” Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.”*<sup>90</sup>

The idea that virtue will be rewarded in an everlasting renewal of life is clearly stated here. It may be that the idea of resurrection first gained acceptance in Judaism during the Maccabean revolt.

The author tells the story with an emphasis on the religious aspects and with an eye towards anecdotes that would appeal to his Judean audience. Thus he recounts that Nicanor, the emissary of Antiochus IV, had come to Jerusalem with plans to capture large numbers of Judeans as slaves with the

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Judean community on Elephantine and, when this place was threatened, from there to Ethiopia.

<sup>86</sup> She has been identified with Ishtar and Ashtoreth, gods of the Ancient Near East, and as Aphrodite or Artemis by the Greeks.

<sup>87</sup> Compare 2 Maccabees 2:11-17 with 2 Maccabees 9:1-29.

<sup>88</sup> 2 Maccabees 6:12-16

<sup>89</sup> This episode will be expanded in the 4 Maccabees.

<sup>90</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:7-9

aim of selling them to in order to raise the money needed to pay the tribute required of Antiochus by the Romans. But following Nicanor's defeat, the Judeans relieved the slave merchants of the money they had brought with them. Then, after pursuing the defeated army some distance, the Judeans felt obliged to return because it was the day before the Sabbath. They kept the Sabbath, giving great praise and thanks to the Lord, who had preserved them that day. Afterwards '*they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans*'.<sup>91</sup>

There followed an entry concerning other military engagements (probably misplaced) and the story then resumed saying that: -

*Whilst in Jerusalem, celebrating their victory, they burned those who had set fire to the Holy Gates. Callisthenes and some others had fled into one little house; so these received a fitting reward for their sacrilege.*

*The thrice-cursed Nicanor, who had brought the thousand merchants to buy the Judeans, having been humbled with the help of the Lord by men whom he had regarded as of very little account, took off his splendid uniform and made his way alone like a runaway slave across the country until he reached Antioch, having succeeded chiefly in the destruction of his own army!*

*He proclaimed that the Judeans had a Defender, and that the Judeans were invulnerable, because they followed the laws ordained by Him.*<sup>92</sup>

The grisly second account of the death of Antiochus IV followed. The author suggested that in his dying agony, Antiochus (Revealed-as-god) wrote a letter to the Judeans and to his successor, the child Antiochus V, wishing them all health and prosperity.

The month and day of the purification of the temple was said to have been the same as the month and day that the temple had earlier been desecrated. The Judeans held a festival, in the manner of 'Tabernacles', for eight days, and the leadership ordered by public decree, ratified by vote, that the whole nation should celebrate those same days each year.

The purification of the temple is at the heart of the book. After this had been described, the author continued with a description of the struggles of Judas against neighbouring peoples and against the regime of Antiochus V. In this account, Lysias (the tutor of young Antiochus V) invaded Judea but was routed ignominiously by the Judeans when '*a rider dressed in white and brandishing golden weapons*' appeared at their head<sup>93</sup>. When Lysias reflected upon his defeat he was said to have concluded that he should enter into negotiations with the Judeans since he could not defeat them whilst their god fought for them. The author quoted three letters which illustrated the progress of the negotiations and a fourth which demonstrated Rome's encouragement of the peace process.

With peace agreed, the Judeans '*returned to their farms*'.<sup>94</sup> But Antiochus V and his tutor, accompanied by the former so-called High Priest Menelaus, broke the peace and advanced on Jerusalem. Here the author probably got his sequence wrong and had Antiochus condemn Menelaus to death as '*the cause of all the trouble*' before matters started to go wrong for the king. The chosen means of execution was by being thrown into a tower of ashes – regarded by the author as appropriate end for a wicked High Priest on account of Menelaus' many sins against the altar and therefore the holy ashes of the sacred sacrificial fire.

The author continued to follow the history but included details such as a daring night time guerrilla raid by the Judeans that caused chaos in the empire's camp. The death of the lead elephant<sup>95</sup> led Lysias to try and achieve the empire's objectives by negotiation and trickery, rather than by force. It was whilst doing this that he heard that the man who he had left in charge of matters in Antioch had rebelled against him: so he made the best treaty he could and returned to attempt to deal with the rebel – in which matter Lysias was successful – only to be defeated two years, in 161 BCE, by Demetrius.

After reporting that Demetrius took the crown of Antioch and executed Antiochus V and his tutor Lysias, the author included another story with a morale-boosting message for pious Judeans. In this story Demetrius despatched Nicanor, perhaps the overly optimistic slave dealer, perhaps someone else (the author described him as the commander of the Elephants) to do battle with Judas and his men. But on his arrival, it proved that Nicanor was reluctant to fight against Judas and chose instead to make a

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<sup>91</sup> 2 Maccabees 8:25-28a

<sup>92</sup> 2 Maccabees 8:33-36

<sup>93</sup> 2 Maccabees 11:8

<sup>94</sup> 2 Maccabees 12:1

<sup>95</sup> 2 Maccabees 13:14-17

treaty with him. He even took up residence in Jerusalem. But Alcimus, the high priest, stirred up Demetrius who furiously sent a letter to Nicanor commanding him to break his Treaty. Although distressed by this instruction, Nicanor eventually made an attempt to arrest Judas by trying to force the temple priests to betray him. When they refused, the frustrated Nicanor stretched out his right hand and said, “*I shall raise this dwelling of God to the ground, shall demolish this altar and raise a temple to Dionysus here.*”<sup>96</sup> and he chased Judas into Samaria where he attempted an attack on the Sabbath. But the attack failed. There the author claimed that Judas had a vision of Jeremiah who presented Judas with a golden sword as a holy gift from God, saying “*With this sword you will shatter the enemy*”. In the following battle Nicanor’s forces were defeated and Nicanor himself killed. His right arm, the one he had raised when threatening ‘*this dwelling of God*’ was cut off and displayed; and the tongue that had been used to vocalise the threat was removed and fed to the birds bit by bit. And all agreed to celebrate that day ever afterwards. It was the eve of the Day of Mordechai.

The book ended modestly:

*If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do. For just as it is harmful to drink wine alone, or water alone, whilst wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one’s enjoyment, so also the style of the story should delight the ears of those who read the work.*<sup>97</sup>

The book aimed to entertain and educate. It developed the concept of a reward in the afterlife for sufferings, especially martyrdom, endured on earth. The author enjoyed describing peculiarly horrific deaths, whether of martyrs who thereby glorified god, or of villains whose divinely arranged punishment was always peculiarly suitable to their crimes. The author claimed that divine interventions directly assisted the Judeans in their struggle; something that the author of the later I Maccabees did not do.

### **1 Maccabees (ca 104 BCE)**

1 Maccabees was written for Judeans around 104 BCE. It was originally written in Hebrew, though only the Greek translation has survived to the present day – hence its relegation to the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles and to the Deutero-Canon in Roman Catholic Bibles. It was written by someone close to the Maccabean leadership. 1 Maccabees was a single composition – not a compilation of texts. At several points the book uses structures and phrases that seem to be intended to make the book sound like a continuation of the Deuteronomistic History. For example, the book ended with the following summary statement concerning the reign of John Hyrcanus I: -

*The rest of the acts of John and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and the building of the walls that he completed, and his achievements, are written in the annals of his high priesthood, from the time that he became high priest after his father*<sup>98</sup>

These closing lines, written in conscious imitation of the end-of-reign formula employed by the Deuteronomistic Historian, would make good sense if they had been written after the end of John’s reign in 104 BCE, but bearing in mind that there is no mention of John’s death, it is also possible that they were written whilst he was still alive but when the achievements of his reign were already substantial. It is likely that the book was written before the unpleasantness of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE) had developed to the point that a book celebrating the Hasmonean revolution would have seemed out of place. Hence a date around 110-100 BCE is plausible with most commentators preferring the end of this period.

1 Maccabees was an establishment version of the history of Judea from the time of the accession of Antiochus IV (175 BCE) through the Maccabean revolt to the death of Simon in 135 BCE<sup>99</sup>.

### The text

The book opened with a short history of Greek power in Judea from Alexander to the desecration of the temple and the revolt of Mattathias. It quoted contemporary documents, such as letters and treaty

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<sup>96</sup> 2 Maccabees 14:33b

<sup>97</sup> 2 Maccabees 15:38-39

<sup>98</sup> 1 Maccabees 16:23-24

<sup>99</sup> It was this book, rather than 2 Maccabees, that Josephus preferred as the source for his history.

texts and included oral tradition in the form of imagined or recollected speeches. It made many references to the Hebrew scriptures both in the way it used ancient formulations (such as the example quoted above) and through direct references to parallel stories. The implicit message is that the Hasmonean dynasty follows the line, if not the lineage, of the acknowledged kings and priests of Israel.

The book also included poetry in the classical Canaanite form. After describing the first raid on the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus IV (Revealed-As-God), the author wrote:

*Girls and young men fainted away;  
the beauty of women faded.  
Every bridegroom took up a lament;  
and the bride sat mourning on her marriage bed.  
Even the land trembled for its inhabitants -  
the whole house of Jacob was clothed with shame.<sup>100</sup>*

And again, when two years later Antiochus' tribute-gatherer<sup>101</sup> pillaged Jerusalem and set up the citadel as the base for their garrison in opposition to the temple sanctuary below, the author wrote: -

*It became an ambush against the sanctuary,  
an evil adversary of Israel at all times.  
All around the sanctuary they shed innocent blood;  
they defiled the sanctuary itself.  
Therefore the residents of Jerusalem fled;  
she became a dwelling of strangers.  
Estranged from her offspring,  
her children forsook her.  
Her sanctuary became as desolate as a desert;  
her feasts turned into mourning.  
Her Sabbaths into reproach  
her honour into contempt.<sup>102</sup>*

When he came to describing the edict of Antiochus concerning the abandonment of the Judean religion, the author acknowledged that many from Israel accepted the Greek religion. He admitted that:

*The king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judea; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land ...and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law. (1 Maccabees 1:41-50)*

In brutal language, the author described the implementation of this decree including the burning of books of the law and the desecration of the altar. Those women whose babies had been circumcised were executed with their infants hung around their necks. Then he described the event which triggered the Hasmonean revolt – the slaughter on the Sabbath of 1000 men, women and children who had gone into the desert to live rather than stay in the town under the oppression. This was the event that had led Mattathias to decide to form an armed resistance willing to fight even on a Sabbath.

The introduction concluded with Mattathias' end-of-life commendation of his sons to those who would intend to 'keep the law': -

*Here is your brother Simon who, I know, is wise in counsel. Always listen to him; he shall be your father. Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples.*

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<sup>100</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:26-28

<sup>101</sup> The Greek has the 'Mysarch' who is named as Apollonius in 2 Maccabees 5:24. He was the leader of the mercenaries from Mysia. 'Tribute-gatherer' and 'Mysarch' would have been similar in Hebrew. (Note in the New Jerusalem Bible)

<sup>102</sup> 1 Maccabees 1: 36-39

After Judas Maccabee had some initial success, the author wrote that Antiochus sent three generals including Georgias and Nicanor to Judea with a substantial force. Judas summoned the assembly to his camp and they resolved to fight to recover Jerusalem, their people and the sanctuary for: -

*Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness;  
not one of her children went in or out.  
The sanctuary was trampled down;  
foreigners held the citadel as a lodge for Gentiles.  
Joy was taken from Jacob;  
the flute and the harp ceased to play.*

When Judas eventually succeeded in capturing Jerusalem, success was not attributed to miraculous divine intervention, but rather to the courage of the Judean troops and their readiness to live or die nobly. When they entered the city ‘*they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar desecrated, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on a mountain. They saw the priest’s rooms in ruins*’<sup>103</sup>.

The restoration of the temple and the initiation of the festival of Hanukkah were described. The continuing campaigns of the Hasmonean leadership followed, but in the midst of these the author inserted a story of an independent attempt by couple of commanders to wage war on the surrounding gentiles – an attempt that ended in failure for, the author declares, ‘*they did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel.*’<sup>104</sup>

Considerable emphasis was placed on the support that Rome offered to the new dynasty. Reference to the Treaty that Judas sought and secured is preceded by a long passage describing the power and success of Rome. In summary, the author noted that the Romans: -

*...have subdued kings far and near, and as many as have heard of their fame have feared them. Those whom they wish to help and to make kings, they make kings, and those whom they wish deposed, they depose.*<sup>105</sup>

The reply that Judas’ ambassadors to Rome brought back ‘*inscribed on bronze tablets*’ was quoted followed by an extract from the letter allegedly sent from Rome to Antioch requiring Demetrius to desist from any future action against the Judeans.

The heroic death of Judas in battle was dealt with in a manner calculated to recall the scriptural accounts of the passing of Saul and Jonathan and of the Deuteronomic History

*Jonathan and Simon took their brother Judas and buried him in the tomb of their ancestors at Modein, and wept for him. All Israel made great lamentation for him; they mourned many days and said,  
“How are the mighty fallen, the saviour of Israel!”  
Now the rest of the acts of Judas, and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and his greatness, have not been recorded, but they were very many.*<sup>106</sup>

It was claimed that the Treaty with Rome was renewed and in addition a Treaty was made with Sparta. In support of the Treaty with Sparta it was suggested that Jonathan reminded them of an exchange of letters that had occurred earlier between the High Priest Onias and the Spartan king Arius in which the Spartan had written: -

*It has been found in writing concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and are of the family of Abraham.*<sup>107</sup>

Whilst there is no evidence of this connection, such myth-making was no doubt good politics.

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<sup>103</sup> 1 Maccabees 4:38

<sup>104</sup> 1 Maccabees 5:62

<sup>105</sup> 1 Maccabees 8:12b-13

<sup>106</sup> 1 Maccabees 9:18-22. The references are to 2 Samuel 1:19 and to the comments of the Deuteronomic Historian on each Davidic King - for example 1 Kings 14:29, 15:7, 15:23, 22:45 and elsewhere.

<sup>107</sup> 1 Maccabees 12:21

It was perhaps Simon who this author most admired. It was he who finally recovered the citadel, and it was to him that a letter was sent allegedly sent by Demetrius acknowledging Judean independence: -

*We are ready to make a general peace with you and to write to our officials to grant you release from tribute. All the grants that we have made to you remain valid, and let the strongholds that you have built be your possession. We pardon any errors and offenses committed to this day, and cancel the crown tax that you owe; and whatever other tax has been collected in Jerusalem shall be collected no longer...  
Let there be peace between us.*<sup>108</sup>

Simon was singled out for a poetic eulogy which began, in another emulation of the Deuteronomic History: -

*The land had rest all the days of Simon.  
He sought the good of his nation.  
His rule was pleasing to them,  
as was the honour shown him all his days.*<sup>109</sup>

The main part of the rest of the book described the career of Simon with quotations from correspondence with the Spartans and others. The centre piece is a declaration of honours for Simon by the Assembly. The book ended with a brief note on John Hyrcanus II and the Deuteronomic epilogue quoted above.

The author was writing a history with the apparent intention of justifying the establishment of a new dynasty founded by the three Maccabee brothers. He needed to show that this family was the right family to carry the inheritance of both the kingship and high priesthood. He used a number of techniques to do this: -

- The brothers' reigns were described in the manner used by the Deuteronomic Historian with regard to the Kings of Israel and Judah
- Events were described in ways that recalled the time of the Judges and of king Saul.
- The approval given to the brothers in treaties sealed with Rome, the world super-power, was emphasised.
- The approval given to them by the people and council was noted.
- Divine approval was inferred from a comparison between their own record of military success and the failure that occurred when other commanders acted on their own initiative.
- Eulogies were composed or quoted.

This 'history' is surprisingly modern in its use of contemporary documents and in the absence of any inserted accounts of direct divine intervention or manifestations. It was Josephus' preferred source for the period it described.

The continuation of this dynasty was clearly the hope and expectation of the author. He had John Hyrcanus II in the Solomon role - secure in his inheritance of the Kingdom from his father and potentially initiating a period of great wealth. But whether that could happen would depend upon the governance of John's successors.

### **The Judean Woman aka 'Judith' (ca 110-95 BCE)**

The original title of the book we know as Judith was "The Judean woman". Transliterating the Greek word we get "*Ioudith*", hence our "Judith". She was known as the widow of Manasseh, and her father's ancestors were named going back fourteen generations, but she herself was never named. Nevertheless, most English translations refer to her as 'Judith' - entirely missing the satirical point. Judging by its heroine and its setting, this book was the work of a Judean author. Whatever the original language was, the earliest available manuscript is from the Greek version in the Septuagint. It is not part of the Hebrew bible and is treated as Apocryphal by Protestants and Deutero-canonical by Roman Catholics. The story has many similarities with the ancient Canaanite myth of Aqat's sister.

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<sup>108</sup> 1 Maccabees 13:37-40

<sup>109</sup> 1 Maccabees 14:4

This more recent story was set in Samaria, where the imaginary town of Bethulia, the home of the Judean woman, was sited. The place names mentioned in the text - Azotus, Scythopolis, Mount Gerizim, Shechem, and Samaria itself did not become part of Judea till the time of John Hyrcanus I (135–104). In *Judith*, the offerings are made at the temple in Jerusalem, not the nearby Samaritan temple at Mount Gerizim – suggesting it may have been written after that temple had fallen out of use (107 BCE). However, the absence from the text of any hint of the sectarian divisions of the early decades of the first century suggest that it was not written much after 100 BCE. A date around 110 - 95 BCE is plausible.

This short story shows what a virtuous woman may do to save her people. It was written in common Greek and has many of the classic elements of the story-teller's art including favourite characters such as a ruthless general, bumbling officials, a beautiful widow, massive army manoeuvres, a prolonged banquet, a delicious seduction scene and a wicked villain. It makes great use of double meanings and sexual allusions. It has a song to go with it. There are strong elements of satire, but the main source of both the humour and the drama comes from the clever word play in which what is said is understood one way by the speaker and another way by the spoken to, whilst the audience understands both. The author knows Judean literature well and incorporates references to *Jonah*, *Deuteronomy*, *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Numbers*, *Samuel*, *Kings*, *Maccabees* and *Enoch* – some of which will be found in the extracts quoted below. Its ostensible theme is the triumph of an apparently powerless but faithful Judean woman over the powerful but sinful foreign emperor.

Given the irony employed, it would not be surprising if the author was herself a Judean Woman. The book is an entertainment – a heroic tale with delightful touches of wit and subtle humour.

### The story

*It was the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadrezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in that great city of Nineveh when Arphaxad ruled over the Medes in Ecbatana.*

Here we have a collection of well-known characters and places, but all mixed up. The historical Nebuchadrezzar ruled over the Babylonians not the Assyrians, and the biblical Arphaxad was the son of Shem, Noah's son, not a ruler of the Persian city of Ecbatana.<sup>110</sup> The tale goes on to reveal fantastic details of Ecbatana's defences – its walls were 25 meters thick with towers 50 meters high. The audience would know, that whatever this story was about, it was not the history of Assyria. As it progressed, they might have realised that other more recent events were buried within this delightful entertainment.

The story began with Nebuchadrezzar calling on all the world to help him destroy Ecbatana. But the people of the west made light of the order and sent his ambassadors home in disgrace. This made Nebuchadrezzar furious and he swore he would destroy the offenders after he had dealt with Ecbatana. So once Ecbatana had been invested by his army he decided that he and his army would feast there for 120 days! It was only when they had finished celebrating that he called his general Holofernes and commissioned him to take 120,000 footmen and 12,000 horsemen and to go and punish those who had not obeyed the emperor's call. He instructed that their wounded should fill the up their 'ravines', their dead bodies should block up their rivers and any survivors should to be led captive to the 'ends of the earth'. (Shades of *Enoch*?)

After this introduction, the story was structured into two chiasmi – the first focusing on Holofernes and his ruthless use of massive armies and the second on the Judean Woman and her clever use of soft feminine power.<sup>111</sup> The first chiasmus introduced Joakim as a self-centred High Priest and Achior as Holofernes' advisor on Judean affairs: it comprised: -

Holofernes campaign against the disobedient nations and the surrender of their people  
 Israel's terror on hearing of Holofernes approach  
 Joakim's war preparations  
 Holofernes' talk with Achior  
 Achior's expulsion by Holofernes  
 Achior's reception by Bethulia  
 Achior's talk with Bethulia  
 Holofernes' war preparations  
 Israel's terror at the sight of Holofernes armies  
 Holofernes' Campaign against Bethulia and the people's wish to surrender

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<sup>110</sup> See W J Ong's 'Orality and Literature' for a discussion on the use of archetypes in ancient story telling.

<sup>111</sup> Craven, T (1977). *Artistry and faith in the book of Judith*. *Semiotica* 8:75-101

The form of the second chiasmus is somewhat disguised by the inclusion of a song in the style of Miriam's 'Song of the Sea' as part of the victory celebrations, but the underlying structure comprised: -

The Judean woman and her slave-maid in Bethulia  
The plans of the Judean woman to save Israel  
The agreement of the people to her plan  
The departure of the woman and her maid from Bethulia  
The first dinner with Holofernes and the woman  
The prayer of the woman  
The fatal dinner with Holofernes and the woman  
The return of the woman and her maid to Bethulia  
The plans of the woman for the destruction of the Assyrians  
The execution of her plan.  
The freeing of the Judean Woman's slave-maid in Bethulia

In the first chiasmus we learn that Holofernes and his immense army travelled from Nineveh to northern Cilicia (about 500 miles) in just three days, and that he destroyed a great number of nations with such efficiency that the unconquered peoples of the coast were terrified and sent ambassadors to him saying

*Use us as seems fit to you; See our houses and lands, all our wheat fields, our flocks and herds...even our cities and their inhabitants are your slaves; use them as you please.*

Holofernes processed down the coast. Relieved to be allowed to remain alive, the people welcomed him with dancing, garlands and tambourines! He, in turn, destroyed their shrines and declared that they should worship Nebuchadrezzar alone. (This must have rung Antiochan bells with the audience.) And then he pitched camp on the borders of Judea and waited there for a month, gathering his strength.

The people of Israel had only just returned from exile! They were exceedingly afraid and troubled for Jerusalem and the temple. They made preparations for defence. The high priest Joakim even wrote to the people of Bethulia asking them to guard the mountain passes because, in his view, it should be easy enough for them to stop an invading force, since the passes were very narrow. Then everyone in Israel cried fervently to God. And they, their wives, children and their cattle put on sackcloth.

When Holofernes heard of the guarded passes he was furious and called together the local leaders and sought intelligence from them as to the strengths of the people of Judea. Achior of the Ammonites responded with a short version of the history of Israel<sup>112</sup>. He argued, in Deuteronomic fashion, that when the Israelites obeyed the commandments of their god they are invincible; but whenever they disobeyed their god, they were easily defeated. Holofernes was angered by this analysis and stated that his army will certainly defeat the Judeans either way. 'Who is god but Nebuchadrezzar?' he asked. 'It is the god Nebuchadrezzar, the only true god, who will send his power to crush the Judeans, whose mountains, will then be drunk on their blood'. He expelled Achior saying 'You shall see my face no more till I have taken vengeance on this people that came out of Egypt'. He had Achior deposited in the valley below Bethulia so that he would suffer the same fate as the Judeans. The people of Bethulia found him and brought him before their leader Uzziah, whose name means 'Yahweh-is-my-strength'. All the elders, the youth and the women gathered to hear Achior tell of all that had happened in his meeting with Holofernes. Then people prayed saying

*Lord God of Heaven, look at their arrogance! Have mercy on our people in our miserable state, and look with favour this day on those who are consecrated to you.*

The next day Holofernes ordered his whole army and all the many troops who had joined him, a total of 170,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry, to move against Bethulia, seize the passes and make war on the Israelites. This great army spread out in front of Bethulia. Holofernes was advised by the Edomites with him not to attack, but rather to cut off their water supplies and thus force their capitulation, and

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<sup>112</sup> King David's army was fighting the Ammonites when he was having his affair with Bathsheba. That story includes a reference to the death of Abimelech at the hands of another un-named woman. (2 Samuel 11)

Holofernes did this.

The siege continued for 34 days. Then the exhausted people of Bethulia came to their leaders and demanded that they surrender saying,

*God has delivered us into their hands. We would be better off to become their spoil... Although we would become their slaves, we would at least live, and not have to see our little ones dying before our eyes and our wives and children breathing their last.*<sup>113</sup>

And they asked ‘Yahweh-is-my-Strength’ to go to the Assyrians and surrender. But he answered, “*Let us wait five more days for the Lord our god to show us mercy. But if help does not come, I will do as you ask.*”

This completed the first chiasmus. The second began with an introduction to the Judean Woman and her household. She had lost her husband 3 years and 4 months ago<sup>114</sup>. Despite the fact that her husband had left gold and silver, male and female slaves, livestock and fields, she had lived on the roof of her house wearing sackcloth and fasting every day except those on which such actions were forbidden. She was unbelievably virtuous, and incredibly beautiful.

On hearing of the public meeting, she summoned the leaders and demanded, “*Who are you to put God to the test?*” She told them that imposing conditions on God in the way that ‘God-is-my-strength’ had done was fundamentally wrong. If, as a result, Holofernes took the city, enslaved the people and plundered the sanctuary then God would hold them responsible. When the leaders acknowledged her wisdom, she told them she would perform a deed that would go down in history from generation to generation. She prayed when they had left, and her prayer ended with these words: -

*Please, please God of my father, God of Israel, God of Heaven and Earth, Creator of the waters, King of all you have created, hear my prayer. Let my misleading words wound and bruise those who plan cruel things against your covenant... Make every nation know...that there is no other that protects the people of Israel, but only you alone.*

She laid aside her widow’s clothes, washed her body and anointed it with rich fragrances, arranged her hair, put on a diadem and dressed as for a festival. She put on sandals, rings and ear-rings, bracelets for her wrists and ankles and all her jewellery. She made herself very beautiful – to entice the eyes of men. She gave her maid a bag of food and the two of them went out of city gate towards the Assyrian camp until they encountered an enemy patrol. She told the patrol’s leader that she was fleeing from the ‘*Hebrews*’<sup>115</sup> because they were about to be given over to the Assyrians and she wished to tell Holofernes how to take possession of the whole hill country without a single man being killed or injured. The soldiers willingly gave her an escort. Apparently, it required 100 men to take her to see Holofernes! Whilst she waited outside his tent, a crowd gathered around her and wondered at her beauty, saying, “*Who can despise a people who have such women among them... They could beguile the whole world.*” When Holofernes came out, she prostrated herself on the ground, but his servants raised her up and he said, “*Have courage; I have never harmed anyone who serves Nebuchadrezzar.*”

The Judean woman responded that she would say ‘*nothing false to my ‘Lord’, this night*’. Here ‘*Lord*’ has a double meaning; it could be Holofernes; it could also mean the Judean woman’s Lord, her God. She flattered Holofernes ruthlessly. She swore ‘*by the life of Nebuchadrezzar*’ that not only did people serve the king through him, but also the wild animals, the cattle and the birds of the air. She told him that the whole world had heard of his wisdom, cleverness, experience and distinguished military strategies. She admitted having met Achior and confirmed what he had said - that the Israelites were invincible except when they sinned against their God. But now they were so hungry, she said, that they have sent to Jerusalem to seek permission to eat the tithes of grain and wine which are reserved for the priests. She was sure they would get permission, because ‘*they have done this sort of thing before!*’ – a possible reference to David who took the altar bread when fleeing from Saul. When they do that, she said, they will sin and be vulnerable. She concluded “*I will remain with you ‘Lord’; but each night I will go out and pray to God and he will tell me when they have sinned. Then I will tell you, so that you may march out and none will be able to withstand you.*”

Holofernes responded saying, “*Not only are you beautiful, you are also eloquent. If you do as*

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<sup>113</sup> Judith 7: 25-32. See numbers 16:3 and numbers 14:3 for similar responses.

<sup>114</sup> Possibly the duration of the desecration of the temple.

<sup>115</sup> The Judeans never refer to themselves as ‘Hebrews’, but the bible quotes their enemies as using the term - possibly because it relates to the contemptable *habiru* (outlaw bands).

*you have said, your god will be my god*". (This quotation from the book of Ruth contrasts with Holofernes earlier statement that Nebuchadrezzar is the only god; he was clearly smitten). They retired to eat and drink. But the Judean woman would not accept any of Holofernes food because she feared it might be forbidden to her according to the laws of her god – for which reason she had brought her own food, or so she said.

*"But what if your supplies run out?"* asked Holofernes

*"As surely as you live, my 'lord', your slave will not run out of food before God accomplishes by my hand what he has determined."*

Each night she went out to bathe and to pray. The listeners to this story were told she needed to bathe to purify herself after contact with a Gentile; they could imagine what Holofernes thought. Whatever it was, he gave instructions that she was to not to be hindered. On the fourth night, Holofernes gave a banquet for his servants and the Judean woman - no officers were invited. He said to his eunuch, *"It would bring shame on us to be with such a woman without enjoying her; if we do not seduce her, she will laugh at us"*

The eunuch went to the Judean woman, *"So lovely a maidservant should not be reluctant to come to my lord and be 'honoured' by him, to enjoy wine with us, and to be made today like one of the Assyrian women who serve in Nebuchadrezzar's palace."*

*"Who am I to refuse my 'Lord',"* she replied, *"I will do whatever pleases 'Him'. It will be my joy till the day of my death."*

She put on her most alluring clothes and went to Holofernes. She had her maid spread soft skins on the ground before Holofernes. When she came in, she lay on them, Holofernes lust was aroused, he was enraptured by her; he burnt with desire to possess her, for he had been waiting on an opportunity to deceive her from the moment he first saw her.

*"Drink and be happy with us!"*

*"I will gladly drink, my 'Lord',* she said, *"for today is the greatest day of my whole life!"*

Holofernes, entranced, drank a great deal of wine – more than he had ever drunk before. When it grew late, his slaves withdrew. His eunuch closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence. The Judean woman was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, dead drunk. Then the woman, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, *"O Lord God of all might, look in this hour on the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. Now indeed is the time to help your inheritance and to carry out my design to destroy the enemies who have risen up against us."*

She went to the bedpost near Holofernes' head, and took down his sword. She came close to his bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said, *"Give me strength today, O Lord God of Israel!"* Then she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head. She rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts. Soon afterwards she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag.<sup>116</sup>

Leaving as if to go bathing as usual, the two of them walked back to her city. When the people of Bethulia saw Holofernes head and heard what the woman had done they were overjoyed, and praised God. When Achior saw Holofernes head, he fainted and later converted to Judaism. When the Assyrians saw Holofernes' head displayed on the city walls and the Judeans manning the mountain heights they fled by any path they could. The Israelites pursued them, cutting them down for miles around. Others joined in, even as far away as Damascus. The camp of Holofernes was plundered for 30 days so that the time from the entry of the Judean Woman's entry to that camp till the end of the plunder equalled the time from the beginning of the siege around Bethulia until the Judean woman's entry into the enemy camp.

The Judean woman was much praised; she and the other women took olive leaves and wove them into crowns and danced, the women singing a song of praise, part of which ran: -

*Her sandal ravished his eyes,  
her beauty captivated his mind,  
the sword severed his neck!*

...

*Then my oppressed people shouted;  
my weak people cried out,  
the enemy trembled, screamed and fled*

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<sup>116</sup> Judith 12:12-13:10

*Sons of slave-girls stabbed them through,  
wounded them like the children of fugitives.  
They perished before the army of my Lord.*

*I will sing a new song to my God  
O Lord you are great and glorious  
Wonderful in strength and invincible*<sup>117</sup>

They went to the temple in Jerusalem and celebrated for three months. When she returned home, the woman found that many men wished to marry her, but she did not accept any of them. Before she died at the age of 105, she set her maid free. Throughout her lifetime and for long afterwards, no-one ever again spread terror among the Israelites.

Thus the story concluded. There are elements in this story that echo that of the defeat of Nicanor, the general of Antiochus IV (175-164) as recounted in 1 Maccabees 7:39-50. In both stories, the head of the opposing general is displayed on the walls of the defending city; the oppressor's army flees in disarray, the men of the surrounding towns and villages pursue the defeated foe; and the people rejoice. But equally it is a tale of delicious irony, magnificent exaggeration and rich references to Judean stories and literature.

### **The Book of Baruch: a spiritual collation (ca 100 BCE)**

The Book of Baruch is not the most significant of the Biblical books attributed to a long-dead author - that honour must surely go to Deuteronomy and Moses - but the title shows the great esteem in which the scribe Baruch was held some four centuries after his death. It is found in the Apocrypha of Protestant bibles, is deuterocanonical in Roman Catholic bibles and is placed between Jeremiah and Lamentations in the Greek Bible. Baruch continued to be honoured by pseudographica written in his name well into the next millennium. Baruch 2 (Syriac) is an apocalypse published a few decades after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Baruch 3 (Greek) is another apocalypse of similar date; it is referred to by Origen. Baruch 4, alternatively titled 'Things omitted from Jeremiah' is roughly contemporary with the other two and contains a fictitious story of events surrounding the destruction of the temple and the return of the exiles mixed up with a 66-year sleep for Baruch's friend Abimelech alongside a basket of fresh figs picked in the Jerusalem farm of Agrippa - possibly a reference Herod Agrippa; this text contained a reference to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

The main part of the first Book of Baruch was probably written somewhere in the diaspora. It is thought to have been written in Hebrew and later translated into Greek, although no Hebrew text has yet been found<sup>118</sup>. A small fragment of the Greek translation is thought to exist amongst the finds from Qumran. This fragment has been dated to around 100 BCE on palaeographical grounds.<sup>119</sup>

Just as in the Daniel stories, Belshazzar was promoted to become the son of the legendary Nebuchadrezzar. The author followed Jeremiah in urging prayer for a foreign ruler. After the introduction, possibly written in Greek by the book's translator, the book comprised a collection of three independent documents: -

- A prose prayer
- A poem about wisdom – God's gift to his people
- A psalm of hope

The prayer, comprising confession and petition, relied extensively on Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, and included deliberate quotations. It concluded:

*Almighty Lord, God of Israel, an anguished soul and a troubled heart now cry to you. Listen and have pity ... Hear the prayer of the people*<sup>120</sup> *of Israel - of the children of those who have*

<sup>117</sup> Judith 16:9-13

<sup>118</sup> The evidence for a Hebrew original comes from the probable mistranslation of Hebrew words whose written form could be misread or could permit more than one vocalisation. For example, 'mt' (Baruch 3:4) could be 'the dead' or 'the people' and 'mdmt' (Baruch 3:10) meaning 'you are like' could be misread as 'mtmt' (defiling yourselves). The written Hebrew would have had no vowels.

<sup>119</sup> Introduction to Baruch from the New Jerusalem Bible (study version) p 1174.

<sup>120</sup> The Greek reads 'the dead' of Israel. Probably a mistranslations of mt' - see earlier note..

*sinned against you... We will praise you in our exile, for we have rid our hearts of the wickedness of our ancestors.*<sup>121</sup>

The wisdom poem drew on Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sira) as well as passages from the Torah. Israel was urged to ask ‘*where knowledge is, where strength and understanding are, and so to learn where life and length of days and clear-sightedness*

*and peace may be found*’<sup>122</sup>. God had not gifted wisdom to the leaders of nations, to those with great wealth; nor to the people of Canaan, or the children of Hagar or the merchants of Midian and Teman; nor to story tellers, philosophers or the Giants of old. No, God had uncovered the “*whole way of knowledge and shown it to his servant Jacob*” and thus “*Blessed are we, for we know what pleases God.*”<sup>123</sup>

The psalm was addressed to a people in exile, The command to take courage was repeated throughout:-

*Take courage, my people, perpetrators of Israel!  
You were not sold to the nations for destruction,  
but because you angered God...*

*Take courage, my children, and call on God.  
He will deliver you from tyranny, from the clutches of your enemy...*

*Take courage Jerusalem:  
He who gave you your name will comfort you.*<sup>124</sup>

The psalm drew on material from 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah – *the hills will be flattened; the valleys filled* - so that Israel can walk safely in the Glory of God

*For God will guide Israel in joy, in the light of his glory,  
With the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*<sup>125</sup>

### **The Letter of Jeremiah: a satire. (ca 100 BCE)**

This short work is neither a letter nor by Jeremiah. In Roman Catholic Bibles it is included as chapter 6 of Baruch. In Protestant Bibles it can be found in the Apocrypha. It is extant only in Greek versions although various awkward or clumsy passages can be explained by presupposing a Hebrew or Aramaic precursor.

A fragment has been found in Qumran which can be dated to around 100 BCE. There is an apparent reference to this document in 2 Maccabees 2:3 (ca 124 BCE). The language of the text is the common Greek of the second century BCE.

#### The text

The content was a satire on idolatry loosely based on Jeremiah 10:1-10. It took the form of advice to the deportees to Babylon, advising them that they will stay there for ‘seven generations’. This was certainly longer than Jeremiah predicted - possibly because many Israelites remained in Babylon for several generations after the ‘return’ was permitted.

The author stated that in Babylon, the exiles will see ‘*gods made of silver, gold and wood being carried shoulder high*’ with people prostrating themselves before and behind. Just as they might give presents to a girl fond of finery, so they would see people make crowns to give to these so-called ‘gods’ – only for the priests to take the gold and spend it on themselves, even using some of it to pay for

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<sup>121</sup> Baruch 3:1-8.

<sup>122</sup> Baruch 3:13-14

<sup>123</sup> Baruch 3:16-4:4

<sup>124</sup> Baruch 4:5-30

<sup>125</sup> Baruch 5:7-9

prostitutes. These ‘gods’ accumulate dust on their faces that they cannot remove; they are locked in the temples at night as a jailor might lock up a condemned man; their bodies are gnawed away by termites, blackened by smoke, and are used as perches by bats, birds and cats.

The author claimed that these ‘gods’ are dishonoured by the Chaldeans themselves. In evidence he referred to the Babylonian custom whereby every woman, once in her life, sat around these gods with string around her waist waiting to be picked up for sex by a casual stranger.

*‘It is better to be a door’,* argued the author, *‘than one of these counterfeit gods’*. At least a door has its uses. In the end, eaten away, they will be the dishonour of their country.

*Better then to be someone upright who has no idols; dishonour will never come near him*<sup>126</sup>.

### **3 Maccabees: a historical satire**

This short story is also thought to have been written in the late second or early first century BCE. Like other novellas of the time, it incorporated real historical figures into a tale in which faithful Judeans, supported by their God, overcome the wickedness of their pagan overloads. In structure and purpose, it has much in common with the Greek version of Esther. That book’s translation in the Septuagint may have inspired an Alexandrian to build a story with a similar message around historical persona from his city.

The book became a part of the Greek Bible, but was never accepted as Jewish Scripture. With the split of the Roman church from Orthodox Christianity, it was largely lost to the western churches.

#### The Story

The story started with the Battle of Raphia in which, it will be recalled, Ptolemy IV defeated Antiochus III. After the battle Ptolemy visited Jerusalem and sought entry to the Holy of Holies in the Temple. He was reluctant to accept refusal. The author developed this scenario in emotive language. He wrote that as people realised that something mysterious was going on, everyone rushed towards the temple, even secluded young women and brides preparing for their weddings. Nurses and mothers of new-born babies abandoned their infants, *“some in houses and some in the streets”* and everyone, *“without a backward glance crowded together at the high temple”*. This developed into an immense uproar *“for it seemed that not only the people but also the walls and the whole earth echoed around, because everyone at that time preferred death to the profanation of the place.”*<sup>127</sup>

Simon the high priest prayed that the Lord would intervene and prevent the disaster. Whereupon God threw the arrogant ruler to the ground; he was convulsed, *‘shaking this way and that like a reed is shaken by the wind’*, unable to speak and paralysed in his limbs. His bodyguards dragged him out of the situation, but on his return to Egypt he resolved on inflicting public disgrace on the Jews. All Jews were to be rounded up, registered, enslaved, branded with the sign of Dionysus, Ptolemy’s ancestor, and compelled to worship him on pain of death. However, *“in order that he might not appear to be the enemy of all”*, he ordered that those who chose to join the cult of Dionysus would be spared and have equal status with other Alexandrians. Whilst 300 Jews apostatised, the vast majority refused the offer. The Greeks in Alexandria did what they could to help the Jews, even taking some into their houses for protection. But Ptolemy wrote to all his generals claiming that the Jews had wantonly spurned his wish to make them honorary citizens, and that he had therefore reluctantly come to the conclusion that they were the enemy within; he needed, therefore, as a precaution, to round them up throughout the empire. The author described Jews being shipped to Alexandria ‘as traitors’ and confined in the race course there.

The bureaucrats charged with registering the Jews were rendered incapable of completing the task when, after a month’s work, they ran out of papyrus and pens. Infuriated, Ptolemy ordered the mass executions to proceed anyway. War elephants, drugged with wine and frankincense, were to be used for this purpose. Preparations proceeded overnight, but when the keeper of the elephants went to report to the king that all was ready, the king was found to be asleep; he could not be roused until evening when he declared that it was too late for the execution spectacular and invited his guests to remain with him, feasting and drinking whilst the elephants were to be prepared for the following morning. The next morning, when the hapless keeper of the elephants once more invited the King to come out, the King asked, *“Come out for what?”* When it was explained to him, the King burst into a fury saying, *“If your parents or children were present I would order them to be a rich feast for the savage animals instead of*

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<sup>126</sup> Letter of Jeremiah verse 72 or Baruch 6:72

<sup>127</sup> 3 Maccabees 1:20&29

*the Jews who give me no cause for complaint and have exhibited an extraordinary loyalty to my ancestors*<sup>128</sup> But the king's friends once more persuaded him that what had been prepared had been done on his orders, so it was agreed that they would rearrange the carnage once more - for the following morning.

Then the author introduced another real person: Eleazar, he wrote, rose up and asked the Almighty God to look upon the descendants of Abraham, of Jacob, of Moses, of Daniel in the lion's den, of Jonah in the whale's belly and to act now to save the saints of Israel. As Eleazar was ending his prayer, so the King arrived with his party. Then "*the most glorious, almighty and true God revealed his holy face and opened the heavenly gates, from which two angels of fearful aspect descended, visible to all but the Jews*"<sup>129</sup>. The animals turned back upon the armed forces following them and trampled them.

The King, now filled with pity for the Jews, turned on his friends demanding to know who had brought this people – "*who from the beginning differed from all nations in their goodwill towards us*" – to this place. "*Loose them!*", he commanded, "*Send them back to their homes, and beg pardon for your actions*"

The released Jews celebrated with great feasting at the Kings expense and petitioned him for the right to execute all those who had transgressed the law of God. The king granted them license so do without royal authority or supervision. So, on their way home they put to public shame and death those who had apostatised. And they treated it as day of joy and feasting.

### The date

The reference to Daniel together with the use of the salutation "Greetings and Good Health" - thought to be fashionable around 100 BCE - suggest a date around the beginning of the first century BCE. The salutation was also used in letters commemorating the creation of the Septuagint, festivals in celebration of which occurred in first century BCE Alexandria.

### **Alexander Janneus – The Wicked Priest? (104 – 63 BCE)**

The will of John Hyracanus provided for a separation of the civil from the religious powers. His wife was to take over as chairperson of the Council of Judeans, whilst his son Judah Aristobulus was to become High Priest<sup>130</sup>. Judah Aristobulus ended this arrangement by imprisoning his mother and all his brothers except Antigonus. He starved his mother to death. After a year, the two free brothers fell out, with one apparently conspiring to cause the death of the other whose death, according to Josephus, caused the survivor to die of a disease brought on by remorse. Judah's widow, Salome, an alleged conspirator in these events, then released the remaining brothers and married the elder, Alexander Janneus, who became the new leader. The title 'King' (or, in Josephus words, 'The one who wears the diadem') was now applied to Judea's leader.

Alexander attempted to expand the kingdom with military operations. One of his early targets was the Phoenician city of Ptolemais – known formerly and today as Acre. He was opposed in this attempt by Ptolemy IX, one of the sons of Cleopatra III. On the death of her husband, Cleopatra III had been enjoined to rule with one of her sons, but she alternated in her choice between the eldest and her favourite – or perhaps she really wanted to rule without either of them. At the time of Alexander's attack on Ptolemais, Ptolemy IX was out of favour with his mother. He attacked various Judean towns, forcing Alexander to lift the siege of Ptolemais, but Cleopatra intervened against her son and rescued Alexander from a potentially humiliating defeat. It happened that Cleopatra's army was led at the time by two Judeans, sons of the Onias –the priest who had set up the temple at Leontopolis.<sup>131</sup> Relieved of the threat posed by Ptolemy IX, Alexander continued his military exploits.

Many thousands of Judean lives were lost in Alexander's wars. For this and other reasons his suitability as ruler and High Priest was openly questioned. One year there was a riot during the festival of tabernacles during which Alexander, officiating as High Priest, was pelted with fruit. He survived the riot, barricaded himself off from the people, brought in mercenaries and executed many of the rioters.

His taste for military adventure was not assuaged and he continued to make war on his

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<sup>128</sup> 3 Maccabees 5:31

<sup>129</sup> 3 Maccabees 6:18

<sup>130</sup> Gaalyahu Cornfeld. Daniel to Paul: Jews in Conflict with Greco-Roman Civilization. p 55.

<sup>131</sup> Oxford p 447-8; Josephus Antiquities 13.12.1-13.2 (320-355) and Wars of the Jews 1.4.1-2 (85-6) In Antiquities Josephus describes some complicated political deceptions allegedly used by Alexander to exploit the internal family conflict in Egypt.

neighbours until his forces were nearly destroyed by a Nabatean ambush. He himself just escaped with his life and somehow managed to return to Jerusalem, but there the population rose against him. A six-year civil war followed during which more thousands of Judeans died at the hand of Alexander's forces – mainly mercenaries. When, at one point, he asked what he should do to end the war, the rebels replied that only his death would suffice. The rebels sought external help from Demetrius III – the reigning Seleucid king. Demetrius did indeed intervene, but without sufficient force to be decisive. It was probably never more than a side show for Demetrius, and he eventually decided to withdraw – possibly because his own throne was threatened by domestic rivals. Left to fight on their own, the Judean rebels were defeated by Alexander's mercenaries. Alexander took 800 of the captured rebels and crucified them whilst he looked on, '*drinking and lying with his concubines*' (or so Josephus claimed). He compounded the suffering of the dying men by executing their wives and children before them as they hung from their crosses. These events occurred around the mid-point of Jannaeus reign, circa 90 BCE.<sup>132</sup>

Substantial numbers of Judeans decided to emigrate rather than live under Alexander<sup>133</sup>, but whilst he continued his military activities during the rest of his reign, there were no further domestic insurrections.

The expansion of the Armenians into Syria in 83 BCE effectively ended the Seleucid Empire; it was squeezed out of existence by the Armenians, the Parthians and the independence movements in the Levant of which Judea was one. Traces remained in the form of Seleucid princes governing individual cities, but the empire had vanished.

Meanwhile the power of Rome had grown. Western Anatolia had been ceded to Rome as early as 133: the central Anatolian states had accepted Roman protection somewhat later. In Egypt, internal dynastic quarrels had so weakened the Ptolemaic dynasty that the country had effectively become a Roman protectorate: from 80 BCE, the local ruler in Alexandria was Ptolemy XII, known as 'the flute player'. He would reign with Roman support until 51 BCE - except for a three-year period from 58 to 55 during which time various other members of the family contested the throne. He was the son of Cleopatra IV and Ptolemy IX – both children of Cleopatra III.

Most the Mediterranean was now under Roman control – save for the eastern seaboard.

For the last three years of his life, Alexander Jannaeus suffered from alcoholism and the quartan ague – a form of malaria. He died whilst fighting in the region of the Decapolis, the group of 10 Trans-Jordanian cities that had come to significance under the Seleucids. The area would be visited by Jesus of Nazareth: it would become the setting for the story of the Gadarene swine.

In 76 BCE, at the end his 27-year reign, Alexander Jannaeus ceded secular power to his wife Salome Alexandra, the conspiratorial widow of his brother Aristobulus.<sup>134</sup> The Kingdom he bequeathed extended from the Golan Heights to the borders of Moab and from the Mediterranean coast to territory east of the Jordan.

Alexander may be the person known by the Qumran community as the Wicked Priest. He was certainly both wicked and a High Priest and he did cause people to leave Judea and set up their lives elsewhere. His life and death matches other known events that characterise the 'Wicked Priest' - he fortified parts of Jerusalem, was '*delivered into the hands of his enemies*' when ambushed by the Nabateans and died of drunkenness and disease.

During his reign the Pharisees appear to have become politically important as the party of the people. They were opposed to the Sadducees who were religious traditionalists associated with the upper class. Both of these groups together with the Essenes were derivatives from the Hasidics, the pious Jews who had strongly opposed the Hellenisers.

Salome, the widow of both Judah Aristobulus and Alexander Janneus, maintained the kingdom substantially intact for the nine years of her reign. According to Josephus, himself a Pharisee, she was advised by her dying husband to place some of her authority into the hands of the Pharisees, for they would '*reconcile the nation to her*'<sup>135</sup>. Whatever the truth of this story, Salome did seek the support of the Pharisees and re-instated the 'Council of Judeans' that John Hyrcanus had initiated. This became known as the Sanhedrin and would retain authority under subsequent rulers. Her elder son John Hyrcanus II succeeded his father as High Priest, thereby keeping both secular and religious authority in one family. Salome pursued a moderate foreign policy, building some defensive forts on her borders and engaging in only minor military engagements. Judea prospered. Salome died in 67 BCE at the age of 74.

Salome's younger son, Judas Aristobulus, was ambitious and sought to replace his mother as

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<sup>132</sup> Oxford p 448; Josephus Antiquities 13.14.2 (380) and Wars of the Jews 1.4.6 (96-98);

<sup>133</sup> Josephus Wars of the Jews 1.4. 6 (98)

<sup>134</sup> Salome may be a transliteration of 'Shalom Zion' – the peace of Zion.

<sup>135</sup> Josephus Antiquities 13.15.5 (400-404)

the secular power. The two brothers clashed militarily shortly after their mother's death, but John Hyrcanus II, finding himself at a disadvantage, proposed a solution by which Judas Aristobulus would become both High Priest and King, whilst he retired to peacefully enjoy his considerable wealth. Judas readily accepted the proposal.

Sometime later Antipater, a prominent aristocrat whose grandson would become Herod the Great, suggested to John Hyrcanus II that the Idumaeen king Aretas III would rather see John on the throne than his younger brother Judas, and was prepared to raise a substantial army to make good this wish. John decided that kingship was, after all, quite attractive, and the two of them inflicted a substantial defeat on Judas. Judas and his surviving supporters withdrew to the temple. Pompey's general Scaurus was in the area at the time and opportunistically decided to intervene in the dispute. Both brothers appealed for Scaurus' support, but, according to Josephus, the 300 talents that Judas offered carried more weight than the justice of John's cause might possibly have done. Whatever the reason, Scaurus ordered Aretas to withdraw and take his army home or become an enemy of Rome. Aretas understandably withdrew and the siege was lifted. But Judas was not content with just being released; he saw the prospect of dealing decisively with his elder brother, raised some troops and set out to engage him in battle.<sup>136</sup> Shortly afterwards Pompey came to Damascus himself and summoned both brothers and a deputation from the people of Judea to come and speak with him. There he listened to what they desired and what they had to offer Rome, but did not make an immediate decision - preferring instead to deal first with the Nabateans. Meanwhile Pompey ordered both brothers to do nothing that might disturb the status quo. Judas, however, ignored Pompey's demand and moved his forces into more advantageous positions. He even chose to occupy the fortress of Alexandrium, not far from Jerusalem. This disobedience angered Pompey who decided to postpone his Nabatean campaign in order to deal with Judas. Confronted by the might and reputation of Rome, Judas was persuaded to relinquish the fortresses he held and concede defeat. His supporters in Jerusalem retreated into the heavily fortified temple, destroyed the bridge at the entry to the temple and prepared to make their stand – despite their leader's surrender. After a three-month siege, the Roman war machine built a bank against the temple walls and broke in with their siege engines.<sup>137</sup>

### **The Beginning of Roman Rule (63 – 37 BCE)**

In 63 BCE the temple fell, and Pompey strode victorious into the Holy of Holies. He found an empty room.

Following Pompey's invasion of the temple, John Hyrcanus II was restored as High Priest as a reward for the help he had given Pompey in the siege, but he was permitted no particular secular power. Judah was stripped of all the territories she had secured, compelled to pay tribute and be subservient to Rome.

With his man now on the Judean throne, the Idumean Antipater embraced Rome. He would become one of the most significant and manipulative figures in the politics of this part of the Levant. But the Hasmonean dynasty, which had offered intermittent glimpses of Judean independence, was now finally over, destroyed by its own internal conflicts. Judea now was a tribute-paying Roman colony.

Pompey completed the reorganisation of the coastal Levant as a set of Roman colonies and protectorates and returned to Rome for his triumph with a number of prisoners from the area - including Judas Aristobulus and his family. The freed descendants of these Judean slaves would form the active Jewish community in Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE

### **Judea under the Roman Republic (63 BCE to the 37 BCE)**

Rome was a republic, ostensibly ruled by the senate, but Pompey, Crassus and Julius Caesar formed an initially-secret triumvirate of powerful generals. Their plan was that Pompey would stay in Rome whilst Caesar and Crassus ran armies in Europe and Parthia respectively. Crassus was the least successful and was killed in conflict in 53 BCE. Caesar used his army to build a substantial power base in Gaul. When told by the Roman Senate to disband his army and return to Rome, he refused. Factions in favour of various contenders for power made Rome a dangerous place to live in – so much so that Pompey was asked to bring an army into the capital in order to restore order following the riots of 52, during which the senate house had been burnt down.

In 51 BCE, Cleopatra VII, a daughter of the 'flute player', came to the Egyptian throne at the

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<sup>136</sup> Josephus Wars of the Jews 1.6.2-3 (123-127) and Antiquities 14.2.1-14.3.3.

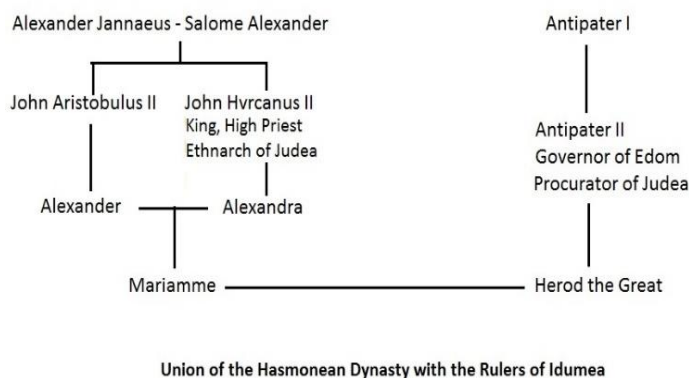
<sup>137</sup> Oxford p 450-1 and Josephus Antiquities 14.4.1-6 (54-79)

age of 17 alongside her brother Ptolemy XIII aged 10. She was to become the famous Cleopatra who would rule jointly with various members of her family under Roman direction and have children (she would claim) by both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

Meanwhile in Rome, the senate continued to make attempts to recall Caesar without his army, but they were all rejected.

In 49 BCE, Caesar crossed the Rubicon and took Rome. Pompey escaped, planning to return to his power base in East, gather an army, starve Rome of essential supplies and thereby force the capitulation of Caesar. But Caesar left Rome and pursued Pompey across the Adriatic. The two men and their armies met in what today is Albania, where Caesar was repulsed by Pompey. But Caesar was not defeated: he moved East to Thessalonica, where he was trapped by the combined armies of Scipio and Pompey who had by this time received some support from Egypt. But, against the odds, Caesar won the ensuing battle and it was Pompey's turn to escape once more. In the confusion, Pompey lost contact with his main fleet and the army. He decided to sail for Egypt and seek further support there.

The group of advisors surrounding Ptolemy XIII had persuaded the young king to expel Cleopatra, but she had raised an Arab army and when Pompey arrived, she was besieging her brother in Pelusium on the eastern Nile delta. It was into this situation that Pompey landed. As he stepped ashore in Pelusium he was murdered on the orders of the group advising Ptolemy who hoped, wrongly as it turned out, to gain favour with Caesar. Caesar landed in Alexandria, seized the palace, and ordered Ptolemy and Cleopatra to submit to his arbitration. Cleopatra sought to influence Caesar, so the story goes, by having herself delivered to Caesar wrapped in a carpet. In the end, Caesar decided in her favour, though we may speculate as to whether this was a politically astute decision or one driven by Cleopatra's seductive techniques. The facts are that she was reinstated as Queen in Alexandria and she gave birth to a son the following year who she claimed to have been fathered by Caesar, although Caesar was never to officially recognise the child.



With Pompey dead, John Hyrcanus II and Antipater II allied themselves with Caesar. John was appointed 'Ethnic of the Judeans' and Antipater 'Procurator of Judea'.<sup>138</sup> Antipater managed to place his younger son Herod in charge of Galilee whilst his elder ran Jerusalem. Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BCE and Mark Antony emerged as the power in the East. He confirmed the sons of Antipater as Tetrarchs against the wishes of the population.

In 40 BCE a Parthian force captured Judea and installed the son of Judas Aristobulus II as king of Judea. The Roman senate could not tolerate this and appointed Herod, who had gone to Rome to avoid capture by the Parthians, to be 'King of the Jews'. With Roman help, Herod secured his kingdom in 37 BCE. He sent Aristobulus to Mark Antony for execution. Thus began a reign of economic expansion, religious tolerance and paranoid insecurity that would last till 4 BCE.

Reactions to Roman rule in Judea can be found in some writings of the time. In the community of Qumran a document known as the War Scroll was created which described an anticipated final battle between the forces of Good and Evil.<sup>139</sup> The document began by saying that '*The King of Kittim (the Roman ruler) shall enter into Egypt ...and shall set out to wage war against the kings of the North (the Seleucids) that his fury may destroy the horn of Israel.* This seems to be a reference to the progressive Roman occupation of the Levant. But if that ended badly for Israel, the repeat that the scroll envisaged would end gloriously for "*This shall be a time of salvation for the people of God, an age of dominion for all the members of his company, and of everlasting destruction for the company of Belial.*"<sup>140</sup>

In this document, the evil forces are the Romans (called the Kittim), other nations and apostate

<sup>138</sup> Antipater II is sometimes called Antipater I or Antipater the Idumaeen. Josephus describes him as the son of Antipater, who was first called Antipas. (Antiquities 14:1:3 (10))

<sup>139</sup> The quotations used here are based on Geza Vermes' translation in his 'The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English (4<sup>th</sup> edition) published by Penguin 1998; pp 161-189.

<sup>140</sup> 1QM column

Jews led by Beliar. Against them the good forces comprised the community of Qumran and the angelic forces led by Michael. The document was not a war manual; it was more like a liturgy for the final destruction of evil. Great emphasis was therefore placed on the ritual to be observed and the holiness of the weapons to be used, for example: -

*'On the trumpets calling the congregation they shall write "the Called of God".  
On the trumpets calling the chiefs they shall write "the Princes of God".  
On the trumpets of the levies they shall write "the Army of God".  
On the trumpets of the men of renown and the heads of the family of the congregation gathered in the house of the assembly they shall write "Summoned by God to the Council of Holiness".  
On the trumpets of the camps...'<sup>141</sup>*

Nevertheless, the Forces of Good would adopt the best tactics of the day – those perfected by the Roman Legions. The imagined war would last for many years – for the opposing forces would be evenly matched. The forces of good would sing hymns of praise to their God, until finally a time would come when the High Priest appointed for the Day of Revenge could say to the people: -

*"This day is the time of the battle of God against all the host of Belial...  
The God of Israel has lifted his hand...  
He will do mighty deeds by the saints of his people."<sup>142</sup>*

And all the priests would say:

*'Yours is the power, and the battle is in your hands! ... For our Sovereign is Holy and the King of Glory is with us; the host of his spirits is with our foot soldiers and horsemen. They are as clouds, as clouds of dew covering the earth, and as a shower of rain shedding righteousness on all that grows there.'<sup>143</sup>*

Victory would be achieved by the God of Israel working through the forces of good led by Michael, whose 'song' has been found in a separate fragment: -

*'My glory is incomparable,  
Apart from me none is exalted. ...  
I am reckoned with the 'gods'  
my dwelling place is in the congregation of holiness.  
My desire is not according to the flesh;  
all that I value is the glory of the place of holiness.'<sup>144</sup>*

Pompey's invasion of the Temple was also reflected in other texts written found amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls including the 'Psalms of Solomon'. In these psalms, and in other non-canonical writings, the concept of a liberating Messiah began to emerge. The desecration of the temple by Pompey's soldiers was understandably condemned as a sacrilege, but this act was seen as merely the culminating act of a series of sacrileges perpetrated by those who should have been Yahweh's priests, for whilst *"the sinner broke down the walls with a battering ram"* it was noted that the Lord did not interfere even though *"Gentile foreigners went up to your place of sacrifice; and arrogantly trampled it with their sandals"*<sup>145</sup>. The psalmist wrote of collared and branded prisoners being taken back to the West to be mocked<sup>146</sup> Even worse that the trampling of the temple by foreign sandals, the psalmist found that the leaders of Judea had *"stolen from the sanctuary of God as if there were no redeeming heir; they had*

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<sup>141</sup> 1QM III

<sup>142</sup> 1QM XV-XVI

<sup>143</sup> 1QM XIX

<sup>144</sup> 4Q491, fragment 11

<sup>145</sup> Psalms of Solomon 2:1-2. The psalmist went on (verses 30-31) to note that with satisfaction that the 'dragon' responsible for this was dishonoured - killed in Egypt and his body left unburied<sup>145</sup> – the fate of Pompey as reported by Josephus and other ancient historians. This psalm must therefore have been written after 48 BCE, the date of Pompey's death.

<sup>146</sup> Psalms of Solomon 2:1-6 & 11

walked on the place of sacrifice of the Lord, coming from all kinds of uncleanness.<sup>147</sup> Consequently the author imagined a resolution of this through divine intervention by an anointed one, a Messiah, of whom it could be said: -

*'There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days,  
For all will be holy and their king shall be the anointed Lord'*<sup>148</sup>

The word 'messiah' simply means 'the anointed'; a king or a high priest could thus be known as a 'messiah' in this ordinary sense. However, the concept of the Messiah in these texts was something more; sometimes he was a military leader, sometimes he ruled at the end of time; in some Dead Sea scrolls there were two messiahs, a spiritual one and a Davidic leader. But there never was a single, unified messianic figure who dominated Jewish thought at any time in the Greco-Roman period.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Psalms of Solomon 8:11-12

<sup>148</sup> Psalms of Solomon 17:32

<sup>149</sup> Cambridge p 362