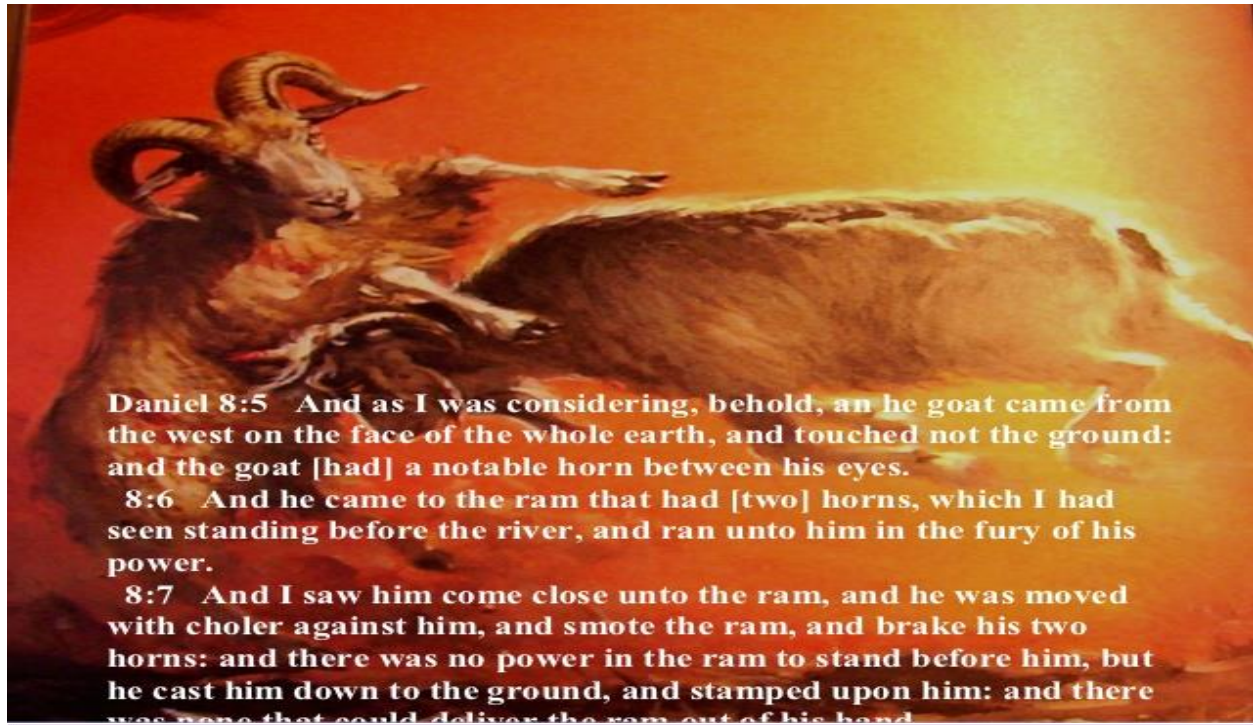


BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS REBELLION & REVOLUTION

by **David Lee Burris**



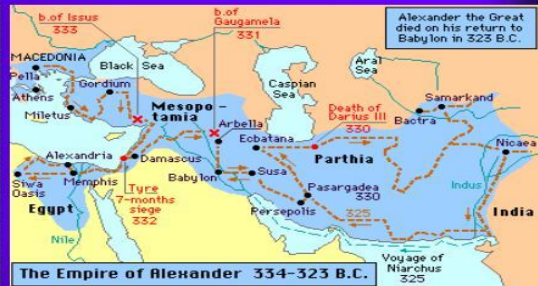
Inspired Old Testament Ends & 400 Years of God's Silence Begins



The Goat is Greece! Alexander the Broken Horn!

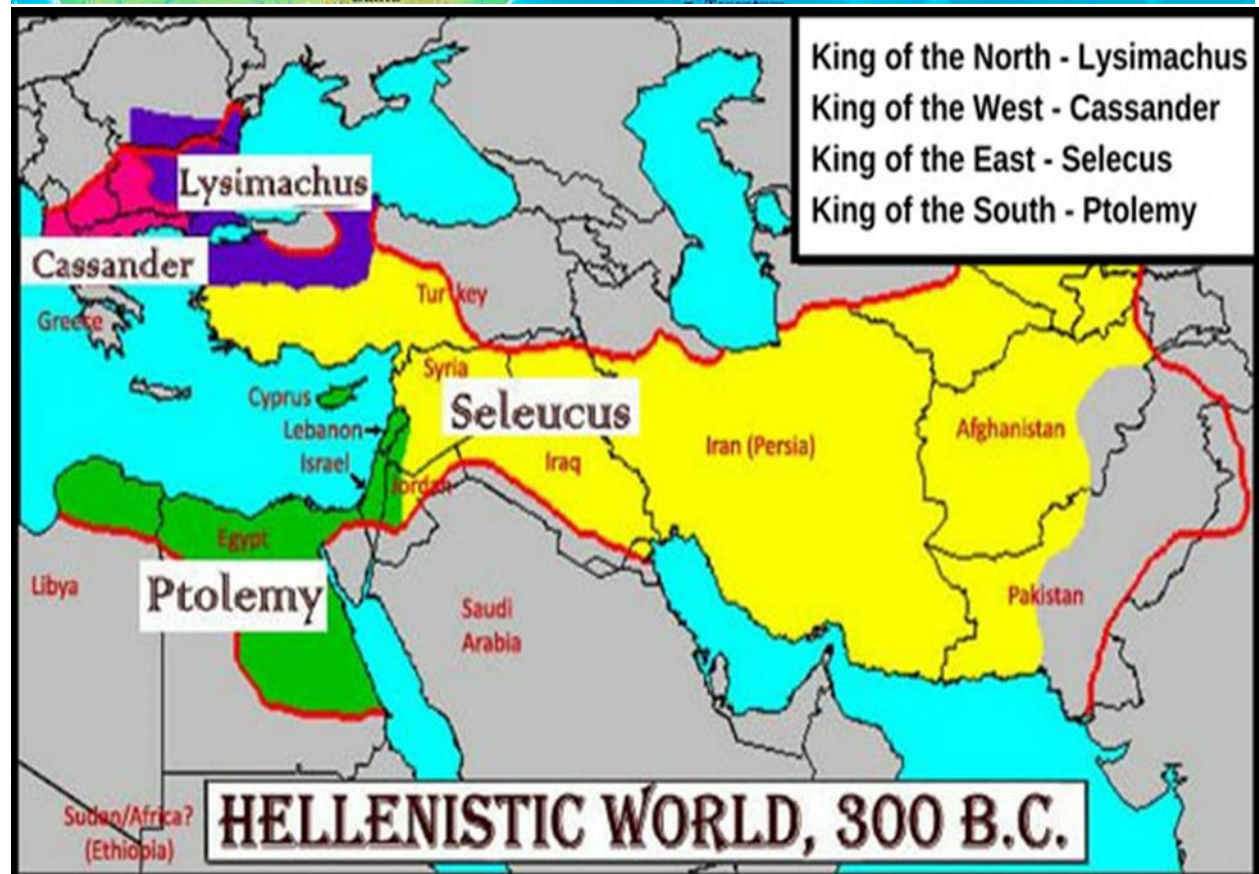
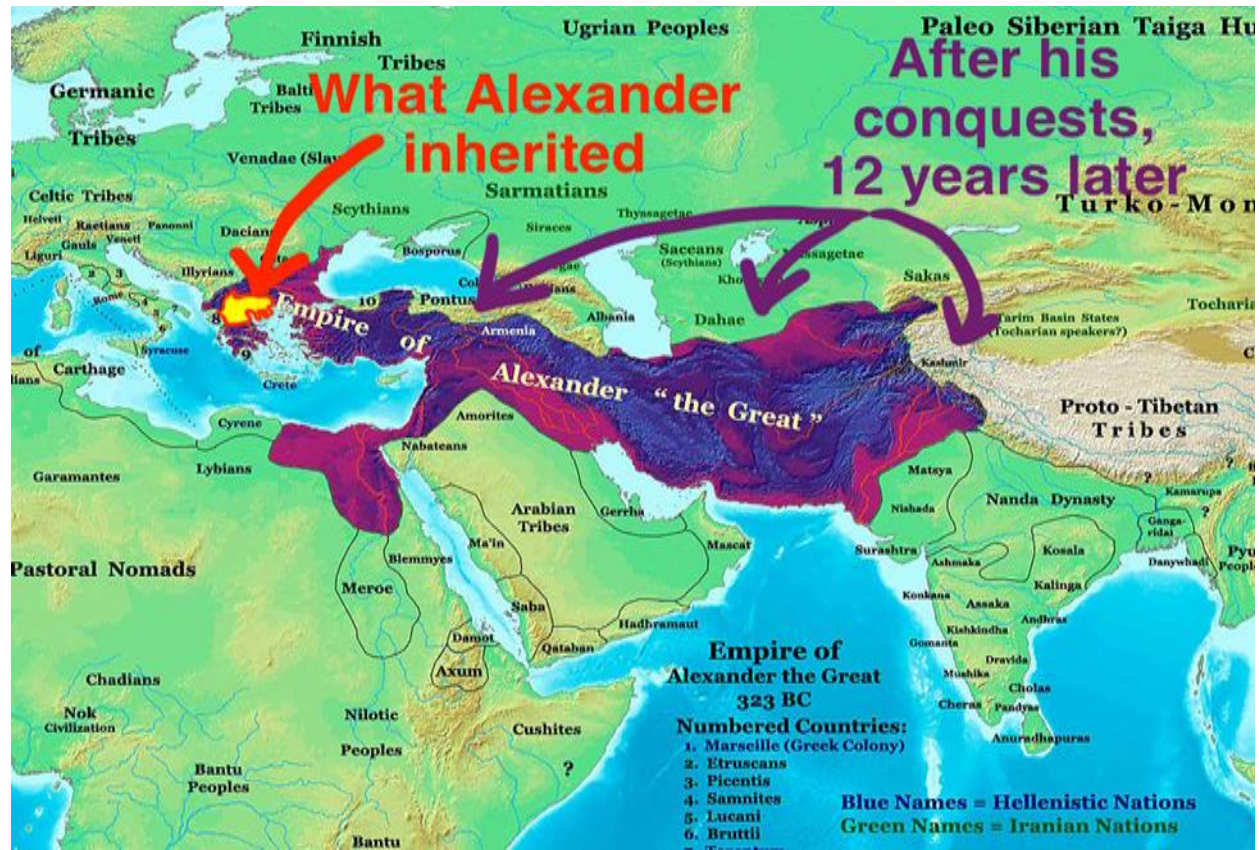
Daniel 8:21,22

- ◆ 21 "And the male goat is the kingdom of **Greece**. The large horn that is between its eyes is the **first king**."
- ◆ 22 "As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power."

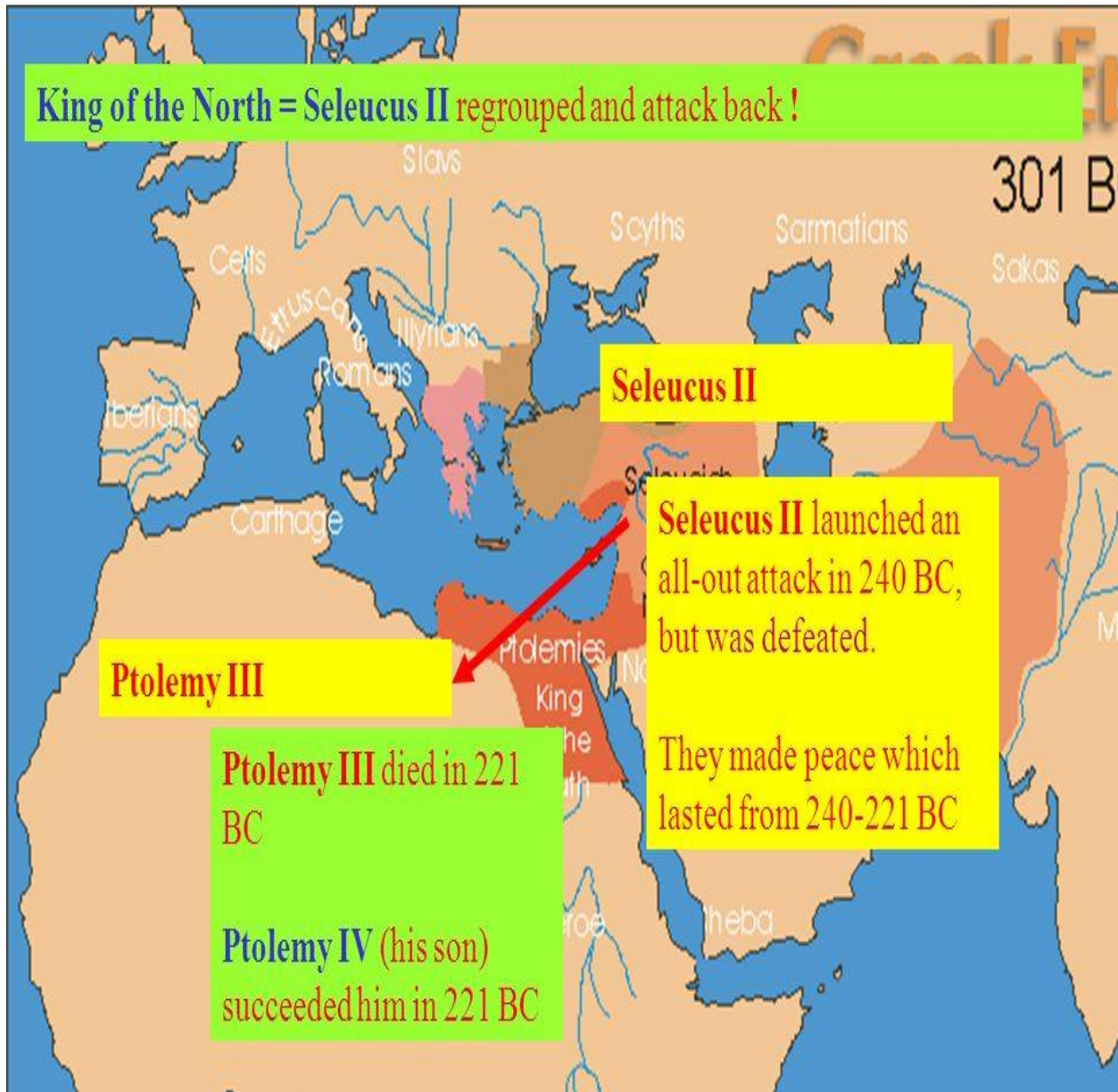


The angel says that the Goat is Greece and the horns--as we learn from History --are Alexander's & his 4 generals' lesser kingdoms. Very simple!



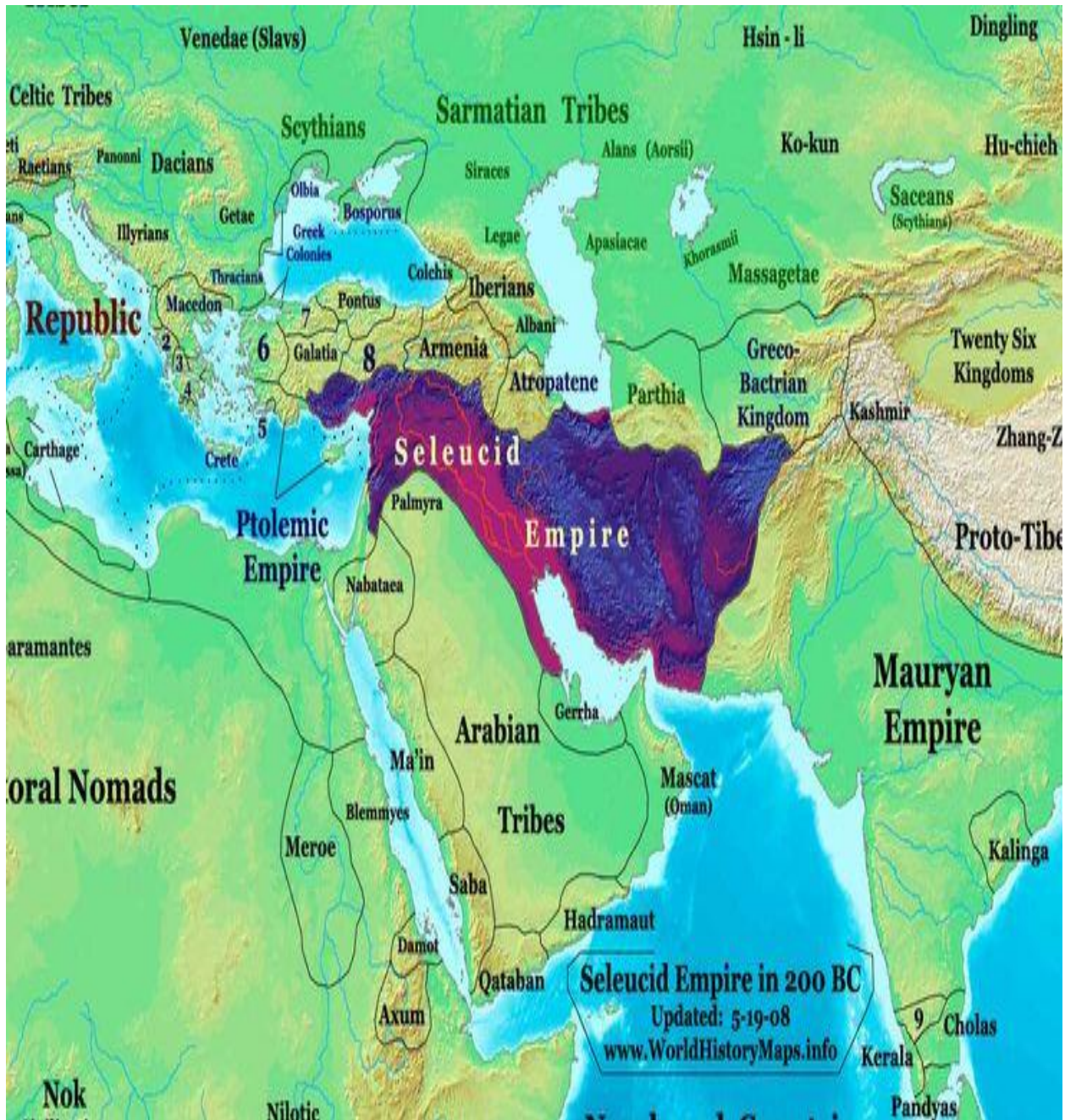


11:9 Then the **king of the North** will invade the realm of the king of the South but **will retreat** to his own country.



- ✓ He didn't live long enough to carry out his plans
 - His kingdom fell into the hands of generals
 - Various men struggled for dominance

– The territory of Palestine changed hands five times in the first 20 years after Alexander’s death

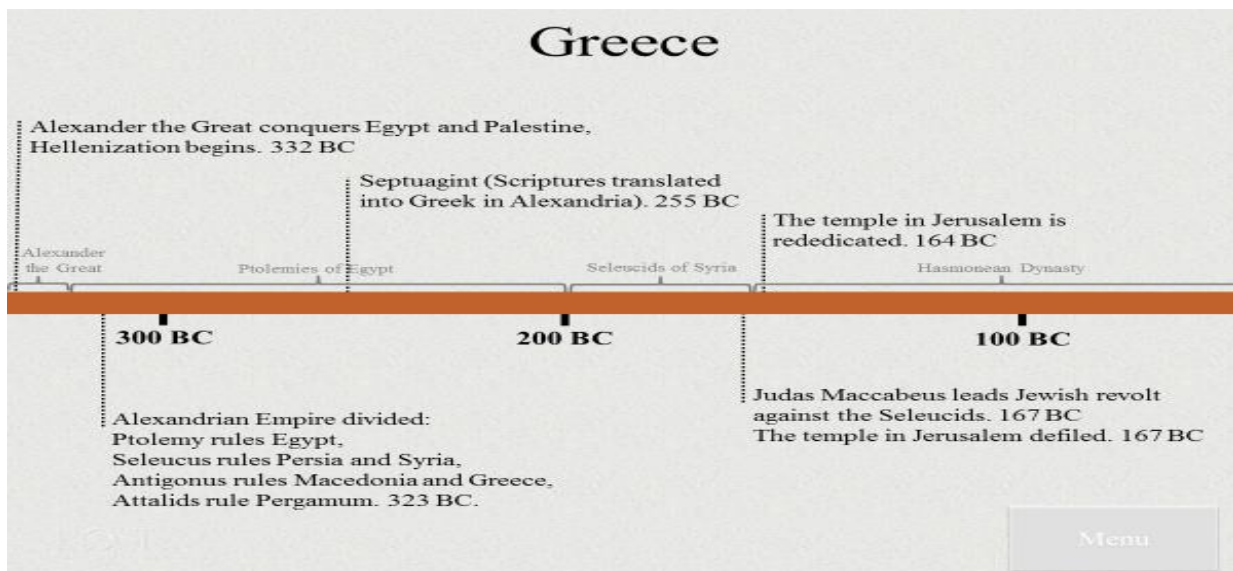


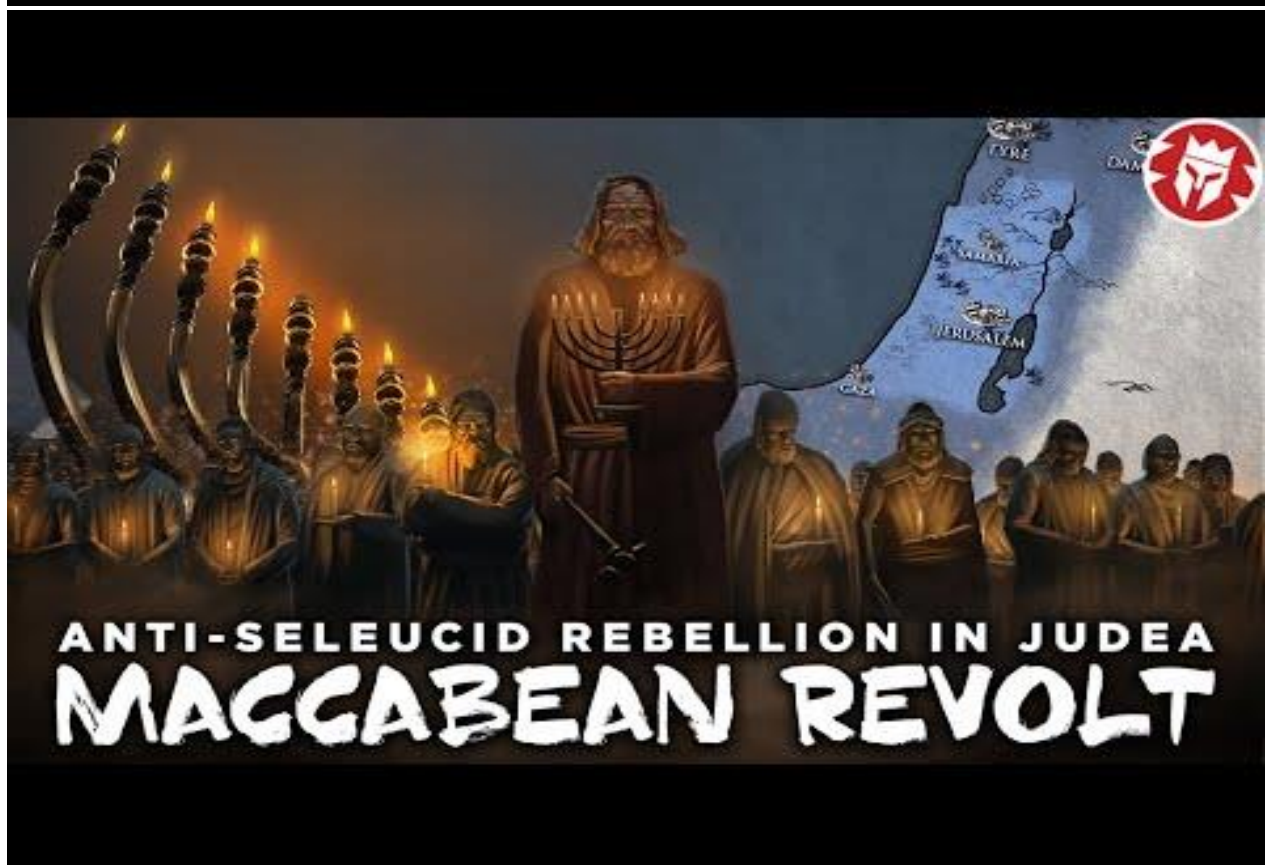
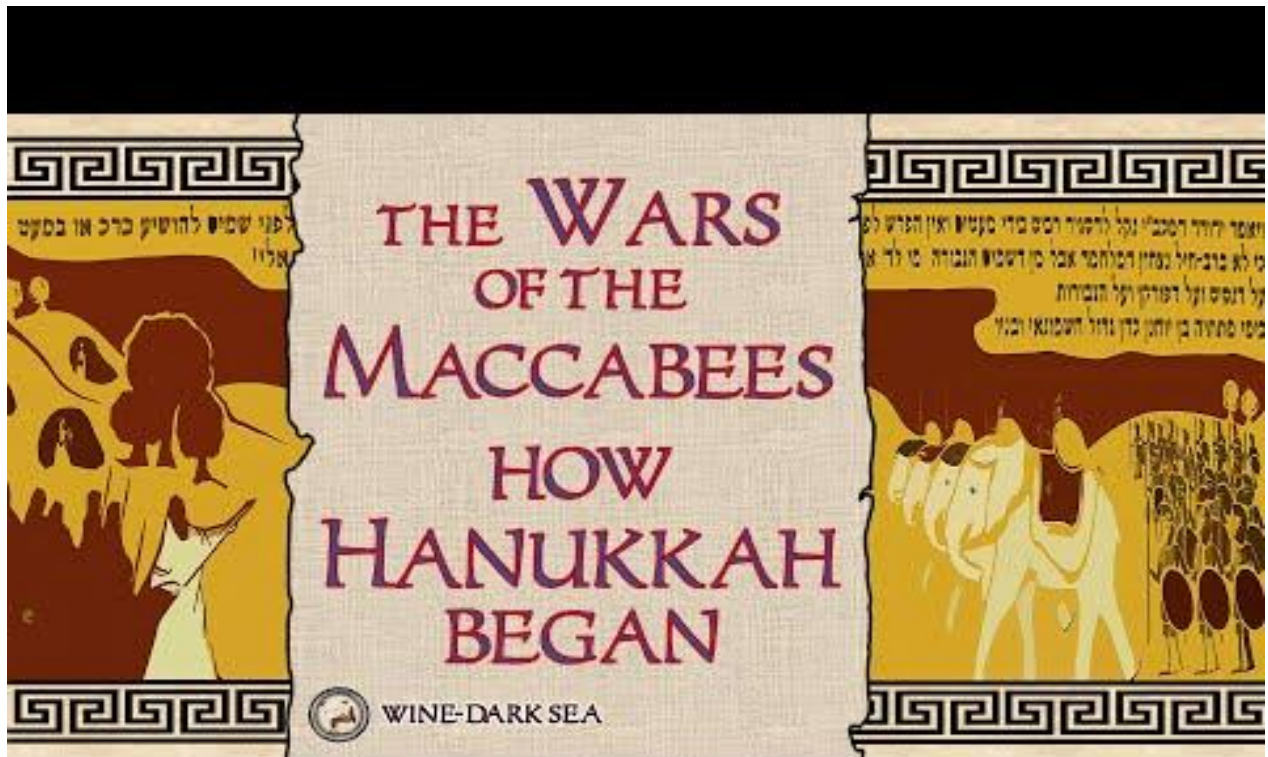
Alexander The Great conquered Medo-Persia— The third world empire represented in Daniel’s vision by the middle body and thighs of brass.

Division of Alexander The Great’s Empire was as Daniel predicted - the empire of Alexander would separate into 4 parts, that the great horn would be broken and in its place would arise 4 horns. Following Alexander’s death his empire was divided between his four generals.

The Grecian Civilization

Gave the world a universal language resulting in the Old Testament scriptures being translated and accessible to all. The Jews were treated favorably and encouraged to settle in various centers throughout the empire. Away from Jerusalem, from the sacrificial part of their worship, greater attention was given to the Law and the Prophets, and the result was that in the dispersion the expectation of the coming Messiah widely spread.







Then The Syrian Kingdom Arose & The Jews Persecuted

In the conflicts between Syria and Egypt Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, seized Palestine and bitterly persecuted the Jews. It was reported that Antiochus Epiphanes died in Egypt which caused the Jews to rejoice. But, it was a false report, and when he returned in 168 B.C. he slew 40,000 Jews and profaned the Temple by offering a sow on the altar. The Jews were forbidden to worship in the Temple and compelled to eat the flesh of swine. The cruelties of Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, brought about a revolt of the Maccabees under the leadership of Matthias. The Maccabees aroused the patriotism of the Jews who rebelled. A name given to a Jewish family that had the courage to “hammer” their enemy. Matthias, the father, was a priest. He had five soon to be famous sons.

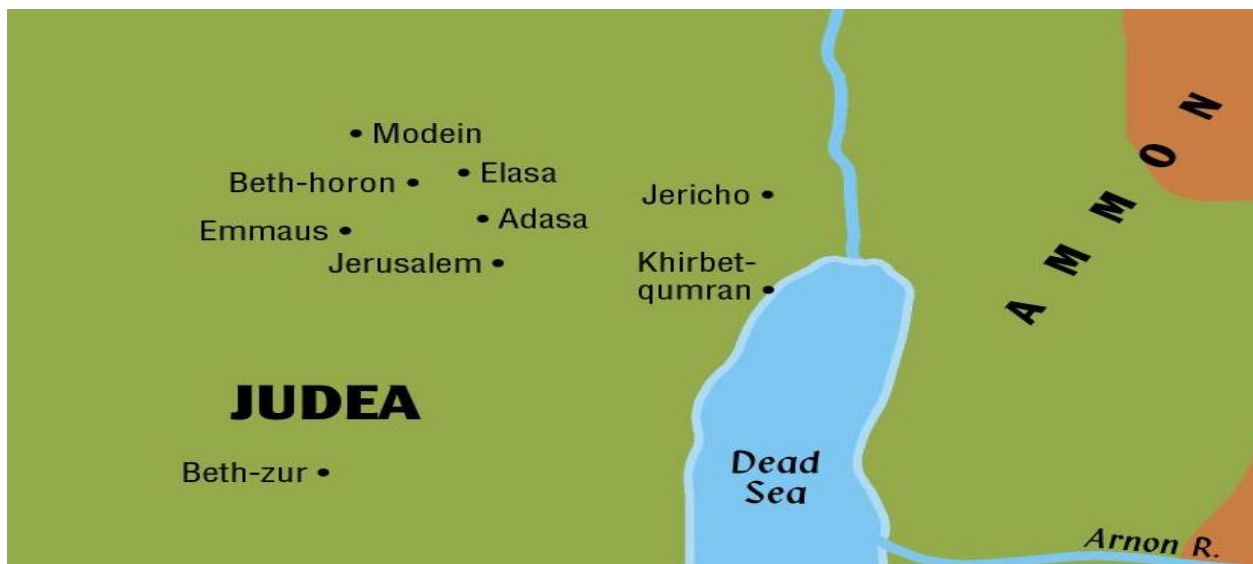
○ **Antiochus IV**

- Declared himself as the human manifestation of Zeus, the chief god of the Greeks
- Tried to force everyone to accept the Greek way of life and to worship him as the Greek god
- His actions brought him in conflict with the Jews
 - *To submit to his actions would mean apostasy from Jehovah*
- Succeeded in forcing the Samaritans to renounce their religion – then headed toward Jerusalem
 - *Set up a high priest favorable to the Hellenistic way*
 - *Defiled the altar of burnt offering*
 - *Outlawed all Jewish ceremonies such as circumcision*
 - *Forbade the observance of the Sabbath or feast days*
 - *Burned copies of the law*
 - *Set up a cult to worship Zeus in the temple*

**Idols of Zeus were set up in all
public places through Judea
167 BC**

All who would not obey the king's decrees and display allegiance to the idol were publicly whipped and then killed!

- **Mattathias Hasmonean**
 - A priest living in Modein, northwest of Jerusalem
 - *First to have the courage to withstand a Syrian official*
 - Refused Syrian's demands and declared to live and die in the religion of his fathers
 - *Killed the king's officer*
- **Fled to Gophna, Ephraim**



- Faithful from all over rallied around them
- Mattathias, realizing his great age, appointed his son Simon as counselor & head of family
 - *Named Judas as the military leader*
 - *“Maccabee” & “Hammer” were also names by which they were known*

Remembered in history as the *“Hasmonean Dynasty”*

○ **Judas and his followers**

- Began waging guerrilla type warfare immediately
- Mingled with local villagers during the day and attacked Syrian army outposts at night
- Judas constantly was ambushing some vastly superior force and scattering it
- Outnumbered, he met and defeated the royal forces in a series of victories.

THE REVOLT

170 B.C.—165 B.C.

“AFTER the Macedonians obtained supremacy in the East, King Antiochus endeavored to root out the Jewish superstition, but was hindered by a Parthian war from reforming this vilest of people.”—Tacitus, *History*, v. 8.

With these few but bitter words the Roman historian contemptuously dismisses the history of the great struggle for freedom, successfully carried out by the Hebrew nation, which he hated.

It is not, however, in such a spirit that an impartial student of history will regard the episode of the revolt from the Greek rule which Judas Maccabæus conducted. The position of an independent Prince, or Ethnarch, in Palestine may have had little political importance at the time, for the country had neither trade nor harbors, and its whole extent was not much greater than the area of Yorkshire.

A silent revolution was taking place in Jewish thought and habits at the time when Antiochus Epiphanes came to the throne. The influence of Greek culture was beginning to be felt not only in Egypt or Syria, among the foreign Jews, but even in Palestine and in the Holy City. The toleration shown by Alexander the Great had brought Jew and Gentile into new and friendly relations, and a ruler as wise and far-seeing as was the great conqueror would have been content to allow the movement to develop itself with results which we cannot calculate. **The obstinate and hasty measures enforced by Epiphanes saved Judaism in attempting to destroy it, and created the reaction which purged it at once of every foreign element, and stamped it with a distinct character of its own.**

Two claimants were at this time struggling for the office of High Priest—Jesus, or Jason, the rightful heir, supported by the national voice; and Menelaus, also called Onias, the nominee of Antiochus. It must not, however, be supposed that two contending parties were represented by the rivals, for both were deeply tainted with Hellenistic heresy, and the contest was purely personal and political.

Menelaus and his companions lived at the Court of Antiochus in open defiance of the Law of Moses. Jason, meantime, was busy in Jerusalem familiarizing the astonished inhabitants with Greek customs, which raised in the breasts of the older and more conservative feelings of mingled contempt and wrath.

A more serious innovation was the establishment of a gymnasium in Jerusalem, under the western walls of the Temple—the remains of the building being perhaps still recognizable in an ancient chamber recently discovered. In this profane place, even the priests of Jehovah were to be seen engaging in unseemly struggles, casting aside their sacred robes, and contending for popular applause in the heathen game of Discus. To a proud and dignified Semitic people, nothing can have appeared more degrading, or unworthy of the sacred vocation, than this participation in performances which they must have regarded as fit only for hired clowns, or for the heathen.

Heathen festivals also began to be celebrated in Palestine, and were attended by the Jews, in direct disobedience to the Mosaic commands. The feasts of Bacchus were honored in the Holy Land, and Jason sent representatives with rich presents to attend the games in honor of Hercules, celebrated under the auspices of the Kings of Antioch every fifth year at Tyre.

Another festival, which seems probably to be of heathen origin, was that celebrated twice a-year at Motza, in a deep, well-watered valley west of Jerusalem. The Jewish maidens came out to meet the young men at this place with songs and dances—a ceremony very contrary to the spirit of Judaism; and though said to commemorate the old festival of Shiloh, when the Benjamites chose their wives from the women dancing in the vineyards, this feast calls to mind irresistibly the processions of the Greek mysteries.

Such was the state of national feeling when the savage and disappointed Antiochus formed his rash project of destroying all that was distinctive in Jewish customs and religion. He judged the temper of the people, no doubt, from the renegade Jews whom he had encountered in Antioch. He understood neither the attachment with which the bulk of the nation regarded their ancient Law, nor the stubborn courage and endurance of which the Jews were capable.

Returning from his fourth Egyptian campaign, Antiochus detached a party under one of his officers, Apollonius, to go to Jerusalem. **Apollonius was made Governor of Palestine, and instructed not merely to collect the taxes, but to put down, by stringent measures, every distinguishing Jewish custom. Circumcision was forbidden, the Sabbath was to be desecrated, the copies of the Law to be collected and burnt, the Jews to be forced to eat swine's flesh, and the Temple to be desecrated by foreign worship, and re-consecrated to Jupiter Olympus.** We gather that the same edict was to be enforced also against the Samaritans and their Temple at Gerizim, and that Apollonius, after desolating Jerusalem, went next to fulfil his mission in the northern capital of Shechem.

The new Governor entered Jerusalem peacefully, but, when once established, his cruel edict fell like a thunderbolt on the nation. A terrible persecution followed. **Women who had dared to circumcise their children were tortured and paraded with their murdered infants hanging round their necks; aged elders were put to a cruel and lingering death, refusing to eat the flesh of the unclean beast.** But the stubborn spirit of the nation could not be broken, though the party of the Hellenisers was so strong in the capital that it was impossible for the few devout Jews there left to do more than meet martyrdom courageously.

The Greek policy triumphed for a moment, and incense was burnt at pagan altars in the streets of Jerusalem. A citadel was erected on the little knoll of Millo, or Akra, which overlooked the lower city. It stood just where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre now stands, and formed a stubborn stronghold, which was not overthrown for twenty-seven years. It was garrisoned by Macedonians, and by renegade Jews from among the Hellenisers.

On the 15th day of Cisleu (December), in this memorable year, the "abomination of desolation" was set up, an idol altar standing upon the great rude stone altar in the Temple Court. Ten days later, sacrifices of swine were offered on it, and the fane reared for Jehovah was declared consecrated to Jupiter Olympus. The Jewish ritual was abolished, and Greek rites substituted for it.

Thus, in the pathetic language of the Chronicler, "Her sanctuary was laid waste like a wilderness; her feasts were turned into mourning, her Sabbaths into reproach, her honor into contempt. And there was very great wrath upon Israel."

Although it was at Jerusalem that the violent decree of Antiochus seems first to have been put in force, it was not there that the desperation of the Jews first lent them courage to resist. The same edict was sent out to every town and village in the country. At the capital, the Hellenists were probably in a majority, and the few orthodox Jews on whom persecution fell were unable to resist; but the views and habits of the villagers were, as has been shown, entirely different from those of the educated townsmen. They had, no doubt, adhered with much greater loyalty to the ancient customs and beliefs of their forefathers, and it was thus far more difficult to carry out the resolution proposed by Antiochus in the wild rural districts remote from the capital.

The ancient main road from Jerusalem to Lydda descended the stony hill of Bethhoron, and ran along a mountain spur towards the plain. About a mile to the north of this main road, the little village of Modin was built upon the southern slopes of a rocky valley.

To this little village, some twenty miles from the capital, and standing away from the high-road, an aged priest, named Mattathias, had retired from Jerusalem. The Temple was desolate, the ritual of the Jewish temple service had been forbidden, and there was no longer any regular recurrence of those visits which (as already described) the orders of priests paid twice a-year to the Holy City. Disgusted with the innovations of the Hellenisers, Mattathias retired into the country to mourn the fallen condition of the chosen people.

Mattathias had five sons—all grown men—all of whom were destined to become famous. Johanan, the eldest, was also called Caddis, “the saint;” Simon, called Thassi, the second, was esteemed the wisest and most prudent of the brethren; Judas Maccabæus, “the hammerer,” was the boldest and most skillful in war; Eleazar, the fourth, was called Avaran; and the crafty Jonathan, youngest, but perhaps most energetic of the five, had already earned the title Apphus, or “the wary.” We may reasonably conjecture that the young men were remarkable for their personal beauty; for that fatal gift was, at all events in later times, distinctive of the Hasmonean race, and the last of the line, Aristobulus, was no less famous for his beauty than was his unhappy sister, Mariamne, whose charms made Herod forget even the fascination of Cleopatra herself. The family name of Hasmonean was derived from that of Hasmon, the great-grandfather of Mattathias, and through him they traced their descent from the sons of Joarib—the first of the twenty-four courses of priestly families, and thus to Eleazar, the son of Aaron.

Mattathias was a man of distinction in Modin—a ruler and an influential elder. When, therefore, the edict of Antiochus was carried out into the country, and the King’s commissioners came to Modin, their first object was to endeavor to persuade, or bribe, the leading family into compliance with the rule which directed that every Jew should offer sacrifice to the heathen divinities. Had they succeeded in gaining the countenance of Mattathias, the envoys would probably have found it an easy task to induce the poor and ignorant villagers to follow his example. But such compliance was scarcely to be expected from one who had fled from Jerusalem on account of the spread of heresy which he there witnessed.

The spirit of the old man was, moreover, roused by the sight of a renegade Jew, whose fears had induced him to perform the sacrifice required. The memory of the famous deed of the zealous Phinehas, his ancestor, encouraged Mattathias to strike a blow for his religion and for the covenant of his fathers. He ran upon the apostate, and slew him on the idol altar, which had been raised in accordance with the royal order—possibly on the knoll south of the village; and he went further yet, and slew the King’s commissioner, while the Greeks were driven out of the place and the heathen altar demolished.

Thus, the first outbreak of the national revolt was due to the unpremeditated act of a single aged man. A reaction of feeling followed immediately, and the villagers saw the danger to which they would be exposed so soon as the news reached Jerusalem, and the Macedonian garrison of the fortress should be sent to punish them. Hastily driving off their cattle, they fled across the watershed to the dreary desert of Bethaven, above the Jordan valley, where they endeavored to hide themselves in caves, subsisting on the wild herbs of the wilderness.

The villagers of Modin formed a small band, to which the discontented and zealous quickly gathered. The Chasidim, or Puritans, were the first to join, and the force of the insurgents augmented rapidly. They took courage at length to undertake a guerilla warfare against the Greek Governor and against the apostate villages, and were successful in many night attacks. **They compelled their wavering countrymen to adhere to the Law; they pulled down the idol altars, and made the Jews who had submitted to Antiochus circumcise their children.**

The party was distinguished at a very early period by its strict orthodoxy, and by its determination to restore the most archaic institutions of the national religion. Yet, curiously enough, one of the first acts of Mattathias was a modification of the Law of Moses. A band of a thousand insurgents were attacked on the Sabbath day in a cavern, and as they would not break the Sabbath rest by using their weapons, their strict observance of the Law cost them all their lives.

Mattathias, hearing of this catastrophe, took counsel with his followers, and pointed out that unless some modification of this understanding of the Law were made, the heathen would take advantage of the Sabbath, and the devout Jews would in time be entirely extirpated. It was therefore decreed that self-defense against Gentiles was to be held lawful even on the Sabbath. The decision was sensible, yet it served to show how impossible it would be to adhere to every minute observance of a Law promulgated at so remote an age, and under circumstances so different from those of the time of the revolt. The alteration was more in the spirit of the Hellenists than in that of the conservative and zealous party of the Chasidim.

Thus, for a year the insurrection continued to smoulder, when, in 167 B.C., Mattathias died, no doubt from the effects of the hardships and exertions which the old man had been forced to undergo in the rough life of the desert. His address to his sons, though perhaps not strictly historic, is illustrative of the spirit which animated the Jews. It concluded with the exhortation to consider Simon as the wisest counsellor; Judas as the ablest leader. "To recompense fully the heathen, and take heed to the commandments of the Law."

It was thus that, in the year 167 B.C., Judas Maccabæus found himself at the head of a small, but resolute and united band of enthusiasts, who were determined not only to resist the tyranny of Antiochus, but to free their brethren from both the Greeks and the Hellenistic Jews, and to re-establish the independence of the nation.

The province of Judea was an outlying part of the possessions of Antiochus, and the revolt, which seems at first to have had the character of a guerilla war, or brigandage, such as often precedes a great national struggle, did not raise any great amount of alarm at Antioch. The Governor of Samaria, Apollonius—to whom Judea had been also assigned in 168 B.C.—collected the local forces and advanced against Judas; but he was defeated and slain, and his sword was ever after used by Maccabæus," and therewith he fought all his life long."

No doubt the aims and views of the party of which Judas was the head expanded with time and with success. The impetuosity of Mattathias had forced them into revolt, and at first they fought merely for self-preservation. They then became emboldened so far as to attack the villagers, and, **a little later, they even ventured to oppose the Greek garrison of the Akra citadel, and the Samaritan militia under Apollonius.** But a far graver danger was brought upon them by the defeat of Apollonius; for no sooner had it come to the ears of the King in Antioch, than he despatched his general, Seron, with an army of regular troops, then garrisoning Coelesyria.

Seron's orders were yet more imperative and violent than those which Antiochus had given Apollonius. The small party of the orthodox was to be annihilated; the Jewish religion was to be utterly stamped out; the land was to be colonized by strangers, and divided by lot among them.

Thus, in the year 166 B.C., the Greek army marched down the plain of Sharon, and commenced its ascent towards Jerusalem by the main road from Lydda, passing by Modin, the home of Judas, and advancing on the steep ascent of Bethhoron, where, in about half-a-mile, the road rises 500 feet to gain the top of a long, narrow, rocky ridge—a spur of the watershed mountains, flanked by deep and narrow ravines.

Against this formidable force the brave Judas advanced with a handful of men. His zeal and fearlessness, his military instinct and prudence, were alike evinced in this his first regular battle; and his choice of position, guarding the top of this dangerous pass, showed qualities beyond those of a mere bandit chief.

The scenery was full of inspiring memories, for the rugged pass had more than once before been the scene of a Jewish victory. Beneath him, near the line of the Greek advance, Judas looked towards Modin, his home, where, even then, his aged father lay buried the scene of the memorable episode which had opened his career. Behind him, on its stony knoll, amid open corn-lands, was Gibeon, and to the south-west was the broad, flat plain, skirted by low hills, and running down by the little village of Ajalon. **Thus, it was almost on the very spot where Joshua had stood, when he commanded the sun to stand still until Israel was avenged of his enemies, that Judas Maccabæus now awaited the new foes of his country.** In imagination, he might already see them rolled back from the steep steel-grey slope of barren rock, crowned by a few straggling olives, down to the white hills and corn-plains beneath, even as the host of the five kings had been discomfited when overtaken by the great hail-storm on that bleak hill-side.

His followers, however, looked down on the Greek host, as it advanced towards the foot of the pass, with far other feelings. *“How shall we be able,” they said, “to fight against so great a multitude, and so strong, seeing we are ready to faint with fasting all this day?”* But Judas was able to infuse into them something of his own spirit, reminding them that they fought for their lives and for the Law, and that strength was not to be sought in numbers, but from the God who had given victory to Joshua.

Falling suddenly on the enemy, with every advantage of ground, and in country suited for an irregular attack, Judas gained his first real victory on the field, which was destined to see also his last success. The scattered Greeks were pursued even further into the broad Philistine plains than were the Amorites after the first battle of **Bethhoron**, and the Greek generals were, apparently, convinced that the northern pass, which could be held by so small a force, was not the best line of advance on Jerusalem.

The independence of the Jews was thus, for the moment, secured, and Antiochus was not only shamed by the defeat of his army, but his treasury was also impoverished by the loss of the Judean taxes. His attention was thus turned to Parthia, and to the rich temple of Nanæa, the “desire of women” (Dan. 11:37), in Elymais; and leaving to his generals the task of subjugating the Jews, from whom he had already extorted the riches of the Jerusalem temple, he appointed Lysias guardian of his boy- heir, and departed, early in 165 B.c., on his last fatal campaign.

Three new generals, Ptolemy, Nicanor, and Gorgias, were quickly dispatched by Lysias to re-conquer the stubborn corner of hill-country where Judas held his own: a force of no less than 40,000 footmen and 7000 horse is said to have been under their command. Warned by the fate of Seron, they did not attempt to face the difficulties of the Bethhoron pass, but prepared to ascend by the main road which leads up to Jerusalem from the west, by which means they might be able to hem in the rebels between the Greek army on the south and the Samaritans on the north.

The force now sent against Judas appears to have been considered overwhelming; and **so certain were its leaders of success, that they allowed merchants to follow the camp, who were provided with gold and silver to give for the slaves they hoped to buy, and with fetters to place on their limbs.** Marching southwards, along the flat plain of Sharon, they encamped by the town of Emmaus, at the edge of the hills.

But the same spirit which had animated Judas at Bethhoron supported him even in presence of this mighty army. His second victory was perhaps the most brilliant of all his battles; and, from the similarity of its tactics, it might be called the Maccabæan Austerlitz.

Jerusalem itself lay almost entirely in ruins. The fierce persecution of the fatal year 168 B.C. had decimated its population. The Hellenist renegades, and the foreign mercenaries who had been introduced as a garrison by Apollonius, were shut up in the tower which stood on the lofty knoll of Millo, or Akra. The walls of the city had been pulled down, and the desecrated temple was deserted and ruinous.

Thus, it was not in the capital that the zealous devotees assembled for those religious exercises by which, like the Covenanters, they prefaced their fierce onslaught on the heathen. Reverting in memory to the primitive times of Samuel, they assembled in the place where he had gathered Israel before the great victory of Ebenezer, and spent the day in prayer and fasting at Mizpeh, immediately north of the city, where formerly the Tabernacle had stood, and near which the Jews had encountered Alexander the Great on his memorable visit to Jerusalem. **Clothed in sackcloth and covered with ashes, they lamented the sins of their nation, and implored the Divine help, while the flame of fanaticism was aroused by the exhibition of a copy of the Sacred Torah, which the heathen had desecrated by paintings of their images.**

As night came on, the army was arrayed in the primitive formation employed by their forefathers; captains of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens were appointed, and, in strict accordance with the commands of Moses, the newly-married men, the vine-dressers, and even the timid and unwilling, were dismissed from the picked body which the five famous brothers were to lead against the enemy.

In all these preparations we cannot fail to note an intentional imitation of the actions of their forefathers by the zealous and orthodox party of the Chasidim. The Divine favor was only to be gained by a strict observance of the Divine ordinances, as made known to Moses or Samuel. As under Samuel the Israelites had assembled at Mizpeh, so they did now under Judas; and almost in the steps of the former host, they now advanced on their enemies in the lowlands.

A long night-march of some twenty miles brought the Jews within sight of the Greek host at dawn. By that very road by which the traveler now generally first approaches the Holy City they must have come down, crossing deep valleys and long ridges clothed with copse, emerging through the narrow pass now called "The Gate of the Valley," into the bare chalky hill country which surrounds Emmaus, and runs out on the south side of the little plain of Ajalon.

Arriving thus on the south side of the enemy's position, Judas arrayed and exhorted his men—"For it is better for us to die in battle," he said, "than to behold the calamities of our people and our sanctuary." The vanguard only of the enemy had as yet arrived—8000 men, under Gorgias—and the promptitude of the Jewish attack indicates the military talent of their leader, who thus fell upon the enemy before his forces were entirely concentrated.

The news of the gathering at Mizpeh had already been brought to the Greek camp by some of the Akra garrison; and Gorgias, hoping to surprise the Jews before they expected him, had started from his camp with 5000 of his best men, and, guided over the mountains by the "men of the fortress," had actually passed by the Jewish force, which was descending by the less known southern road.

Thus, the battle of Emmaus may be compared to that of Austerlitz, in which Napoleon allowed the greater part of the Austrian force to advance on his communications, and hurling his main body against the right wing of the enemy, which was weakened by the advance of the left, cut the army of Austria in two, and defeated each half in detail. So also, Judas now fell, to the sound of the silver trumpets, with his whole force on the 3000 Greeks in camp, and cut in two the army of Gorgias, the left wing being already too far advanced into the intricate hill-country to afford any assistance to the right. The Greeks in the camp at Emmaus little suspected how close the foe was to them. They were unarmed and unmounted. The forces of Judas were equal in numbers, and though he had no cavalry, the nature of the ground was such as to render the deficiency unimportant.

So soon as the compact companies of the Jewish host became visible, marching across the swelling hills and dark against the brightening dawn, the Greeks armed hastily, and went out to meet them; but Judas had again contrived to have the advantages of higher ground and of surprise. The heathen were thus soon discomfited, driven into the plain, and pursued for five miles south-west to the strong fortress of Gezer, which stands on a bastion of hill projecting into the Philistine plain, and which was at that time in the power of the Greeks. The panic-stricken remnant fled yet further to the south and west, to Jamnia and Ashdod, on the shores of the sea, twenty miles from the battle-field.

But Judas was too prudent a general to allow his forces to scatter in pursuit, or to become disorganized in looting the abandoned camp. "Be not greedy of the spoils," he said, "inasmuch as there is a battle before us." His position between the two halves of the enemy seems to have recalled to his mind—or to that of the chronicler who puts the words in his mouth—that of Israel in the Red Sea; and though one wave had been beaten back, a greater one was now surging from the rocky hills, for Gorgias had heard the din of battle, and had seen the black column of smoke rising from the burning tents in his camp at Emmaus. Perceiving that some disaster had occurred in rear, he now hastily retraced his steps, and the heads of his columns were seen emerging from the folds of the mountains.

The battle was, however, already won. At the sight of their strongly-fortified camp in flames, and of the Jewish army drawn up at the foot of the hill awaiting their attack, a panic struck the Greeks, and they fled without striking a blow.

The spoil of the deserted camp was rich and various. Gold, silver, blue silk, Tyrian purple, and other riches fell into the hands of the Jews, and perhaps the allotted portion of the spoil formed the foundation of the great wealth afterwards possessed by the Hasmonean family. The return to Jerusalem after the second victory was triumphant and joyful; and **among the three "Battles of the Passes" which were fought during the campaign of the years 166 and 165 B.C., that of [Emmaus](#) was afterwards considered to have contributed most to the deliverance of the nation.**

The news of this second defeat at the second pass leading to Jerusalem reached Lysias, who was advancing with the main body of the Greek army. His forces were swelled to 60,000 men by the levies raised on the march and by the remnants of Seron's and Gorgias' armies, with which he formed a junction; but he determined not again to attempt an approach by the western passes, but to endeavor to reach the formidable stronghold formed by the natural rock-wall of mountains round Jerusalem by the easier ascent on the south-west. Judas, however, had in this contest the strategical advantage of interior lines. His position was taken up on the watershed, near Jerusalem, from which point the roads to the various passes radiated. Thus, he could never be surprised, and was able to confront the foe after a short march, and to choose his ground, while the enemy wandered round him in the plains.

Lysias would appear to have advanced by the broad and open valley of Elah, the scene of so many conflicts between the Philistines and Israel under Saul and David. Ascending by the road which leads by Hareth, the Greeks gained the watershed just south of Bethsur, some twelve miles from the capital, on the way to Hebron. The shed is lowest at this point, and a narrow pass leads by a beautiful spring, under the rocky scarp where [Bethsur](#) then stood, west of the road, while to the east a rounded hill rises above a low cliff towards the mountain village of Halhul. This pass forms a position not easily turned, and it was here that the indefatigable Judas had posted himself, barring the main road along the watershed to Jerusalem.

It was no longer a small band that the patriot mustered. The victory of Bethhoron gave him an army; the more brilliant offensive action at Emmaus swelled that army to 10,000 men. **The Jews began to understand that a great deliverer had arisen, and they flocked to the camp of Judas.**

As the scenery of Bethhoron had recalled the remembrance of Joshua to Judas' mind—as the position of his army between the two Greek hosts at Emmaus reminded him of Israel in the Red Sea—so now, as he looked down on the rugged hills covered by the copses of Hareth to the great valley of Elah, where Adullam and Shochoh had once barred the way against Philistine invasion, **the memory of the shepherd king who had defended the mountains of Judah in this same district seems to have risen to his thoughts, and the very scene of the old battle with the giant**, which was spread beneath him, gave good augury for his impending conflict with the giant host of the Greeks.

“Blessed art thou, O Savior of Israel!” were the words of his prayer, “who didst quell the violence of the mighty man by the hand of thy servant David.”

An attack followed, in which the Jews again had the advantage of the higher ground. The confidence inspired by former victory outweighed the inferiority in numbers. The army of Lysias was defeated and dispersed, and that general fled to Antioch to gather fresh forces for a yet more formidable attack.

By these three famous victories at Bethhoron, Emmaus, and Bethsur, Judas accomplished the liberation of his countrymen from the yoke of the Seleucidæ. **For the next two years (164-163 BC) he was left undisturbed, and even ventured on expeditions which seem to have had for an object the restoration of the kingdom as it had been under Solomon.** The Greeks found themselves in presence of a far more serious task than they had expected, and it was no longer a question of crushing a small body of disaffected zealots, but of the re-conquest of the whole block of the Judean hills. At each of the three main passes, the generals of Antiochus had been repulsed with loss, and a regular campaign was necessary, for which preparations were now made at Antioch.

The first thought of Judas, after these signal successes, was the re-establishment of the national religion and the purification of the Temple. From the field of battle the host marched to ruined Jerusalem. It was winter. The Sanctuary was desolate; the rampart walls which Solomon had raised from the rock, and which Nehemiah had rudely restored, were half overthrown, and in places the great stones were cracked and blackened by fire. The broad area within was covered with thistles, and the wild plants, just sprouting rankly after the first rains of winter, had forced their way between the flagstones of the inner cloisters. The wild olives and other shrubs had straggled over the outer court; the chambers round the platform were torn down; the gates were burnt; the long creepers hung down from the walls. We can almost picture to the eye the desolation of the Holy House by a comparison with the present condition of parts of the Temple area.

The passionate outburst of grief with which the liberators looked on the desolation of their Temple, evidences the national pride in, and affection for, a building that was not only the center of that faith which formed the mainspring of their existence, but was also their one architectural triumph, and their ideal of all that was grand and beautiful in art.

Another eyesore in the scene was the dark tower on Millo, which overtopped the Temple ramparts, and formed the stronghold of renegades and oppressors. A body of troops from Judas' army was detached to invest this castle; for, though successful in the field, the Jewish leader appears to have had no engines or other requisites for conducting an attack on a regular fortress, and he contented himself with surrounding it, as a precaution against an unexpected sally.

The purification of the Temple was at once commenced. Priests of orthodox faith, untainted by any suspicion of Hellenistic heresy, were chosen to restore and cleanse the inner courts. The chambers were built up, the gates re-hung, and the desecrated altar on which swine had been sacrificed, and which a woman had struck in contempt, was pulled down. Stones for the new altar were sought in the valley of the Kedron, and dug out from red virgin earth, without the use of iron. They were arranged in a wooden frame, and cemented together with mortar. The hollow horns were fashioned on wooden molds, and, the framework being removed, the rude concrete structure was whitewashed all over.

It was not easy to deal with the stones of the old altar. Though no longer fit for the service of God, they had, nevertheless, been at one time consecrated, and it seemed doubtful to the scrupulous Purists, who now led the nation, whether it would be right to cast them out into a profane place. For such a predicament no precedent or direction could be found in the Law of Moses, and it appeared, therefore, to be a question which could only be settled by the authority of a divinely-commissioned messenger—of such a prophet as was expected shortly to appear. **They, therefore, laid up the stones in a chamber at the north-west corner of the altar court, in the great gate-house called Moked, there to remain until a prophet should arise to show what should be done with them. In that chamber they remained until the time of Christ, and until the Holy House had been once more overthrown, once more restored and beautified, and yet again levelled to the ground. The Prophet with the required authority was never recognised, and the stones of the desecrated altar were finally scattered, no man knows where.**

The 25th day of Cisleu was appointed for the solemn re-consecration of the Sanctuary. It was a memorable anniversary. On that day the Angel had been seen by David standing on the hill-top by the rocky platform of Araunah's threshing-floor. On the same day, only three years before, the heathen had sacrificed swine on their idol altar. Thus, it was an appropriate day on which to celebrate the restoration of the purity of Judaism and the defeat of the uncircumcised.

New veils had been made for the Temple, new tables of shewbread, and a new candlestick and incense altar. The vessels were all new, replacing those stolen by Antiochus, and crowns and shields of gold were hung in front of the Temple façade. Once more the solemn service of the Temple, so graphically described in the Mishna, was restored. In the darkness of the early morning, the master of the Temple came at an uncertain hour to summon the priests who watched round the fire in the gatehouse of Moked. In the dusk they went out and fetched the lamb which had been pronounced spotless on the previous day. Standing without the altar court, they watched the first streak of day spreading behind the black outline of Olivet, and over the steel grey ridges of Moab, until the brightness had crept round southwards as far as the direction of Hebron. Then the appointed priest went in first, and in the dim light he bathed at the great laver, and his figure could be discerned mounting the long slope of the altar, until, from under the heavy, grey ashes, the red glow of the never-extinguished fire was stirred up, and the column of smoke was thickened by new fuel. Then, and not till then, the other priests ventured into the Sacred Court; and as daylight brightened and the city awoke, the early sacrifice was offered, and the daily service of the Temple proceeded in its appointed order.¹

¹ Conder, C. R. (1894). [*Judas Maccabæus and the Jewish War of Independence*](#) (New Edition, pp. 76–105). London: A. P. Watt & Son.

THE MACCABEAN REVOLT



*Image 8 Maccabean Revolt. (2023, January 4). In Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maccabean_Revolt*

The Maccabean Revolt, also known as the Hasmonean Revolt, was a Jewish rebellion led by the Maccabees against the Seleucid Empire during the 2nd century BC. The revolt began in 167 BC, sparked by the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes' campaign of repression against the Jewish religion and culture, which included the banning of Jewish practices, the imposition of a syncretic pagan-Jewish cult in the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the placing of the city under direct Seleucid control.

The Maccabees, led by Judas Maccabeus and his family, began a guerrilla movement in the Judean countryside, raiding towns and targeting Greek officials far from direct Seleucid control. The rebellion gradually developed into a proper army, and in 164 BC, the Maccabees captured Jerusalem, a significant early victory. The cleansing of the temple and rededication of the altar, which occurred on the 25th of Kislev, is the source of the festival of Hanukkah.

Despite the Seleucids' eventual concession of unbanned Judaism, the Maccabees, motivated by the desire for a more direct break with Seleucid rule, continued to fight for independence. Judas Maccabeus died in 160 BC in the Battle of Elasa against the Greek general Bacchides, but remnants of the Maccabees under the leadership of Judas' brother, Jonathan Apphus, continued to resist from the countryside.

It wasn't until 141 BC that Simon Thassi, the last of the Maccabean brothers, succeeded in expelling the Greeks from their citadel in Jerusalem and establishing an independent Hasmonean kingdom. The Maccabean Revolt had a significant impact on Jewish nationalism, serving as an example of a successful campaign to establish political independence and resist governmental suppression of Jewish culture and religion. **The alliance with the Roman Republic helped to guarantee their independence.**

Background

In 338 BC, Alexander the Great began his invasion of the Persian Empire, and by 333-332 BC, he had conquered the Levant and Palestine, which at the time was home to many Jewish exiles who had returned from Babylon due to the Persians. After Alexander's death in 323 BC, the territory was given to the Ptolemaic Egypt. The Seleucid Empire, another Greek successor state, would later conquer Judea from Egypt during a series of campaigns from 235-198 BC.

During Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, many Jews learned Koine Greek, particularly upper-class Jews seeking favor with the government and Jewish minorities in towns that were further afield from Jerusalem and more attached to Greek trading networks. Greek philosophical ideas also spread throughout Palestine. A Greek translation of the scriptures, the Septuagint, was created during the third century BC. Many Jews also adopted dual names with both a Greek name and a Hebrew name, such as Jason and Joshua. Despite this, many Jews continued to speak the Aramaic language, which was spoken during the Babylonian exile. In general, Greek policy during this time period was to allow Jews to manage their own affairs and not to interfere with religious matters. Greek authors in the third century BC who wrote about Judaism did so mostly positively, and cultural change was largely driven by Jews themselves who were inspired by ideas from abroad; Greek rulers did not undertake explicit programs of forced Hellenization.

This policy continued under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who came to the throne of the Seleucids in 175 BC. However, Antiochus IV replaced the high priest Onias III with his brother Jason after Jason offered a large sum of money to Antiochus. Jason also sought and received permission to make Jerusalem a self-governing polis, but with Jason able to control the citizenship lists of who would be able to vote and hold political office. These changes did not immediately cause any particular complaint from the majority of the citizenry in Jerusalem, and presumably he still kept the basic Jewish laws and tenets.



Image 9 A 14th century Christian work depicting Antiochus IV praying to a horned idol at the Temple. The Book of Daniel describes an "abomination of desolation" being given authority over the Temple, as well as the daily offering and sacrifice ceasing.

However, tensions began to rise when a newcomer named Menelaus offered an even larger bribe to Antiochus IV for the position of high priest. Jason, resentful, turned against Antiochus IV; additionally, a rumor spread that Menelaus had sold golden temple artifacts to help pay for the bribe, leading to unhappiness, especially among the city council Jason had established. This conflict was largely political rather than cultural. **In 170-168 BC, the Sixth Syrian War between the Seleucids and the Ptolemaic Egyptians arose, for unclear reasons. Antiochus IV led an army to attack Egypt. On his way back through Jerusalem after the successful campaign, High Priest Menelaus allegedly invited Antiochus inside the Second Temple (in violation of Jewish law), and he raided the temple treasury for 1800 talents. This ultimately led to a Jewish rebellion known as the Maccabean Revolt, which was a significant event in Jewish history, and had a great impact on Jewish nationalism as an example of a successful campaign to establish political independence and resist governmental anti-Jewish suppression.**

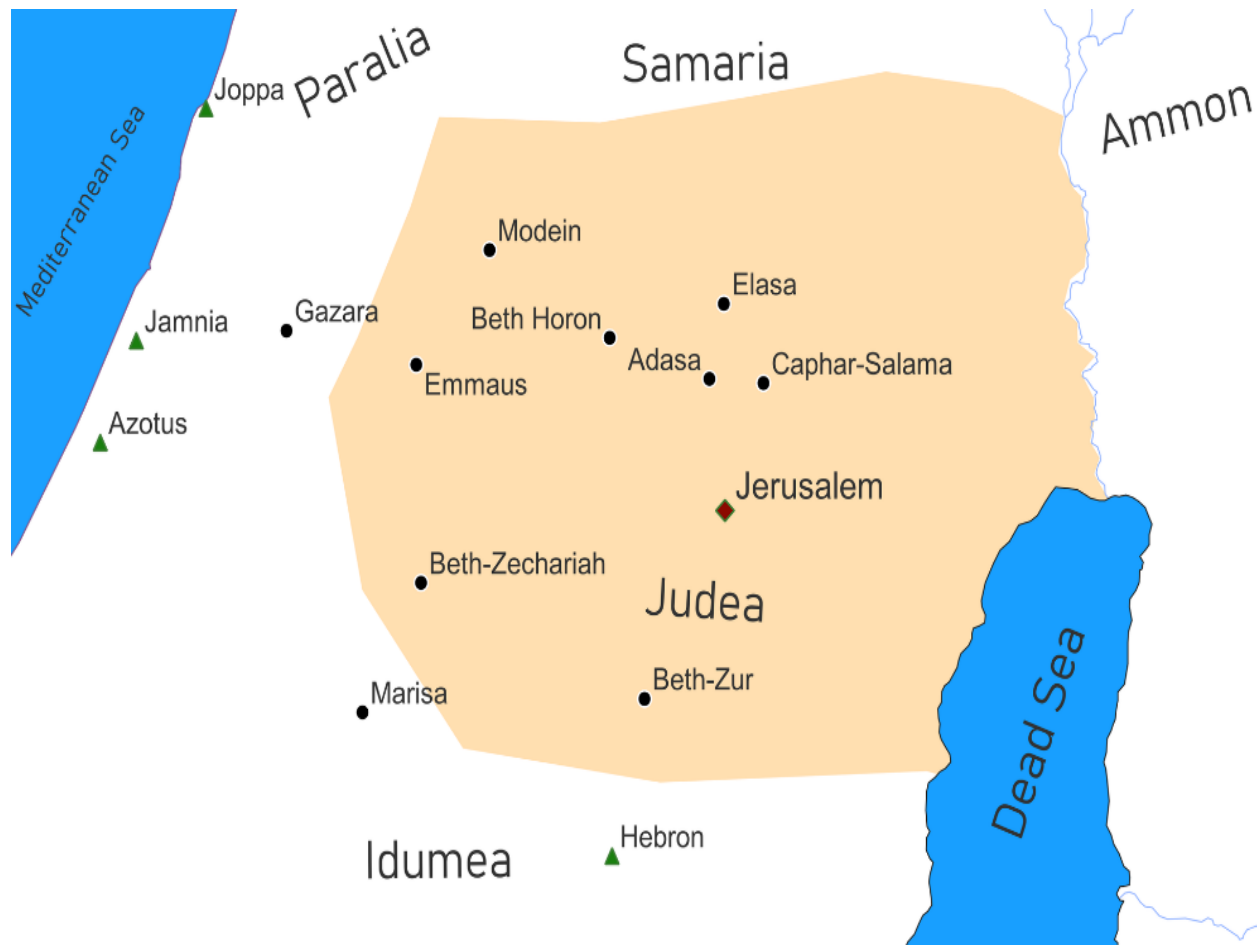


Image 10 Battles during the Maccabean Revolt. Circles mark battles against Seleucids in Judea, triangles outlying cities attacked by the Maccabees.

The Rebellion

Mattathias sparks the uprising (167 BC)

For Antiochus the unexpected conquest of the city (Jerusalem), the looting, and the wholesale slaughter were not enough. His psychopathic tendency was exacerbated by resentment at what the siege had cost him, and he tried to force the Jews to violate their traditional codes of practice by leaving their infant sons uncircumcised and sacrificing pigs on the altar. These orders were universally ignored, and Antiochus had the most prominent recusants butchered.

— Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book 1.34–35



Image 11 Mattathias slaying the Jewish apostate, painting by Philippe De Loutherbourg

In the aftermath of Antiochus IV's decrees forbidding Jewish religious practice, a campaign of land confiscations and the construction of shrines and altars took place in the Judean countryside. A rural Jewish priest from the town of Modein, Mattathias of the Hasmonean family, sparked the revolt against the Seleucid Empire by refusing to worship the Greek gods at a newly built altar in Modein. He killed a Jew who had stepped forward to take his place in sacrificing to an idol, as well as the Greek officer who was sent to enforce the sacrifice. He then destroyed the altar. Afterward, Mattathias and his five sons fled to the nearby mountains, which sat directly next to Modein. The rebellion, led by Mattathias and his sons, was in response to the Seleucid Empire's attempts to impose their culture and religion on the Jewish population and aimed to preserve traditional Jewish culture and religion. The Maccabean Revolt ultimately resulted in the establishment of an independent Hasmonean kingdom and had a significant impact on Jewish nationalism.

Guerrilla Campaign (167–164 BC)

After the death of Mattathias in 166 BC, his son Judas Maccabeus led a band of Jewish dissidents that eventually grew into an army. They were unable to directly challenge Seleucid power, but were **able to raid the countryside and attack Hellenized Jews, who were seen as collaborators. The Maccabees destroyed Greek altars in the villages, forcibly circumcised boys, burnt villages and drove Hellenized Jews off their land.** They employed guerrilla tactics, using speed and mobility to their advantage. They were less trained and under-equipped for pitched battles but could control which battles they took and retreat into the wilderness when threatened. They defeated two minor Seleucid forces at the Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah in 167 BC and the Battle of Beth Horon in 166 BC. Eventually, **they captured Jerusalem in 164 BC, ritually cleansed the Second Temple, reestablishing traditional Jewish worship there. The date of the cleansing in the Hebrew calendar, 25 Kislev, would later become the date when the festival of Hanukkah begins.** The Seleucid Empire agreed to a political compromise that revoked Antiochus IV's ban on Jewish practices, but the Maccabees continued their campaign for a starker break from Greek influence and full political independence, which led to a loss of support from moderate Jews.

Battles of Beth Zechariah (162)\Adasa (161 BC)\Elasa (160 BC)

In 160 BC, Seleucid King Demetrius I left his general Bacchides to govern the western part of the empire while he went on campaign in the east. Bacchides led an army of 20,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry into Judea on a second expedition to reconquer the restive province. The size of the rebel army facing them is disputed, with some historians suspecting that the number was larger than what is stated in 1 Maccabees. The Seleucid army marched through Judea after carrying out a massacre in the Galilee. The Maccabees, led by Judas Maccabeus, encamped on the rough terrain at Elasa to intercept the Seleucid army. Judas was ultimately killed in battle, and the remaining Judeans fled. **The Seleucids reasserted their authority in Jerusalem, fortifying cities across the land, putting Greek-friendly Jews in command, and ensuring that children of leading families were held as hostages.** Judas's brother, Jonathan Apphus, became the new leader of the Maccabees. He continued to fight Bacchides and his troops for a time, but the two eventually made a pact for a ceasefire, and Bacchides returned to Syria in 160 BC.

Autonomy (160–138 BC)

After the defeat of Judas Maccabeus and the Seleucid's reassertion of control over Jerusalem in 160 BC, the Maccabees were able to establish a rival government in the countryside. They avoided direct conflict with the Seleucids, but continued to engage in internal Jewish civil struggles. **During this time, the Seleucids were embroiled in their own civil wars, which gave the Maccabees leverage in negotiations.** In 153-152 BC, a deal was struck between Jonathan Maccabee and King Demetrius I, which resulted in the withdrawal of Seleucid forces from fortified towns and garrisons in Judea, except for Beth-Zur and Jerusalem, and the release of hostages. However, Jonathan soon betrayed Demetrius I after receiving a better offer from Alexander Balas. This led to a state of informal autonomy for the Maccabees, where they were able to maintain their own army and continue to fight in the Seleucid civil wars in order to maintain the favor of Seleucid leaders. In 143 BC, Jonathan was captured and executed by a Seleucid general, but his brother Simon was able to negotiate a deal with Demetrius II Nicator, which resulted in the exemption of Judea from taxes and **Simon being appointed High Priest. The Hasmoneans also established a diplomatic relationship with the Roman Republic, who officially recognized their independence in 139 BC.** Simon did not immediately establish a monarchy and instead referred to himself as "nasi" or leader. The Seleucids continued to make demands for tribute and control of border towns, but the Hasmoneans were able to repulse their attempts to regain control.

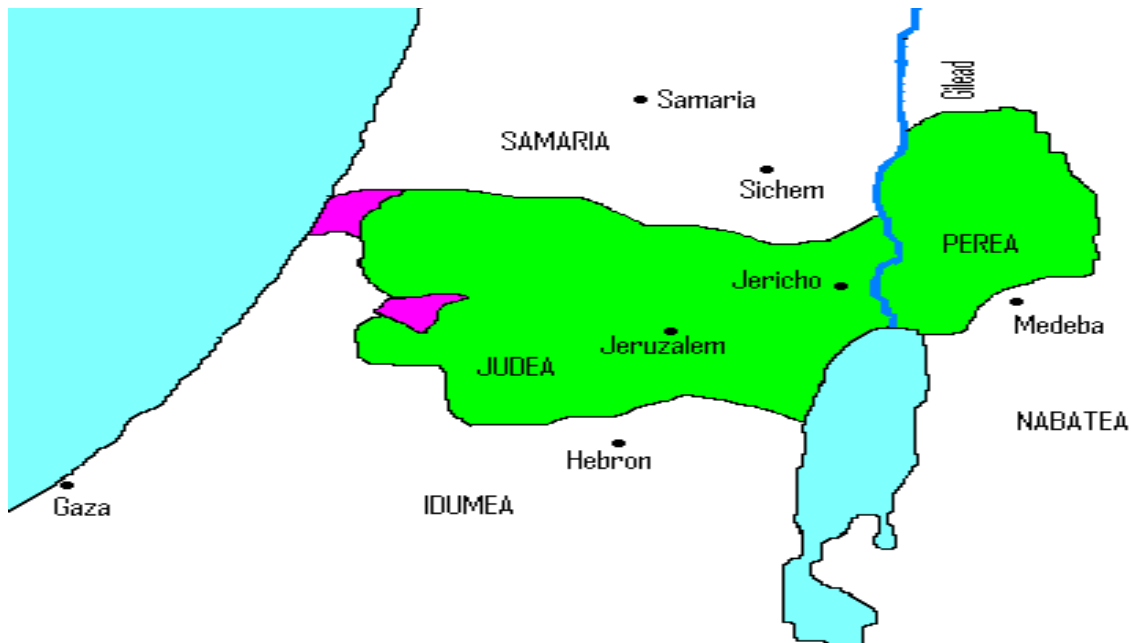


Image 12 Territory under Simon's control

In 135 BC, Simon, the leader of the Maccabees, and two of his sons were killed by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, at a feast in Jericho. This left leadership to the next generation, with **Simon's third son, John Hyrcanus, becoming the new High Priest of Israel. King Antiochus VII of the Seleucid Empire would later invade and besiege Jerusalem in 134 BC, but after Hyrcanus paid a ransom and ceded control of the cities of Joppa and Gazara, the Seleucids left peacefully.** This resulted in an alliance between Hyrcanus and Antiochus VII, with Antiochus making a donation of a sacrifice at the Temple. **With the suzerainty briefly re-established, Judea sent troops to aid Antiochus VII in his campaigns in Persia.** However, after Antiochus VII's death in 129 BC, the Hasmoneans ceased offering aid or tribute to the Seleucid Empire.

John Hyrcanus and his children centralised power more than Simon had done. Hyrcanus's son, Aristobulus I, called himself "basileus" (king) and abandoned the pretensions that the High Priest managing political matters was a temporary arrangement. The Hasmoneans exiled leaders on the council or gerusia that they felt might threaten their power. The council of elders, who would later evolve into the Sanhedrin, ceased to be an independent check on the monarchy.

The Hasmonean dynasty continued to conquer surrounding areas of Judea, especially under Alexander Jannaeus. The Seleucid Empire was too riven with internal unrest to stop this and Ptolemaic Egypt maintained friendly relations. The Hasmonean court at Jerusalem did not make a sharp break from Hellenic culture and language, and continued with a blend of Jewish traditions and Greek ones. They continued to be known by Greek names, used both Hebrew and Greek on their coinage and hired Greek mercenaries, but also restored Judaism to a place of primacy in Judea and fostered a new sense of Jewish nationalism that had sprouted during the Maccabean Revolt. The dynasty would last until 37 BC, when Herod the Great, making use of heavy Roman support, defeated the last Hasmonean ruler to become a Roman client king.



Image 13 Topographic map of Palestine at the start of the Hasmonean dynasty



Image 14 Eleazar Avaran trampled by a war elephant (illustration by Gustave Doré in 1866)

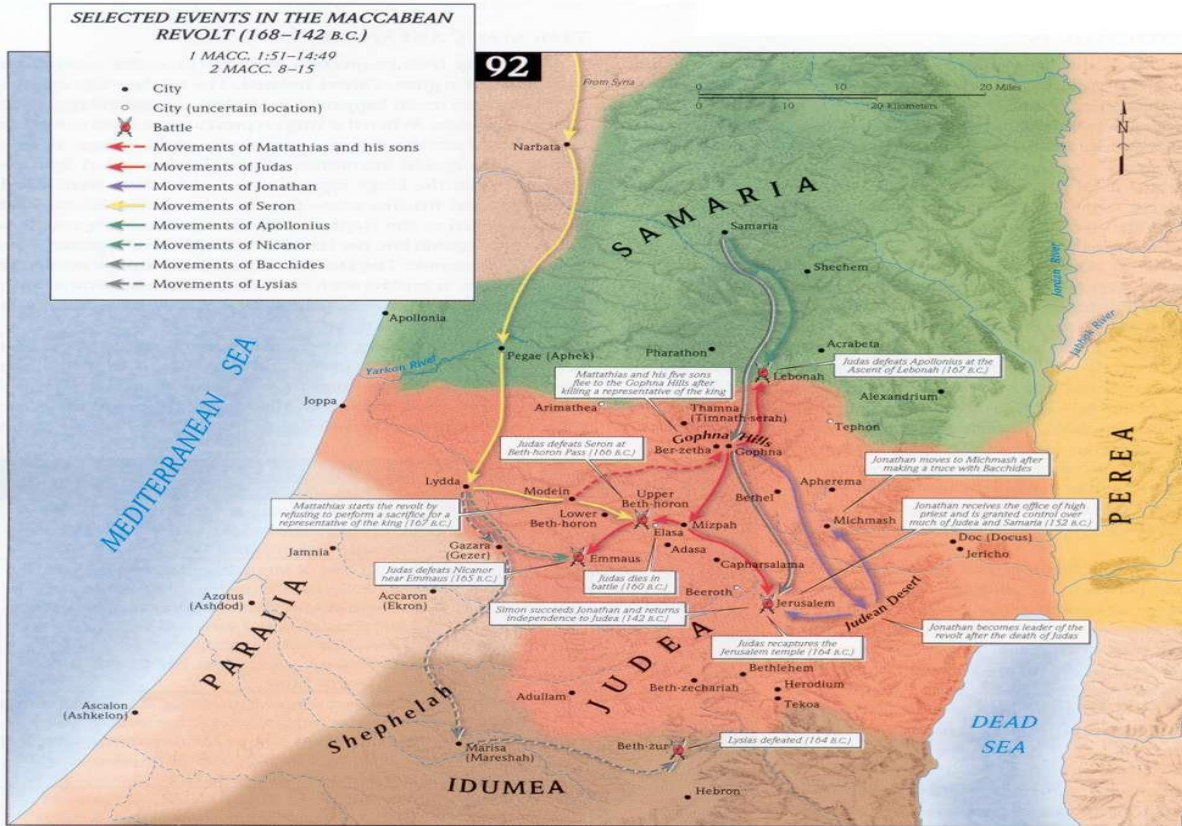
Tactics and Technology @ Battle of Beth Zechariah

During the Maccabean Revolt, both the Seleucid Empire and the Maccabees were influenced by Hellenistic army composition and tactics. The basic Hellenistic battle deployment consisted of heavy infantry in the center, mounted cavalry on the flanks, and mobile skirmishers in the vanguard. The most common infantry weapon used was the sarissa, a Macedonian pike that was held in two hands and had a great reach of approximately 6.3 meters, making it difficult for opponents to approach a phalanx of sarissa-wielding infantry safely. **The Seleucids also had access to trained war elephants imported from India and occasionally made use of scythed chariots.**

In terms of army size, historian Polybius reports that in 165 BC, a military parade near the Seleucid capital Antioch held by Antiochus IV consisted of 41,000-foot soldiers and 4,500 cavalrymen. These soldiers were preparing to fight in an expedition to the east, not in Judea, but give a rough estimate to the total size of the Seleucid forces in the Western part of their empire. The Maccabees started as a guerrilla force that likely used traditional weapons effective in small unit combat in mountainous terrains, such as archers, slingers, and light infantry peltasts armed with swords and shields. **Later on, the Maccabees trained a standing army similar to the Seleucids, complete with Hellenic-style heavy infantry phalanxes, horse-mounted cavalry, and siege weaponry.**²

² Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.





Judea and Samaria It's Time to Get Acquainted

1 Beit El Hills (Gofna Hills): A divided ridge of mountains north of Jerusalem, where the Hasmoneans sought refuge when they fled Modin. This was Judah Maccabee's primary command center.

2 Beit Horon Ascent: A steep slope between Modin and Jerusalem. Here, Judah Maccabee defeated Seron.

3 Modin: The hometown of Mattathias and his sons, where the rebellion against the Greeks began.

4 Yavneh: A mixed (Jewish-Greek) city near Ashdod. Here the sons of Shimon Maccabee - Yoohanan and Yehuda - defeated the Seleucid army for the last time. The Kingdom of Judea is liberated!

5 Beit Zacharia: (Today Hirbet Zakaria, near the town of Elazar). This is where Judah Maccabee suffered his first defeat and his brother Elazar fell battling the elephants.

6 Beit Tzur: A Jewish town north of Hebron (today Karmel Tzur). From here, the defeated army of Lysias retreated back to Syria.

7 Ayalon Valley: A valley that stretches to the west of the Jerusalem Hills. Here, Judah Maccabee defeated Gorgias's large army.

8 Elazar: Site of the Holy Temple. Judah Maccabee purified the defiled Temple and restored the service there. Chanuka commemorates this event.

9 Givon Valley: A valley north of Jerusalem (between the Jerusalem Hills and Beit El Hills). This is where Judah Maccabee defeated Nicanor.

10 Mount Baal Hatzor: A mountain east of Beit El. This was where Judah Maccabee was defeated for the second time. His force was routed and he fell in battle.

11 Maaleh Levonah: A steep rise between Shechem and Beit El. Here Judah Maccabee defeated Apollonius, the Samaria commander.

The Temple Mount: Site of the Holy Temple. Judah Maccabee purified the defiled Temple and restored the service there. Chanuka commemorates this event.

Other locations shown: Jordan, Dead Sea, Jerusalem, Bethleham, Hebron, Kiryat Arba, Sussiya, Ayalon Valley, Beit Tzur, Beit Zacharia, Elazar, Givon Valley, Mount Baal Hatzor, Beit El Hills, Beit Horon Ascent, Modin, Yavneh, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Kiryat Gat, Beersheva, Hadera, Netanya, Tel Aviv, Rechovot, Yavneh, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Kiryat Gat, Beersheva, Hebron, Kiryat Arba, Sussiya, Ayalon Valley, Beit Tzur, Beit Zacharia, Elazar, Givon Valley, Mount Baal Hatzor, Beit El Hills, Beit Horon Ascent, Modin, Yavneh, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Kiryat Gat, Beersheva.

Sites of the Maccabees 166-161 BCE

Illustrated by Marianne, Chris Field, School Consultant, Dr. Hagit Ben-Artzi

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Battle of the Ascent or Battle With Apollonius



Image 15 Presumed location of the battle, 1912

The Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah (Hebrew: קרב מעלה לבונה), also known as the Battle with Apollonius (Hebrew: קרב אפולוניוס), was a significant military engagement that occurred in 167 or 166 BC between the Maccabees and the Seleucid Empire. The Maccabees, a Jewish rebellion group, were led by Judas Maccabeus (commonly referred to as Judah Maccabee) in this battle. On the other side, the Seleucid Empire, a Hellenistic state that controlled much of the Middle East, had Apollonius as the commanding general of their army.

This battle marked the first military encounter between the Maccabees and the Seleucid Empire, which would later be known as the Maccabean Revolt. The Maccabees, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, were able to defeat the Seleucid Empire in this battle, a significant achievement in their rebellion against the Greek-influenced Seleucids. According to the historian Josephus, Apollonius was described as the “strategos (general) of the Samaritan forces,” indicating that the Seleucid army also had the support of the neighboring Samaritan people. The Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah was a crucial moment in Jewish history and set the stage for the Maccabean Revolt which ultimately led to the re-establishment of Jewish independence.

The Maccabean Revolt was a rebellion of the Jewish people against the Seleucid Empire, which controlled much of the Middle East at the time. At the onset of the revolt, Judas Maccabeus (also known as Judah Maccabee) led a small group of guerrilla fighters in the mountainous regions of northern Judea and southern Samaria. In response, the Seleucid Empire sent Apollonius, along with local Samaritan armies, to connect with Seleucid forces from Jerusalem.

Although the exact location of the battle is not known, it is believed to have occurred along a road between Samaria and Jerusalem. The exact date of the battle is also uncertain, but it is believed to have taken place early in the revolt. The Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah, as it is known, is the first battle discussed in the book of 1 Maccabees and is generally dated to 167-166 BC. It marks the first military engagement between the Maccabees and the Seleucid Empire, and the Maccabees were able to defeat the Seleucid forces in this battle. This was a significant achievement for the Maccabees and set the stage for further resistance and ultimately the re-establishment of Jewish independence.

While the specific details of the battle are not well-known, it is believed that the Maccabees employed guerrilla warfare tactics, such as surprise attacks and nighttime assaults. This is supported by the account of 2 Maccabees, which describes the rebels as “coming unexpectedly” on their enemies.

It is possible that the Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah was similar, with the Maccabees launching a surprise attack while the enemy was unprepared. The larger Syrian Greek army was defeated, and **Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Maccabees, defeated Apollonius in personal combat.** This victory was a significant achievement for the Maccabees, which encouraged them to continue their resistance against the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucids soon sent another force against the Maccabees, which led to the Battle of Beth Horon. This battle was a continuation of the rebellion, but the Maccabees were able to defeat the Seleucid army and establish Jewish independence.

The battle's only contemporaneous record is found in First Maccabees:

1 Maccabees 3:10-12 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

¹⁰Apollonius now gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. ¹¹When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he defeated and killed him. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled. ¹²Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle for the rest of his life.

The Battle with Apollonius is historically recorded in the uninspired First Book of Maccabees, which is the only contemporaneous account of the battle. However, 2 Maccabees provides a general description of the early phase of the Maccabean Revolt, including the tactics employed by Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Maccabees, such as surprise attacks, setting towns and villages on fire, capturing strategic positions, and fighting at night.

It is possible that the original five-volume work written by Jason of Cyrene covered the battle in more detail, but this information was condensed into a single sentence in the abridged version of 2 Maccabees. The historian Josephus also mentions the battle briefly in his book Antiquities of the Jews Book 12, Chapter 7, but appears to largely paraphrase the account provided in 1 Maccabees.

Despite the limited historical records, the Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah is considered a significant event in Jewish history as it marks the first military engagement between the Maccabees and the Seleucid Empire, and the Maccabees' victory in this battle set the stage for the continuation of their rebellion and ultimately the re-establishment of Jewish independence.

Analysis

The book of 1 Maccabees provides a relatively vague account of the Battle of the Ascent of Lebonah, also known as the Battle with Apollonius, compared to the other battles in the Maccabean Revolt. The duel described in the account may be more of a scriptural reference than a historical one, as the author uses phrases and language that closely resemble those found in the story of David and Goliath in the Hebrew Bible. This literary device aligns with the author's agenda to present the Hasmoneans, the dynasty of Jewish priests and rulers who emerged after the Maccabean Revolt, as heirs to the legacy of heroes of the Hebrew Bible and to counter the claims of those in the early Hasmonean kingdom who saw the Hasmoneans as usurpers, such as the Essenes.

Historian Bezalel Bar-Kochva argues that it is unlikely that the author of the book was an eyewitness or was able to interview someone who was, unlike the later battles which are described in greater detail. He also cautions that the claims of the Seleucid force being a "large army" should be viewed with skepticism, as soldiers often overestimate the size of opposing armies, and claiming to have defeated more enemies would naturally make for a more impressive and inspiring story to rally the cause. The precise date and location of the battle are not known, but it is believed to have occurred early in the revolt, possibly between Spring 166 BC to Spring 165 BC of the Gregorian calendar, and presumably on the road between Samaria and Jerusalem. Michael Avi-Yonah proposed that an ascent near Lebonah (modern Al-Lubban ash-Sharqiya and Ma'ale Levona) was the most likely spot, halfway between Shechem (modern Nablus) and Jerusalem. The ascent there is steep and winding, with multiple places difficult to scout and thus useful for a raiding force to hide and prepare for an ambush from. Another proposal is somewhat further south at Wadi Haramiya, just north of Silwad; the road there is overlooked by ridges on both sides. The historian Josephus mentions the battle briefly and describes Apollonius as "the strategos (general) of the Samaritan forces," indicating that the Seleucid army also had the support of the neighboring Samaritan people.³

³ Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.



Battle of Beth Horon (166 BC)



Image 16 Mina of Antiochus IV

The Battle of Beth Horon, also known as the Battle with Seron, took place between Spring 166 BC and Spring 165 BC during the Maccabean Revolt. The Maccabean Revolt was a rebellion against the Seleucid Empire, led by the Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus, also known as Judah Maccabee. The battle occurred at the strategic mountain pass of Beth-Horon, which connects the coastal plain to the Judean hill country.

The Maccabee rebels, using guerrilla warfare tactics, ambushed the Seleucid army led by Seron, a commander of the Syrian army, as they passed through the mountain pass. The surprise attack caught the Seleucid force off guard, causing them to flee in confusion. The Maccabee rebels then pursued the fleeing Seleucid soldiers into the plain.

Prior to the Battle of Beth Horon, the Jewish army led by Maccabeus had already won a battle at the ascent of Lebonah against the Seleucid General Apollonius. The Seleucid Empire then sent another force to combat the Maccabees, which led to the Battle of Emmaus.

The battle's only contemporaneous record is found in First Maccabees:

1 Maccabees 3:13-26 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

¹³When Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful soldiers who stayed with him and went out to battle, ¹⁴he said, 'I will make a name for myself and win honor in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command.' ¹⁵Once again a strong army of godless men went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the Israelites.

¹⁶When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. ¹⁷But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, 'How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and so strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today.' ¹⁸Judas replied, 'It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few.' ¹⁹It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. ²⁰They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; ²¹but we fight for our lives and our laws. ²²He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them.'

²³When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. ²⁴They pursued them down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled into the land of the Philistines. ²⁵Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell on the Gentiles all around them. ²⁶His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas.

The historian Josephus, in his work "Antiquities of the Jews," mentions the Battle of Beth Horon, but his account appears to be largely based on a paraphrase of the version found in the book of 1 Maccabees. However, there are some notable differences in Josephus's account. For example, Josephus claims that Seron, the commander of the Seleucid army, was killed outright during the battle, whereas 1 Maccabees only states that his army was defeated. Josephus also refers to Seron as a general (strategos) rather than a commander.

Historian Bezalel Bar-Kochva suggests that Josephus may have misread 1 Maccabees when it comes to the matter of Seron's fate. While 1 Maccabees states that Seron was "defeated," Bar-Kochva believes that Josephus may have read this more literally as Seron being killed in battle. This illustrates the importance of considering the different historical sources and interpreting them critically, as different authors may have different perspectives and biases.

Analysis

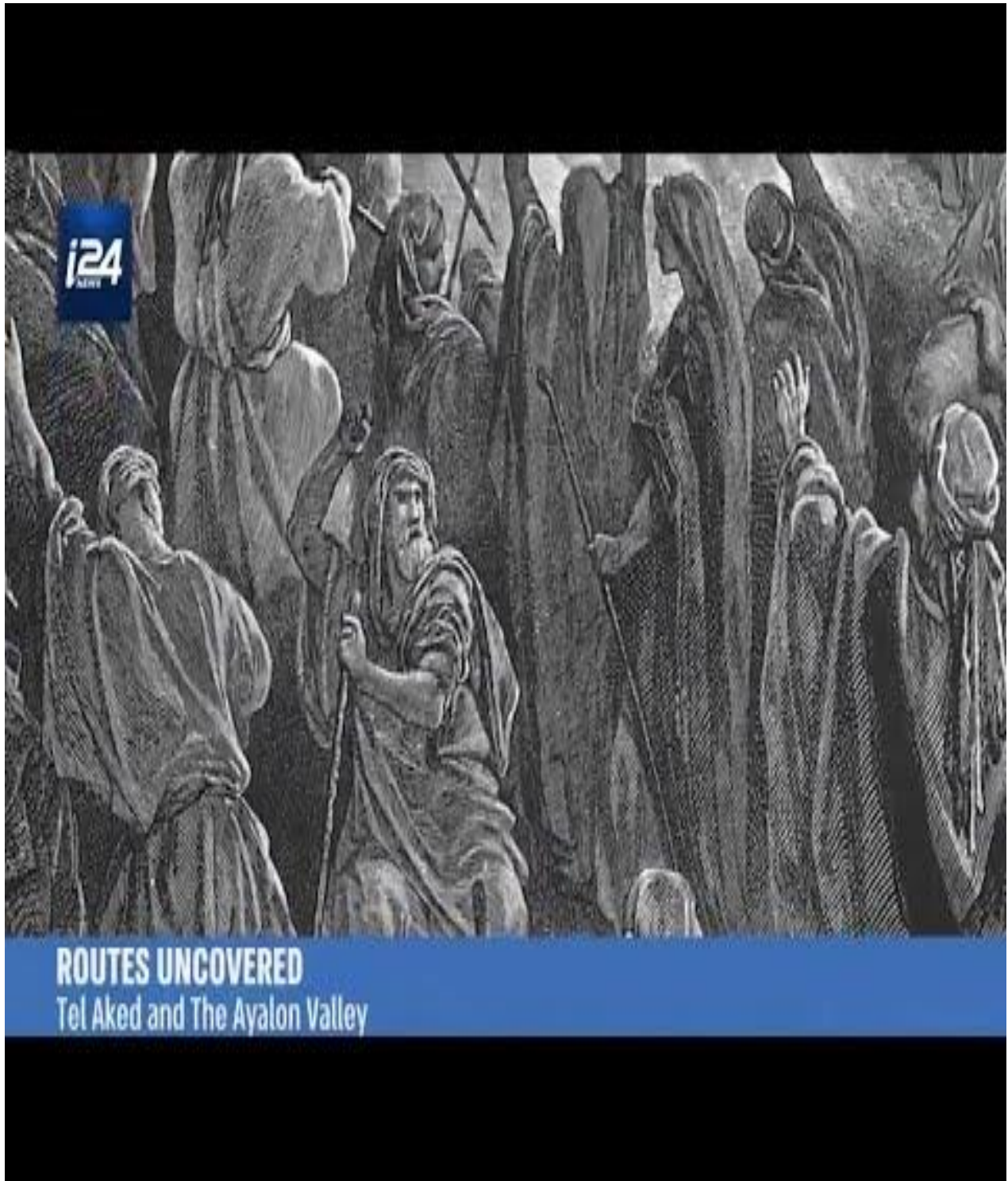
The Battle of Beth Horon, as described in the historical account of the 1 Maccabees and the historian Josephus, took place in a strategically important location - the narrow pass of Beth Horon. Despite its narrowness, it was still a main road from Jerusalem to the west during that era, making it a plausible spot for a small force to inflict major damage on a larger, less coordinated enemy. The book of 1 Maccabees, in which the account of this battle is recorded, is known for its literary style, as the speeches and prayers attributed to Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Jewish rebels, are likely free compositions of the historian rather than actual transcriptions.

The book of 1 Maccabees also makes use of archaic phrasings to present the deeds of the Hasmoneans, the family of Judas Maccabeus, as similar or equivalent to those of earlier heroes of Jewish Scripture. The defeated Seleucid force is said to have retreated to the “land of the Philistines”, which is likely a poetic reference to the eparchy of Paralia on Judea's coastal plain, which was friendly to the Greeks. The exact date of the battle is not known, but it is likely to have occurred between 166–165 BC.

Bar-Kochva, a historian, has suggested that the author of 1 Maccabees was not an eyewitness to the battle, but was able to interview someone who was. He also posits that the author may have inflated the number of enemy soldiers and Seron's rank to make the victory seem more impressive. The claim that “terror” befell the non-Jewish population in the vicinity of the battle as a result of the Maccabees' victory seems overstated, as later events in the text show that they were not so afraid as to avoid further conflicts with the Maccabees.

The identity of Seron and his "godless" allies is not entirely clear. The name "Seron" may be of Thracian origin, and his allies may have included outlying Samaritans or Ammonites, Thracian mercenaries, or even Hellenized Jews who had been recruited as soldiers by the Seleucid government.⁴

⁴ Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.



ROUTES UNCOVERED
Tel Aked and The Ayalon Valley

Battle of Emmaus



Image 17 <https://historycollection.com/at-the-battle-of-emmaus-maccabee-used-guerrilla-tactics-to-destroy-the-seleucid-army/3/>

The Battle of Emmaus occurred around September 165 BC, during the Maccabean Revolt. The Maccabean Revolt was a rebellion against the Seleucid Empire, led by the Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus, also known as Judah Maccabee. The Seleucid Empire was led by generals Gorgias, Ptolemy the son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor. The battle took place near Emmaus, a location that is not specified in the historical accounts.

The Maccabee rebels, led by Judas Maccabeus, emerged victorious in the battle. They were able to achieve this by utilizing a tactic of marching by night and surprising the Seleucid camp while many of the soldiers were absent. The Maccabees were able to loot the Greek camp for valuables, which would have been useful in helping to fund their rebellion. They also likely acquired weapons, which would have helped them in their future battles.

The Maccabean Revolt was a significant event in Jewish history, as it was a rebellion against a powerful empire and the Maccabees were able to achieve a series of victories against the Seleucid Empire. The Battle of Emmaus was one of these victories, which helped to further the cause of the Maccabees in their fight for independence.

Primary Sources

The Battle of Emmaus is recorded in several primary sources, including the books of 1 Maccabees (1 Maccabees 3:38–4:25), 2 Maccabees (2 Maccabees 8:8–8:36, and Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews Book 12. These primary sources provide historical accounts of the battle, each with its own perspective and level of detail.

1 Maccabees provides a more detailed description of the battle and the rebel army, and it is believed that the author may have even been a personal eyewitness to the battle. 2 Maccabees, on the other hand, gives a more accurate depiction of the Seleucid forces and commanders. However, its account of the battle is more focused on moral lessons and emphasizing the righteousness of Judas Maccabeus and the Maccabee cause.

Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews Book 12 also includes an account of the battle, which may provide additional information and insights. It is important to consider all primary sources and to evaluate them critically, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the historical event.

1 Maccabees 3:38-4:25 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Preparations for Battle

³⁸Lysias chose Ptolemy son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor and Gorgias, able men among the Friends of the king, ³⁹and sent with them forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to go into the land of Judah and destroy it, as the king had commanded. ⁴⁰So they set out with their entire force, and when they arrived they encamped near Emmaus in the plain. ⁴¹When the traders of the region heard what was said to them, they took silver and gold in immense amounts, and fetters, and went to the camp to get the Israelites for slaves. And forces from Syria and the land of the Philistines joined with them.

⁴²Now Judas and his brothers saw that misfortunes had increased and that the forces were encamped in their territory. They also learned what the king had commanded to be done to the people to cause their final destruction. ⁴³But they said to one another, 'Let us restore the ruins of our people, and fight for our people and the sanctuary.' ⁴⁴So the congregation assembled to be ready for battle, and to pray and ask for mercy and compassion.

⁴⁵Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness;
not one of her children went in or out.

The sanctuary was trampled down,
and aliens held the citadel;
it was a lodging-place for the Gentiles.

Joy was taken from Jacob;
the flute and the harp ceased to play.

⁴⁶Then they gathered together and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah. ⁴⁷They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their clothes. ⁴⁸And they opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles consulted the images of their gods. ⁴⁹They also brought the vestments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they stirred up the nazirites who had completed their days; ⁵⁰and they cried aloud to Heaven, saying,

‘What shall we do with these?

Where shall we take them?

⁵¹Your sanctuary is trampled down and profaned,
and your priests mourn in humiliation.

⁵²Here the Gentiles are assembled against us to destroy us;
you know what they plot against us.

⁵³How will we be able to withstand them,
if you do not help us?’

⁵⁴Then they sounded the trumpets and gave a loud shout. ⁵⁵After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, in charge of thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens. ⁵⁶Those who were building houses, or were about to be married, or were planting a vineyard, or were faint-hearted, he told to go home again, in accordance with the law. ⁵⁷Then the army marched out and encamped to the south of Emmaus.

⁵⁸And Judas said, ‘Arm yourselves and be courageous. Be ready early in the morning to fight with these Gentiles who have assembled against us to destroy us and our sanctuary. ⁵⁹It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and of the sanctuary. ⁶⁰But as his will in heaven may be, so shall he do.’

The Battle at Emmaus

⁴Now Gorgias took five thousand infantry and one thousand picked cavalry, and this division moved out by night ²to fall upon the camp of the Jews and attack them suddenly. Men from the citadel were his guides. ³But Judas heard of it, and he and his warriors moved out to attack the king’s force in Emmaus ⁴while the division was still absent from the camp. ⁵When Gorgias entered the camp of Judas by night, he found no one there, so he looked for them in the hills, because he said, ‘These men are running away from us.’

⁶At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armour and swords such as they desired. ⁷And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry all around it; and these men were trained in war. ⁸But Judas said to those who were with him, ‘Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. ⁹Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. ¹⁰And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us and remember his covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. ¹¹Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.’

¹²When the foreigners looked up and saw them coming against them, ¹³they went out from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets ¹⁴and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed, and fled into the plain, ¹⁵and all those in the rear fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, and to the plains of Idumea, and to Azotus and Jamnia; and three thousand of them fell. ¹⁶Then Judas and his force turned back from pursuing them, ¹⁷and he said to the people, ‘Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us; ¹⁸Gorgias and his force are near us in the hills. But stand now against our enemies and fight them, and afterwards seize the plunder boldly.’

¹⁹Just as Judas was finishing this speech, a detachment appeared, coming out of the hills. ²⁰They saw that their army had been put to flight, and that the Jews were burning the camp, for the smoke that was seen showed what had happened. ²¹When they perceived this, they were greatly frightened, and when they also saw the army of Judas drawn up in the plain for battle, ²²they all fled into the land of the Philistines.

²³ Then Judas returned to plunder the camp, and they seized a great amount of gold and silver, and cloth dyed blue and sea purple, and great riches. ²⁴ On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven—'For he is good, for his mercy endures forever.' ²⁵ Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.

2 Maccabees 8:8-36 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

⁸ When Philip saw that the man was gaining ground little by little, and that he was pushing ahead with more frequent successes, he wrote to Ptolemy, the governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, to come to the aid of the king's government. ⁹ Then Ptolemy promptly appointed Nicanor son of Patroclus, one of the king's chief Friends, and sent him, in command of no fewer than twenty thousand Gentiles of all nations, to wipe out the whole race of Judea. He associated with him Gorgias, a general and a man of experience in military service. ¹⁰ Nicanor determined to make up for the king the tribute due to the Romans, two thousand talents, by selling the captured Jews into slavery. ¹¹ So he immediately sent to the towns on the sea coast, inviting them to buy Jewish slaves and promising to hand over ninety slaves for a talent, not expecting the judgement from the Almighty that was about to overtake him.

Preparation for Battle

¹² Word came to Judas concerning Nicanor's invasion; and when he told his companions of the arrival of the army, ¹³ those who were cowardly and distrustful of God's justice ran off and got away. ¹⁴ Others sold all their remaining property, and at the same time implored the Lord to rescue those who had been sold by the ungodly Nicanor before he ever met them, ¹⁵ if not for their own sake, then for the sake of the covenants made with their ancestors, and because he had called them by his holy and glorious name. ¹⁶ But Maccabeus gathered his forces together, to the number of six thousand, and exhorted them not to be frightened by the enemy and not to fear the great multitude of Gentiles who were wickedly coming against them, but to fight nobly, ¹⁷ keeping before their eyes the lawless outrage that the Gentiles had committed against the holy place, and the torture of the derided city, and besides, the overthrow of their ancestral way of life. ¹⁸ 'For they trust to arms and acts of daring', he said, 'but we trust in the Almighty God, who is able with a single nod to strike down those who are coming against us, and even, if necessary, the whole world.'

¹⁹ Moreover, he told them of the occasions when help came to their ancestors; how, in the time of Sennacherib, when one hundred and eighty-five thousand perished, ²⁰ and the time of the battle against the Galatians that took place in Babylonia, when eight thousand Jews fought along with four thousand Macedonians; yet when the Macedonians were hard pressed, the eight thousand, by the help that came to them from heaven, destroyed one hundred and twenty thousand Galatians and took a great amount of booty.

Judas Defeats Nicanor

²¹ With these words he filled them with courage and made them ready to die for their laws and their country; then he divided his army into four parts. ²² He appointed his brothers also, Simon and Joseph and Jonathan, each to command a division, putting fifteen hundred men under each. ²³ Besides, he appointed Eleazar to read aloud from the holy book, and gave the watchword, 'The help of God'; then, leading the first division himself, he joined battle with Nicanor.

²⁴ With the Almighty as their ally, they killed more than nine thousand of the enemy, and wounded and disabled most of Nicanor's army, and forced them all to flee. ²⁵ They captured the money of those who had come to buy them as slaves. After pursuing them for some distance, they were obliged to return because the hour was late.

²⁶It was the day before the sabbath, and for that reason they did not continue their pursuit. ²⁷When they had collected the arms of the enemy and stripped them of their spoils, they kept the sabbath, giving great praise and thanks to the Lord, who had preserved them for that day and allotted it to them as the beginning of mercy. ²⁸After the sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and distributed the rest among themselves and their children. ²⁹When they had done this, they made common supplication and implored the merciful Lord to be wholly reconciled with his servants.

Judas Defeats Timothy and Bacchides

³⁰In encounters with the forces of Timothy and Bacchides they killed more than twenty thousand of them and got possession of some exceedingly high strongholds, and they divided a very large amount of plunder, giving to those who had been tortured and to the orphans and widows, and also to the aged, shares equal to their own. ³¹They collected the arms of the enemy, and carefully stored all of them in strategic places; the rest of the spoils they carried to Jerusalem. ³²They killed the commander of Timothy's forces, a most wicked man, and one who had greatly troubled the Jews. ³³While they were celebrating the victory in the city of their ancestors, they burned those who had set fire to the sacred gates, Callisthenes and some others, who had fled into one little house; so these received the proper reward for their impiety.

³⁴The thrice-accursed Nicanor, who had brought the thousand merchants to buy the Jews, ³⁵having been humbled with the help of the Lord by opponents whom he regarded as of the least 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! ³⁶So he who had undertaken to secure tribute for the Romans by the capture of the people of Jerusalem proclaimed that the Jews had a Defender, and that therefore the Jews were invulnerable, because they followed the laws ordained by him.

Background

The background to the Battle of Emmaus, which took place around September 165 BC, is rooted in the actions of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus had gathered an army from the western part of his empire with the intention of leaving for an expedition to the eastern satrapies in Babylonia and Persia. His goals were to replace or do battle with rebellious governors, deter the growing Parthian Empire from invading, and restore a flow of taxes to the capital.

In order to do this, Antiochus left Lysias as regent in the Seleucid capital Antioch and to raise his young son, the future Antiochus V. At the time, Jerusalem was still ruled by Seleucid-friendly Hellenist Jews and High Priest Menelaus. Lysias, at the request of Menelaus, dispatched a force, led by Ptolemy son of Dorymenes, to aid the ruling faction of Hellenist Jews and defeat the countryside rebels led by Judas Maccabeus. Ptolemy was accompanied by Gorgias and Nicanor as commanders.

2nd Maccabees suggests that Nicanor, one of the Seleucid generals, intended to raise money by using the army to enslave Jews and then sell them to pay off a 2,000-talent debt the Seleucids owed to the Roman Republic. This highlights the larger political and economic motivations behind the Seleucid actions and the Maccabean Revolt, as well as the complex dynamics at play in the region.

Battle

The Battle of Emmaus took place around September 165 BC during the Maccabean Revolt between Judean rebels, led by Judas Maccabeus (Judah Maccabee), and an expedition of Seleucid Empire forces under generals Gorgias, Ptolemy the son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor. The Seleucids had established their base camp at the town of Emmaus, which is located at the eastern edge of the Ayalon Valley and along the western border of Judea. Emmaus was an excellent location for a base camp as it had easy access to numerous routes into the Judean hills and good water. Emmaus was also largely flat, which allowed the use of cavalry and denied any advantages to the rebel forces from hilly terrain.

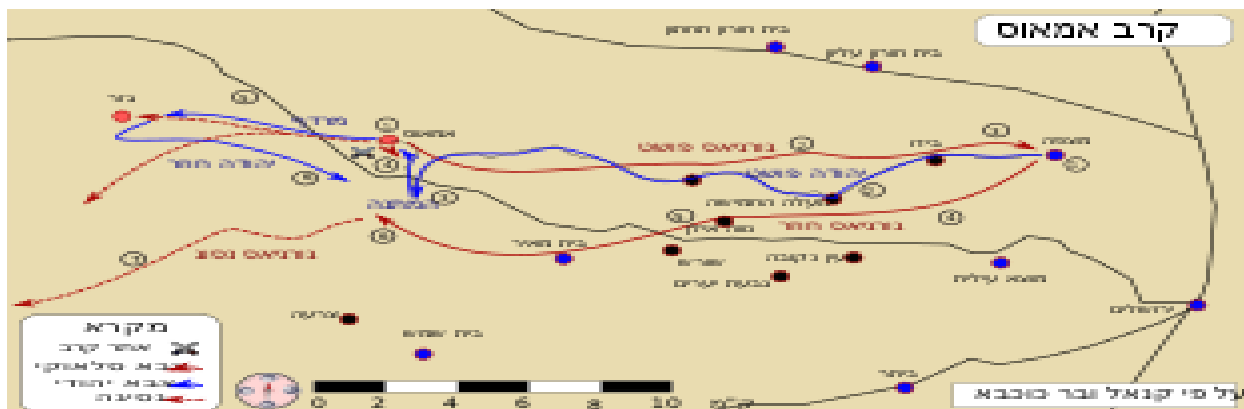


Image 18 Troop movements during the Battle of Emmaus. Blue arrows shows a hypothesized line of the Maccabees march from Mizpah to the west, red arrows shows proposed movement of Gorgias's raiding force; dotted red lines are the direction of the Seleucid camp's retreat.

Judas Maccabeus's camp was located in the town of Mizpah, north of Jerusalem. Gorgias planned to attack Judas's concentration of troops after receiving word of them, possibly through intentional leaks by Judas himself. Judas's scouts and spies found out that Gorgias was leading troops on a march against his camp and was planning to surprise the Jewish rebels in a night-time attack.

Judas then abandoned his camp at Mizpah and led his forces to Emmaus, to attack the expedition base camp that remained there. Using a small force of about 3,000 soldiers, Judas's troops were able to surprise the Seleucid camp at Emmaus at dawn and forced the unprepared Seleucid soldiers to retreat to the southwest, toward Idumea. Gorgias returned to Emmaus, only to find his camp destroyed. The Maccabees looted the camp, taking gold and silver, and likely also took abandoned Seleucid weapons.

The outcome of the battle was quite influential. The Maccabees had previously defeated small detachments of Seleucid troops in earlier clashes against Apollonius and Seron, but with this victory, the Maccabees proved that they could challenge larger numbers of Seleucid troops and could make complicated plans and tactical ploys. This set the stage for eventual Hasmonean independence.

Analysis

The primary source 1 Maccabees is considered to be generally reliable in its depiction of the Battle of Emmaus. However, some scholars have questioned the accuracy of certain aspects of the portrayal of the battle. It is common in accounts of battles during the Maccabean Revolt for the rebels and authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees to exaggerate the size of the Seleucid forces. This was likely done to create more impressive morale-raising stories.

The book of 1 Maccabees claims that Gorgias's force that split from the camp consisted of 5,000 soldiers, 1,000 cavalrymen, and allied Hellenist Jews from the Acra as guides. This would be an unwieldy number for a surprise attack that would travel through the narrow Beth Horon ascent, and the Seleucids had perhaps only 5,000 cavalry in the entire Western half of their empire. Some later manuscripts of 1 Maccabees adds that the rebel troops lacked "helmets and slings and stones and armor" as well in the battle; this is considered likely to be a gloss of an unknown scribe copying the material, and unlikely to be historical. The reported Seleucid casualty numbers are also considered implausibly high: 3,000 defeated according to 1 Maccabees, and 9,000 according to 2 Maccabees.

Judas's speeches and prayers in the book of 1 Maccabees are also seen as compositions of the historian and not actual transcriptions. They are written in the style of Hellenistic historians to make them more literary. In the case of the Battle of Emmaus, Judas's speech in 1 Maccabees does not make sense in context as it is given just before the rebels attack the base camp. This is unlikely as during a surprise attack, every minute of delay after being spotted gives the defenders more time to prepare. It is more likely that any speeches or special instructions were given during the ceremony held at Mizpah, a day earlier.⁵

⁵ Andrews, E. (2023). [The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.

Battle of Beth Zur



Image 19 The Ruins of Beth Zur, early 20th century

The Battle of Beth Zur was a military engagement that took place in October 164 BC between the Maccabees, a group of Jewish rebels led by Judas Maccabeus, and the Seleucid Greek army led by Regent Lysias. The battle was fought at the location of Beth Zur, a town located in the western part of Judea. According to the primary sources, such as the books of Maccabees, the Maccabees emerged victorious in the battle. However, the true significance of this victory is debated among historians. Some suggest that the battle's outcome was inconclusive, and the Maccabees' victory may have been the result of good luck.

After the battle, the Seleucid army and Lysias decided to return to the capital instead of continuing their campaign. This was likely due to the news of Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes' death, which reached Judea in the days following the battle. The leadership transition in the Seleucid Empire required Lysias and his army to return to the capital to handle the political situation. This gave the Maccabees an opportunity to capture Jerusalem, which they were able to do soon after.

The Battle of Beth Zur was a key moment in the Maccabean Revolt, a conflict fought between the Maccabees, a group of Jewish rebels, and the Seleucid Greek army. The Maccabees, led by Judas Maccabeus, were fighting for Jewish independence and religious freedom. The Seleucids, led by Regent Lysias, were fighting to maintain control over Judea. The battle was fought at Beth Zur, a fortification in the Judean hills, in October 164 BC. According to the books of Maccabees, the Maccabees emerged victorious. However, the true outcome of the battle is uncertain and some scholars believe that it was inconclusive.

Nevertheless, the Maccabees were able to take advantage of the situation after the battle as the news of the death of Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes reached Judea, Lysias and his army returned to the capital to handle the leadership transition and the Maccabees were able to capture Jerusalem soon after. This victory was crucial in the Maccabean Revolt, as it marked the Maccabees as a powerful force and helped pave the way for the eventual independence of the Hasmoneans.

Primary Sources

The Battle of Beth Zur is a key historical event recorded in primary sources such as the books of 1 Maccabees (1 Maccabees 4:26–35), 2 Maccabees (2 Maccabees 11:1–15), and Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews. These sources provide different perspectives on the timing of the battle, with 1 Maccabees stating that it occurred before the capture of Jerusalem and the purification of the Temple, while 2 Maccabees suggests that it happened after these events. Scholars have debated which account is more accurate, with many historians preferring the version in 1 Maccabees as it was written closer to the events and the author was possibly an eyewitness. However, Josephus's account largely echoes 1 Maccabees, with the addition that the Maccabees clashed with only the advance troops of the Seleucids, which is considered a plausible addition. The outcome of the battle is also uncertain and disputed, with some scholars believe that it may have been inconclusive.

1 Maccabees 4:26-35 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

First Campaign of Lysias

²⁶Those of the foreigners who escaped went and reported to Lysias all that had happened. ²⁷When he heard it, he was perplexed and discouraged, for things had not happened to Israel as he had intended, nor had they turned out as the king had ordered. ²⁸But the next year he mustered sixty thousand picked infantry and five thousand cavalry to subdue them. ²⁹They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men.

³⁰When he saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, 'Blessed are you, O Saviour of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. ³¹Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. ³²Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. ³³Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns.'

³⁴Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action. ³⁵When Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness that inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he withdrew to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries in order to invade Judea again with an even larger army.

2 Maccabees 11:1-15 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Lysias Besieges Beth-zur

¹Very soon after this, Lysias, the king's guardian and kinsman, who was in charge of the government, being vexed at what had happened, ²gathered about eighty thousand infantry and all his cavalry and came against the Jews. He intended to make the city a home for Greeks, ³and to levy tribute on the temple as he did on the sacred places of the other nations, and to put the high-priesthood up for sale every year. ⁴He took no account whatever of the power of God, but was elated with his tens of thousands of infantry, and his thousands of cavalry, and his eighty elephants. ⁵Invading Judea, he approached Beth-zur, which was a fortified place about five stadia from Jerusalem, and pressed it hard.

⁶When Maccabeus and his men got word that Lysias was besieging the strongholds, they and all the people, with lamentations and tears, prayed the Lord to send a good angel to save Israel. ⁷Maccabeus himself was the first to take up arms, and he urged the others to risk their lives with him to aid their kindred. Then they eagerly rushed off together. ⁸And there, while they were still near Jerusalem, a horseman appeared at their head, clothed in white and brandishing weapons of gold. ⁹And together they all praised the merciful God, and were strengthened in heart, ready to assail not only humans but the wildest animals or walls of iron. ¹⁰They advanced in battle order, having their heavenly ally, for the Lord had mercy on them. ¹¹They hurled themselves like lions against the enemy, and laid low eleven thousand of them and sixteen hundred cavalry, and forced all the rest to flee. ¹²Most of them got away stripped and wounded, and Lysias himself escaped by disgraceful flight.

Lysias Makes Peace with the Jews

¹³As he was not without intelligence, he pondered over the defeat that had befallen him, and realized that the Hebrews were invincible because the mighty God fought on their side. So, he sent to them ¹⁴and persuaded them to settle everything on just terms, promising that he would persuade the king, constraining him to be their friend. ¹⁵Maccabeus, having regard for the common good, agreed to all that Lysias urged. For the king granted every request in behalf of the Jews which Maccabeus delivered to Lysias in writing.

Background

The background of the Battle of Beth Zur took place in the context of the Maccabean Revolt, a rebellion of the Jewish people against the Seleucid Empire, led by Judas Maccabeus (Judah Maccabee) and his brothers. The Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes had left for an expedition to the eastern satrapies in Babylonia and Persia, leaving his regent Lysias in charge of the empire's western half. The Maccabees had already won a significant victory against the Seleucids in the Battle of Emmaus, which took place in 165 BC. However, Lysias attempted to negotiate with the rebels for several months in an attempt to restore order in the Judean countryside. When these negotiations failed, Lysias marshaled an army and camped at Beth Zur, a fortified place near Jerusalem, in preparation for a battle against the Maccabees.

The exact timing and details of the events leading up to the Battle of Beth Zur are debated among scholars, with different accounts provided in primary sources such as the books of Maccabees and Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews. The timing of the Battle of Beth Zur is also a point of debate among historians. According to 1 Maccabees, Lysias initiated an expedition, was defeated at Beth Zur, Jerusalem was taken, and the Second Temple was cleansed. 2 Maccabees, on the other hand, indicates that Lysias's expedition and the Battle of Beth Zur happened after the taking of Jerusalem and the purification of the Temple. This has led some scholars to believe that Lysias only made a single expedition to Judea, rather than the account in 1 Maccabees of two expeditions separated by two years.

In any case, the Maccabees' victory at Beth Zur was a crucial moment in the Maccabean Revolt. It solidified their control over Jerusalem and set the stage for the establishment of the Hasmonean kingdom. Additionally, **the fact that Lysias was forced to negotiate with the Maccabees and that he eventually retreated, showed the Maccabees' strength and the region weakness of the Seleucid Empire.**

Battle

The Maccabees, led by Judas Maccabeus, were outnumbered and outmatched by the Seleucid army led by Regent Lysias. However, they were able to use their knowledge of the terrain and their guerrilla tactics to their advantage. They attacked the Seleucid camp at Beth Zur with swift, surprise raids, causing confusion and chaos among the enemy ranks. The Seleucids, caught off guard, were unable to effectively respond to the Maccabees' relentless attacks.

Despite the Maccabees' initial success, Lysias was able to regroup and rally his troops. He ordered a counterattack, but the Maccabees, knowing they could not defeat the Seleucids in a full-scale battle, retreated into the hills. Lysias, not wanting to risk losing more men in pursuit, decided to retreat back to his main force and regroup.

The Maccabees, on the other hand, were able to use their victory to bolster morale and gain support among the Jewish population. News of the battle spread quickly, and many Jews who had previously been hesitant to join the rebellion were now willing to fight for their freedom. The Maccabees were also able to capture weapons and other valuable resources from the Seleucid camp, which they would later use in future battles.

In the end, the Battle of Beth Zur was a significant victory for the Maccabees, although the Seleucids still held the upper hand in terms of military might. However, the Maccabees' success in this battle would pave the way for future victories and ultimately lead to the establishment of the Hasmonean Kingdom.

Aftermath

The aftermath of the Battle of Beth Zur was significant for both the Maccabees and the Seleucids. According to the First Book of Maccabees, the Maccabees emerged victorious from the battle, which convinced Lysias to return to Antioch to replenish his forces after sustaining heavy casualties. However, this account is somewhat distrusted by some historians as fitting the narrative that the pro-Hasmonean source would want to tell. Some scholars believe that the battle was inconclusive based on the description given.

Regardless of the outcome of the battle, Lysias was unable to continue his campaign due to the death of Antiochus IV. He had to withdraw and cede the field to the Maccabees, as **his main priority was to be in the capital Antioch with as many military units loyal to him as possible to stave off any succession challenges to the new boy king Antiochus V Eupator, who was only 9 years old.**

On the other hand, the Maccabees may have intentionally declined to attempt to conquer Jerusalem earlier, in the knowledge that doing so would have provoked a fierce response from Antiochus IV. **The resulting succession struggle enabled the Maccabees time to establish new "facts on the ground" by taking Jerusalem, cleansing the Temple, and making clear they were in control of Judea, although they did not challenge the Acra immediately with its garrison of Greeks and Hellenist-friendly Jews.**

Analysis

It is likely that the Battle of Beth Zur was a relatively small engagement between the Maccabees and Seleucids, with both sides withdrawing in good order after the clash. The significance of the battle lies in the fact that it occurred at a time when Lysias, the Seleucid regent, was forced to withdraw and return to Antioch due to the death of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the need to secure the succession of the new king, Antiochus V Eupator. **This withdrawal allowed the Maccabees to establish control over Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, leading to the eventual independence of the Hasmonean kingdom.** While the primary sources of 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees provide accounts of the battle, the figures of the size of the Seleucid army and the casualties are likely exaggerated for the purpose of morale-boosting and to enhance the image of the Maccabees as heroic fighters.⁶

⁶ Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.

○ Judas and his followers

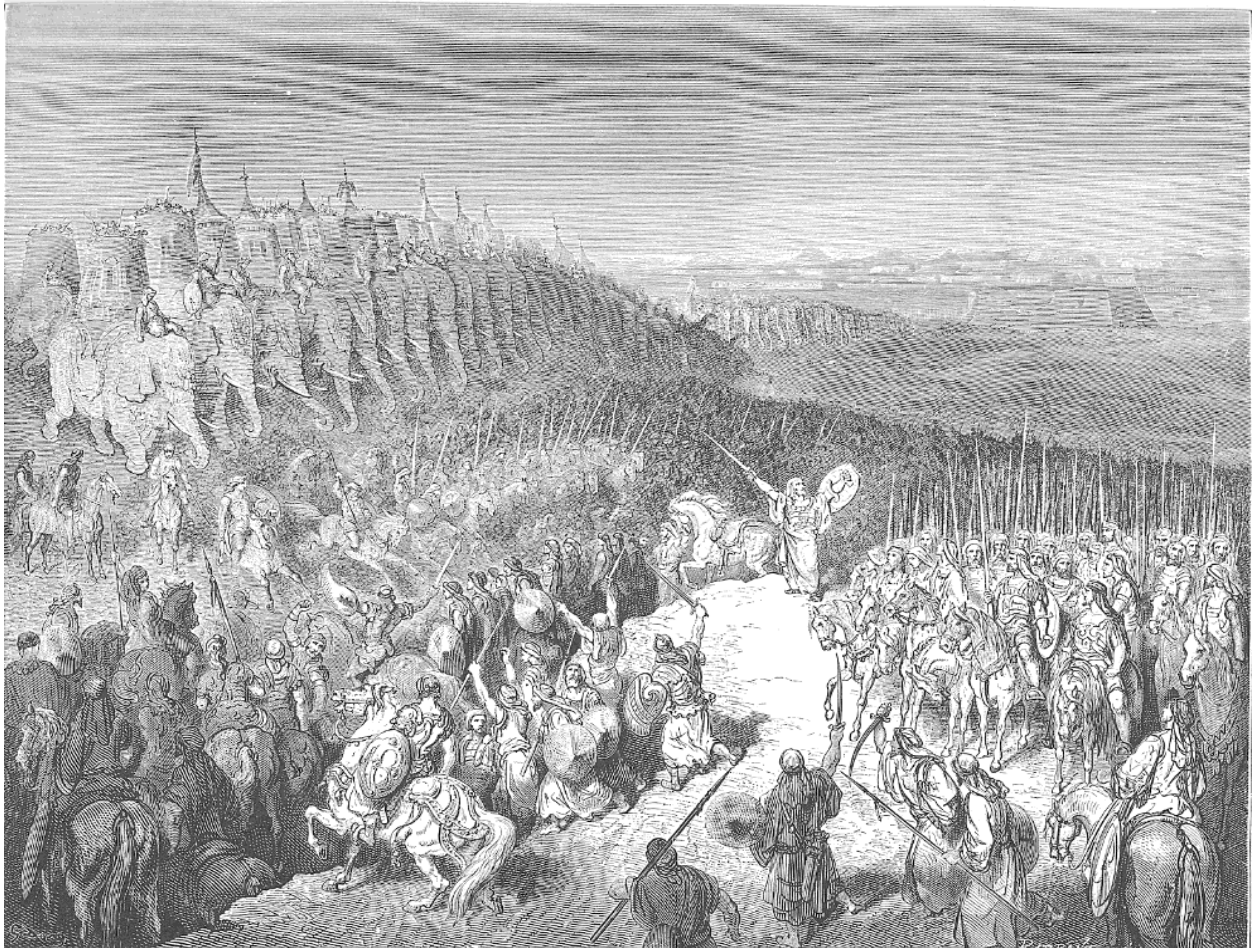
Defeated a large army at Beth-zur

- It paved the way for re-taking Jerusalem
 - *Retook the city & the Temple Mount 164 BC*
 - *The Temple was recaptured, the sanctuary was cleansed, the temple lamps were re-lit, & sacrifices were resumed. **The Maccabees served as both high priests and kings.***

○ Jews have celebrated the moment ever since with a feast in the New Testament called: The Feast of Dedication

- Today it is known as “**Hanukkah**”
- Jesus Himself attended the feast as recorded in *John 10:22-23*

Maccabee Campaigns of 163 BC



The Maccabean Revolt was a series of campaigns fought by the Maccabee rebels against the Seleucid Empire in 163 BC. The rebels fought multiple enemies, including Seleucid garrisons, hired mercenaries, and hostile non-Jewish inhabitants in regions such as Ammon, Gilead, Galilee, Idumea, and Judea's coastal plain. The main Seleucid armies were elsewhere at the time, allowing the Maccabees to expand their influence. The Maccabees did not hold territory, but engaged in raids and retributive attacks. The book 1 Maccabees describes a vicious campaign of extermination on both sides, with the Maccabees massacring Gentiles they believed were involved and burning down their towns. The Maccabees also invited Jewish refugees back to Judea and escorted them under the safety of their army.

Primary Sources

The campaigns against Timothy, a Greek individual, and the local non-Jewish population, commonly referred to as Gentiles, are documented in various primary sources. These sources include the books of 1 Maccabees (1 Maccabees 5), 2 Maccabees (2 Maccabees 10:14–38, 2 Maccabees 12:10–37), and Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews Book 12, Chapter 8. It is worth noting that 2 Maccabees also briefly mentions Timothy and his armies in relation to the Battle of Emmaus (2 Maccabees 8:30–8:33), although it is generally assumed by historians that this reference is a "flash-forward" in time to describe Timothy's eventual defeat rather than an actual occurrence during the Emmaus campaign of 164 BC.

1 Maccabees 5 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Wars with Neighboring Peoples

5 When the Gentiles all around heard that the altar had been rebuilt and the sanctuary dedicated as it was before, they became very angry, **2** and they determined to destroy the descendants of Jacob who lived among them. So, they began to kill and destroy among the people. **3** But Judas made war on the descendants of Esau in Idumea, at Akkrabattene, because they kept lying in wait for Israel. He dealt them a heavy blow and humbled them and despoiled them. **4** He also remembered the wickedness of the sons of Baean, who were a trap and a snare to the people and ambushed them on the highways. **5** They were shut up by him in their towers; and he encamped against them, vowed their complete destruction, and burned with fire their towers and all who were in them. **6** Then he crossed over to attack the Ammonites, where he found a strong band and many people, with Timothy as their leader. **7** He engaged in many battles with them, and they were crushed before him; he struck them down. **8** He also took Jazer and its villages; then he returned to Judea.

Liberation of Galilean Jews

9 Now the Gentiles in Gilead gathered together against the Israelites who lived in their territory, and planned to destroy them. But they fled to the stronghold of Dathema, **10** and sent to Judas and his brothers a letter that said, 'The Gentiles around us have gathered together to destroy us. **11** They are preparing to come and capture the stronghold to which we have fled, and Timothy is leading their forces. **12** Now then, come and rescue us from their hands, for many of us have fallen, **13** and all our kindred who were in the land of Tob have been killed; the enemy have captured their wives and children and goods, and have destroyed about a thousand people there.' **14** While the letter was still being read, other messengers, with their garments torn, came from Galilee and made a similar report; **15** they said that the people of Ptolemais and Tyre and Sidon, and all Galilee of the Gentiles, had gathered together against them 'to annihilate us.' **16** When Judas and the people heard these messages, a great assembly was called to determine what they should do for their kindred who were in distress and were being attacked by enemies. **17** Then Judas said to his brother Simon, 'Choose your men and go and rescue your kindred in Galilee; Jonathan my brother and I will go to Gilead.' **18** But he left Joseph, son of Zechariah, and Azariah, a leader of the people, with the rest of the forces, in Judea to guard it; **19** and he gave them this command, 'Take charge of this people, but do not engage in battle with the Gentiles until we return.' **20** Then three thousand men were assigned to Simon to go to Galilee, and eight thousand to Judas for Gilead.

²¹So Simon went to Galilee and fought many battles against the Gentiles, and the Gentiles were crushed before him. ²²He pursued them to the gate of Ptolemais; as many as three thousand of the Gentiles fell, and he despoiled them. ²³Then he took the Jews of Galilee and Arbatta, with their wives and children, and all they possessed, and led them to Judea with great rejoicing.

Judas and Jonathan in Gilead

²⁴Judas Maccabeus and his brother Jonathan crossed the Jordan and made three days' journey into the wilderness. ²⁵They encountered the Nabateans, who met them peaceably and told them all that had happened to their kindred in Gilead: ²⁶'Many of them have been shut up in Bozrah and Bosor, in Alema and Chaspho, Maked and Carnaim'—all these towns were strong and large— ²⁷'and some have been shut up in the other towns of Gilead; the enemy are getting ready to attack the strongholds tomorrow and capture and destroy all these people in a single day.'

²⁸Then Judas and his army quickly turned back by the wilderness road to Bozrah; and he took the town, and killed every male by the edge of the sword; then he seized all its spoils and burned it with fire. ²⁹He left the place at night, and they went all the way to the stronghold of Dathema. ³⁰At dawn they looked out and saw a large company, which could not be counted, carrying ladders and engines of war to capture the stronghold, and attacking the Jews within. ³¹So Judas saw that the battle had begun and that the cry of the town went up to Heaven, with trumpets and loud shouts, ³²and he said to the men of his forces, 'Fight today for your kindred!' ³³Then he came up behind them in three companies, who sounded their trumpets and cried aloud in prayer. ³⁴And when the army of Timothy realized that it was Maccabeus, they fled before him, and he dealt them a heavy blow. As many as eight thousand of them fell that day.

³⁵Next he turned aside to Maapha, and fought against it and took it; and he killed every male in it, plundered it, and burned it with fire. ³⁶From there he marched on and took Chaspho, Maked, and Bosor, and the other towns of Gilead.

³⁷After these things Timothy gathered another army and encamped opposite Raphon, on the other side of the stream. ³⁸Judas sent men to spy out the camp, and they reported to him, 'All the Gentiles around us have gathered to him; it is a very large force. ³⁹They also have hired Arabs to help them, and they are encamped across the stream, ready to come and fight against you.' And Judas went to meet them.

⁴⁰Now as Judas and his army drew near to the stream of water, Timothy said to the officers of his forces, 'If he crosses over to us first, we will not be able to resist him, for he will surely defeat us. ⁴¹But if he shows fear and camps on the other side of the river, we will cross over to him and defeat him.' ⁴²When Judas approached the stream of water, he stationed the officers of the army at the stream and gave them this command, 'Permit no one to encamp, but make them all enter the battle.' ⁴³Then he crossed over against them first, and the whole army followed him. All the Gentiles were defeated before him, and they threw away their arms and fled into the sacred precincts at Carnaim. ⁴⁴But he took the town and burned the sacred precincts with fire, together with all who were in them. Thus, Carnaim was conquered; they could stand before Judas no longer.

The Return to Jerusalem

⁴⁵Then Judas gathered together all the Israelites in Gilead, the small and the great, with their wives and children and goods, a very large company, to go to the land of Judah. ⁴⁶So they came to Ephron. This was a large and very strong town on the road, and they could not go around it to the right or to the left; they had to go through it. ⁴⁷But the people of the town shut them out and blocked up the gates with stones.

⁴⁸Judas sent them this friendly message, 'Let us pass through your land to get to our land. No one will do you harm; we will simply pass by on foot.' But they refused to open to him. ⁴⁹Then Judas ordered proclamation to be made to the army that all should encamp where they were. ⁵⁰So the men of the forces encamped, and he fought against the town all that day and all the night, and the town was delivered into his hands. ⁵¹He destroyed every male by the edge of the sword, and razed and plundered the town. Then he passed through the town over the bodies of the dead.

⁵²Then they crossed the Jordan into the large plain before Beth-shan. ⁵³Judas kept rallying the laggards and encouraging the people all the way until he came to the land of Judah. ⁵⁴So they went up to Mount Zion with joy and gladness, and offered burnt-offerings, because they had returned in safety; not one of them had fallen.

Joseph and Azariah Defeated

⁵⁵Now while Judas and Jonathan were in Gilead and their brother Simon was in Galilee before Ptolemais, ⁵⁶Joseph son of Zechariah, and Azariah, the commanders of the forces, heard of their brave deeds and of the heroic war they had fought. ⁵⁷So they said, 'Let us also make a name for ourselves; let us go and make war on the Gentiles around us.' ⁵⁸So they issued orders to the men of the forces that were with them and marched against Jamnia. ⁵⁹Gorgias and his men came out of the town to meet them in battle. ⁶⁰Then Joseph and Azariah were routed, and were pursued to the borders of Judea; as many as two thousand of the people of Israel fell that day. ⁶¹Thus the people suffered a great rout because, thinking to do a brave deed, they did not listen to Judas and his brothers. ⁶²But they did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel.

⁶³The man Judas and his brothers were greatly honored in all Israel and among all the Gentiles, wherever their name was heard. ⁶⁴People gathered to them and praised them.

Success at Hebron and Philistia

⁶⁵Then Judas and his brothers went out and fought the descendants of Esau in the land to the south. He struck Hebron and its villages and tore down its strongholds and burned its towers on all sides. ⁶⁶Then he marched off to go into the land of the Philistines, and passed through Marisa. ⁶⁷On that day some priests, who wished to do a brave deed, fell in battle, for they went out to battle unwisely. ⁶⁸But Judas turned aside to Azotus in the land of the Philistines; he tore down their altars, and the carved images of their gods he burned with fire; he plundered the towns and returned to the land of Judah.

2 Maccabees 10:14-38 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Campaign in Idumea

¹⁴When Gorgias became governor of the region, he maintained a force of mercenaries, and at every turn kept attacking the Jews. ¹⁵Besides this, the Idumeans, who had control of important strongholds, were harassing the Jews; they received those who were banished from Jerusalem, and endeavored to keep up the war. ¹⁶But Maccabeus and his forces, after making solemn supplication and imploring God to fight on their side, rushed to the strongholds of the Idumeans. ¹⁷Attacking them vigorously, they gained possession of the places, and beat off all who fought upon the wall, and slaughtered those whom they encountered, killing no fewer than twenty thousand. ¹⁸When at least nine thousand took refuge in two very strong towers well equipped to withstand a siege, ¹⁹Maccabeus left Simon and Joseph, and also Zacchaeus and his troops, a force sufficient to besiege them; and he himself set off for places where he was more urgently needed. ²⁰But those with Simon, who were money-hungry, were bribed by some of those who were in the towers, and on receiving seventy thousand drachmas let some of them slip away. ²¹When word of what had happened came to Maccabeus, he gathered the leaders of the people, and accused these men of having sold their kindred for money by setting their enemies free to fight against them. ²²Then he killed these men who had turned traitor, and immediately captured the two towers. ²³Having success at arms in everything he undertook, he destroyed more than twenty thousand in the two strongholds.

Judas Defeats Timothy

²⁴Now Timothy, who had been defeated by the Jews before, gathered a tremendous force of mercenaries and collected the cavalry from Asia in no small number. He came on, intending to take Judea by storm. ²⁵As he drew near, Maccabeus and his men sprinkled dust on their heads and girded their loins with sackcloth, in supplication to God. ²⁶Falling upon the steps before the altar, they implored him to be gracious to them and to be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries, as the law declares. ²⁷And rising from their prayer they took up their arms and advanced a considerable distance from the city; and when they came near the enemy they halted. ²⁸Just as dawn was breaking, the two armies joined battle, one having as pledge of success and victory not only their valor but also their reliance on the Lord, while the other made rage their leader in the fight.

²⁹When the battle became fierce, there appeared to the enemy from heaven five resplendent men on horses with golden bridles, and they were leading the Jews. ³⁰Two of them took Maccabeus between them, and shielding him with their own armor and weapons, they kept him from being wounded. They showered arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy, so that, confused and blinded, they were thrown into disorder and cut to pieces. ³¹Twenty thousand five hundred were slaughtered, besides six hundred cavalry. ³²Timothy himself fled to a stronghold called Gazara, especially well garrisoned, where Chaereas was commander. ³³Then Maccabeus and his men were glad, and they besieged the fort for four days. ³⁴The men within, relying on the strength of the place, kept blaspheming terribly and uttering wicked words. ³⁵But at dawn on the fifth day, twenty young men in the army of Maccabeus, fired with anger because of the blasphemies, bravely stormed the wall and with savage fury cut down everyone they met. ³⁶Others who came up in the same way wheeled around against the defenders and set fire to the towers; they kindled fires and burned the blasphemers alive. Others broke open the gates and let in the rest of the force, and they occupied the city. ³⁷They killed Timothy, who was hiding in a cistern, and his brother Chaereas, and Apollophanes. ³⁸When they had accomplished these things, with hymns and thanksgivings they blessed the Lord who shows great kindness to Israel and gives them the victory.

2 Maccabees 12:10-37 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

The Campaign in Gilead

¹⁰When they had gone more than a mile from there, on their march against Timothy, at least five thousand Arabs with five hundred cavalry attacked them. ¹¹After a hard fight, Judas and his companions, with God's help, were victorious. The defeated nomads begged Judas to grant them pledges of friendship, promising to give him livestock and to help his people in all other ways. ¹²Judas, realizing that they might indeed be useful in many ways, agreed to make peace with them; and after receiving his pledges they went back to their tents.

¹³He also attacked a certain town that was strongly fortified with earthworks and walls, and inhabited by all sorts of Gentiles. Its name was Caspin. ¹⁴Those who were within, relying on the strength of the walls and on their supply of provisions, behaved most insolently towards Judas and his men, railing at them and even blaspheming and saying unholy things. ¹⁵But Judas and his men, calling upon the great Sovereign of the world, who without battering-rams or engines of war overthrew Jericho in the days of Joshua, rushed furiously upon the walls. ¹⁶They took the town by the will of God, and slaughtered untold numbers, so that the adjoining lake, a quarter of a mile wide, appeared to be running over with blood.

Judas Defeats Timothy's Army

¹⁷When they had gone ninety-five miles from there, they came to Charax, to the Jews who are called Toubiani. ¹⁸They did not find Timothy in that region, for he had by then left there without accomplishing anything, though in one place he had left a very strong garrison. ¹⁹Dositheus and Sosipater, who were captains under Maccabeus, marched out and destroyed those whom Timothy had left in the stronghold, more than ten thousand men. ²⁰But Maccabeus arranged his army in divisions, set men in command of the divisions, and hurried after Timothy, who had with him one hundred and twenty thousand infantry and two thousand five hundred cavalry. ²¹When Timothy learned of the approach of Judas, he sent off the women and the children and also the baggage to a place called Carnaim; for that place was hard to besiege and difficult of access because of the narrowness of all the approaches. ²²But when Judas's first division appeared, terror and fear came over the enemy at the manifestation to them of him who sees all things. In their flight they rushed headlong in every direction, so that often they were injured by their own men and pierced by the points of their own swords. ²³Judas pressed the pursuit with the utmost vigor, putting the sinners to the sword, and destroyed as many as thirty thousand.

²⁴Timothy himself fell into the hands of Dositheus and Sosipater and their men. With great guile he begged them to let him go in safety, because he held the parents of most of them, and the brothers of some, to whom no consideration would be shown. ²⁵And when with many words he had confirmed his solemn promise to restore them unharmed, they let him go, for the sake of saving their kindred.

Judas Wins Other Victories

²⁶Then Judas marched against Carnaim and the temple of Atargatis, and slaughtered twenty-five thousand people. ²⁷After the rout and destruction of these, he marched also against Ephron, a fortified town where Lysias lived with multitudes of people of all nationalities. Stalwart young men took their stand before the walls and made a vigorous defence; and great stores of war engines and missiles were there. ²⁸But the Jews called upon the Sovereign who with power shatters the might of his enemies, and they got the town into their hands, and killed as many as twenty-five thousand of those who were in it.

²⁹Setting out from there, they hastened to Scythopolis, which is seventy-five miles from Jerusalem. ³⁰But when the Jews who lived there bore witness to the goodwill that the people of Scythopolis had shown them and their kind treatment of them in times of misfortune, ³¹they thanked them and exhorted them to be well disposed to their race in the future also. Then they went up to Jerusalem, as the festival of weeks was close at hand.

Judas Defeats Gorgias

³²After the festival called Pentecost, they hurried against Gorgias, the governor of Idumea, ³³who came out with three thousand infantry and four hundred cavalry. ³⁴When they joined battle, it happened that a few of the Jews fell. ³⁵But a certain Dositheus, one of Bacenor's men, who was on horseback and was a strong man, caught hold of Gorgias, and grasping his cloak was dragging him off by main strength, wishing to take the accursed man alive, when one of the Thracian cavalry bore down on him and cut off his arm; so Gorgias escaped and reached Marisa.

³⁶As Esdris and his men had been fighting for a long time and were weary, Judas called upon the Lord to show himself their ally and leader in the battle. ³⁷In the language of their ancestors he raised the battle-cry, with hymns; then he charged against Gorgias's troops when they were not expecting it and put them to flight.

Background

In 164 BC, the Seleucid Empire, under the leadership of Regent Lysias, launched a major expedition to regain control over the Jewish countryside. This expedition was undertaken while King Antiochus IV was away on campaign in the eastern provinces. However, the Seleucid forces were unsuccessful in their mission due to a combination of factors, including the Battle of Beth Zur and the death of Antiochus IV. Lysias was forced to retreat to the capital city of Antioch to secure his own position as Regent and defend the authority of the young king, Antiochus V Eupator.

The Maccabees, a Jewish rebel group, took advantage of this opportunity to gain control of Jerusalem and expand their influence in the region. **With the main Seleucid army occupied elsewhere, the Maccabees were able to conquer territories with minimal resistance from local garrisons and hostile militias.**

During this time period, while the majority of the population in Judea were Jews, many outlying regions had substantial Jewish populations but also had a significant number of non-Jews. Relations between Jews and non-Jews had deteriorated significantly due to the radicalization that had occurred as a result of the revolt. As a result, the Maccabees launched campaigns to protect Jewish communities in outlying regions and attack hostile non-Jewish populations.

Military Campaigns

Idumea

The Maccabees, led by Judas Maccabeus (also known as Judah Maccabee), launched a military campaign against the region of Idumea, which was occupied by the Edomites, an ancient people referred to in historical texts as the **"descendants of Esau."** **This reference is an attempt to align the actions of the Maccabees with the heroes of Hebrew scripture.** The campaign took place in late 163 BC and, like many of the conflicts of that year, it was more of a raid than an invasion.

¹ Maccabees describes the second attack led by Judas as a military action targeting the city of Hebron and its surrounding villages, with the goal of destroying their fortifications and burning their towers. ² Maccabees also mentions a campaign against the Idumeans and states that **anti-Maccabee Judeans who had fled Jerusalem after its capture by the Maccabees had found refuge among the Idumeans. These exiles were actively working to continue the war against the Hasmoneans, which is why Judas led the campaign against Idumea.** The siege of two towers in Idumea took longer than expected and some of the enemy escaped; according to 2 Maccabees, this was due to the misconduct of the commanders who accepted bribes. This account also aligns with the trend in historical texts of assigning blame for setbacks to commanders other than Judas, who is consistently portrayed as both a devout leader and a skilled military strategist.

Ammon and Gilead

The Maccabees, under the leadership of Judas, launched a military campaign in the region of Ammon and Gilead. In Ammon, they clashed with the Baneites, a hostile clan, and Seleucid forces under the command of Timothy of Ammon. Although the main Seleucid army was not present, Timothy would have still had garrisons composed of local soldiers as well as likely some mercenaries under his command. They attacked and successfully captured the city of Jazer but subsequently returned to Judea.

In the Gilead region, local Jews had fortified themselves in a stronghold called Dathema after fighting with local non-Jews and Timothy's forces. They requested assistance from the Maccabees, and Judas and his brother Jonathan Apphus returned to the region with 8,000 soldiers. They met peacefully with the Nabateans, a nearby tribe, and assisted the fortified Jews in the Gilead and the Land of Tob. **At the city of Bozrah, the Maccabees "killed every male by the edge of the sword, (..) seized all its spoils, and burned it with fire."**

Timothy's army had besieged Dathema with siege weaponry, but Judas successfully relieved the fortress and drove off Timothy's forces. The Maccabees then took control of several towns in the Gilead region, including Maapha, Chaspho, Maked, Bosor, and others, **plundering and massacring the populations as they went.** Timothy and his forces, reinforced by mercenaries, camped across the river at Raphon. The two sides fought again, and Timothy was once again forced to retreat. **The Maccabees subsequently burned the town of Carnaim.**

While escorting Jewish refugees back to Judea, the Maccabees encountered resistance at the town of **Ephron. After negotiations failed, the Maccabees attacked, plundered, and razed the town, and killed the male inhabitants.** The refugees were able to return to Judea safely and successfully, in time to celebrate the Feast of Weeks. The book of 2 Maccabees mentions that the Maccabees passed through the land of the Tobiad Jews in the southern reaches of Ammon, who had a temple at Iraq al-Amir near Jazer that the Maccabees had visited earlier. Although the Tobiads generally favored the Seleucids, it is unclear if any fighting occurred between them and the Maccabee forces.

The depiction of Judas offering terms to the town of Ephron but then burning it down and killing the male inhabitants after negotiations failed, aligns with the portrayal of Judas as the perfect Biblical warrior in the book of 1 Maccabees, in line with the military behavior mandated by Deuteronomy 20:10–20 in the Hebrew Scripture. However, the difference is, God mandated what took place in the canonical Scriptures, and while this history is interesting, it has no mandate by God, it is not God sanctioned. This is not to say that people, families, groups, and even nations don't have the right of self-defense. They do.

Galilee

Simon Thassi, a leader of the Maccabees, led 3,000 soldiers to the region of Galilee to engage in military operations. The campaign was aimed at the local non-Jewish population and Simon's forces pursued them "to the gate of Ptolemais." However, the Maccabees did not lay siege to the city. Additionally, Simon was able to escort a large group of Jewish refugees back to Judea with him, likely as part of the Maccabees' efforts to protect and support Jewish communities in the region.

Coastal Greek Towns

The coast of the Eastern Mediterranean during this era was dominated by Greek-friendly cities that were part of the broader Greek trade network. The Seleucid Empire referred to this region as Paralia. While there were Jewish communities in these cities, they were a minority, and the cities were generally hostile to the Maccabean cause.

Commanders named Joseph and Azariah led an attack on the town of Jamnia (Yavneh) to the west of Judea, but they were repulsed by Seleucid general Gorgias, who also served in other battles of the revolt such as the Battle of Emmaus. The Maccabees suffered 2,000 casualties in their defeat and retreat. Judas later returned to the area personally, but reportedly lost some troops near Marisa. He continued on to the city of Azotus and successfully plundered it before returning to Judea.

The book of 2 Maccabees describes a raid against the cities of Joppa and Jamnia after the residents there murdered some local Jews. According to the book, Judas entered the cities, burned ships in their harbors, and killed the murderers in Joppa but declined to conquer either city. However, the historical accuracy of these successful raids is uncertain, as the book of 1 Maccabees clearly describes Jamnia as not falling to the Maccabees, and Joppa was a fortified port in the era, unlikely to be easily raided.

The book of 1 Maccabees, which is written in an archaic style, refers to this area as the "land of the Philistines" for the same reason as it refers to the Edomites as the "sons of Esau"; the Philistines were an ancient people relegated to history, but the reference evokes the language of ancient Jewish heroes and frames the Maccabean expedition in that context. The author of 1 Maccabees also blames the priests who were killed near Marisa for disobeying orders, but this could be an interpretation, as the author is biased in favor of Judas Maccabeus and may interpret any setbacks as due to defiance of his orders rather than other factors.

Analysis

Historian John Grainger, who is skeptical of the reliability of the books of Maccabees, argues that these letters may have been post-factual inventions created to provide additional justification for the expeditions.

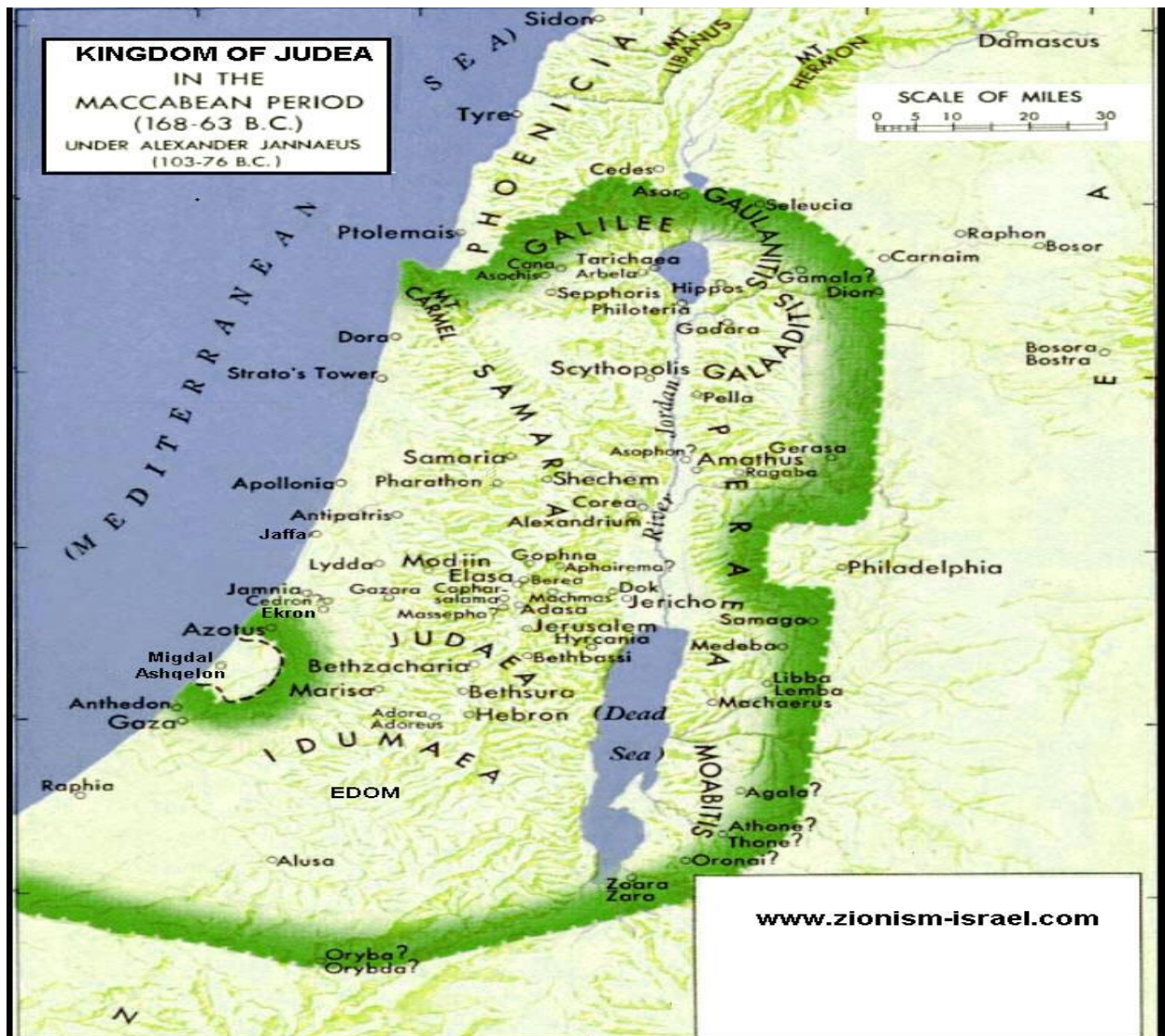
Grainger suggests that the expeditions were likely driven by a combination of defensive moves to weaken nearby sources of Seleucid power, an attempt to gather needed manpower for Judas's armies, and a looting expedition. He also argues that these raids probably did not stretch as far as they were claimed to. The book of 1 Maccabees was likely written during the reign of John Hyrcanus, a time when the Hasmonean state had expanded its borders beyond Judea. Grainger **suggests that the book may be trying to justify the conquests of the author's time (130–100 BC) by prefiguring them in Judas's time and giving them a moral arc of rescuing fellow Jews and punishing enemies of the Jews.**⁷

⁷ Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.

○ Maccabean Accomplishment

- Subjugation of ancient enemies
- Samaria was conquered
- Mt. Gerizim Temple destroyed





○ Vengeance Begets Revenge

- Old Edomites or Idumeans were conquered and forced to formally accept the Jewish religion
 - *This point important later because:*
 - *The Herod's were Edomites who had become forced Jews in religion*





Battle of Beth Zechariah



Image 20 1698 illustration of Eleazar fighting an elephant at the battle by Jan Luykenv

The Battle of Beth Zechariah was a significant engagement that occurred in May 162 BC during the Maccabean Revolt. The Maccabean Revolt was a rebellion led by the Jewish people against the Seleucid Empire, a Greek successor state that controlled Syria and Babylonia. The leader of the Jewish rebels was Judas Maccabeus, also known as Judah Maccabee. The battle took place at Beth Zechariah, which is now known as Khirbet Beit Zakariyyah. Despite the efforts of the Jewish rebels, the Seleucid army emerged victorious. The Jewish rebels were forced to retreat and suffered the loss of Judas's brother, Eleazar Avaran, who was killed in combat while fighting against a **war elephant**. This defeat allowed the Seleucid army to continue their campaign and lay siege to the Jewish holy city of Jerusalem.

Primary Sources

The Battle of Beth Zechariah, a significant engagement that occurred during the Maccabean Revolt, is recorded in several primary sources. These sources include the book of 1 Maccabees (1 Maccabees 6:28–47), as well as two of Josephus's histories: Antiquities of the Jews Book 12, Chapter 9 and The War of the Jews Book 1.1.41–46. 1 Maccabees is considered to be the main source on the battle and provides a detailed description of the Seleucid forces, indicating that the author may have been an eyewitness or had access to detailed accounts from eyewitnesses. The other primary sources, Antiquities and War of the Jews, largely echo 1 Maccabees, but also include additional details based on Josephus's first-hand knowledge of Judean topography and geography.

Additionally, War of the Jews contains new material that is not present in 1 Maccabees, suggesting that Josephus may have used other Greek sources, such as Nicolaus of Damascus, in its composition. 2 Maccabees describes the battle in very general terms (2 Maccabees 13:13–26) and focuses on a raid undertaken by Judas as well as the actions of a Jewish traitor, Rhodocus, who was caught passing secrets to the Seleucids. The author of 2 Maccabees seems to have been aware of the true outcome of the battle but chose to present it in a way that would not be seen as an embarrassing setback for the rebellion. 2 Maccabees also dates the expedition to 149 SE (163 BC), slightly earlier than 1 Maccabees, which is a point of debate among scholars.

1 Maccabees 6:28-47 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

²⁸The king was enraged when he heard this. He assembled all his Friends, the commanders of his forces and those in authority. ²⁹Mercenary forces also came to him from other kingdoms and from islands of the seas. ³⁰The number of his forces was one hundred thousand foot-soldiers, twenty thousand horsemen, and thirty-two elephants accustomed to war. ³¹They came through Idumea and encamped against Beth-zur, and for many days they fought and built engines of war; but the Jews sallied out and burned these with fire, and fought courageously.

The Battle at Beth-zechariah

³²Then Judas marched away from the citadel and encamped at Beth-zechariah, opposite the camp of the king. ³³Early in the morning the king set out and took his army by a forced march along the road to Beth-zechariah, and his troops made ready for battle and sounded their trumpets. ³⁴They offered the elephants the juice of grapes and mulberries, to arouse them for battle. ³⁵They distributed the animals among the phalanxes; with each elephant they stationed a thousand men armed with coats of mail, and with brass helmets on their heads; and five hundred picked horsemen were assigned to each beast. ³⁶These took their position beforehand wherever the animal was; wherever it went, they went with it, and they never left it.

³⁷On the elephants were wooden towers, strong and covered; they were fastened on each animal by special harness, and on each were four armed men who fought from there, and also its Indian driver. ³⁸The rest of the cavalry were stationed on either side, on the two flanks of the army, to harass the enemy while being themselves protected by the phalanxes. ³⁹When the sun shone on the shields of gold and brass, the hills were ablaze with them and gleamed like flaming torches.

⁴⁰Now a part of the king's army was spread out on the high hills, and some troops were on the plain, and they advanced steadily and in good order. ⁴¹All who heard the noise made by their multitude, by the marching of the multitude and the clanking of their arms, trembled, for the army was very large and strong. ⁴²But Judas and his army advanced to the battle, and six hundred of the king's army fell. ⁴³Now Eleazar, called Avaran, saw that one of the animals was equipped with royal armor. It was taller than all the others, and he supposed that the king was on it.

⁴⁴So he gave his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name. ⁴⁵He courageously ran into the midst of the phalanx to reach it; he killed men right and left, and they parted before him on both sides. **⁴⁶He got under the elephant, stabbed it from beneath, and killed it; but it fell to the ground upon him and he died.** ⁴⁷When the Jews saw the royal might and the fierce attack of the forces, they turned away in flight.

2 Maccabees 13:13-26 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

¹³After consulting privately with the elders, he determined to march out and decide the matter by the help of God before the king's army could enter Judea and get possession of the city. ¹⁴So, committing the decision to the Creator of the world and exhorting his troops to fight bravely to the death for the laws, temple, city, country, and commonwealth, he pitched his camp near Modein. ¹⁵He gave his troops the watchword, 'God's victory', and with a picked force of the bravest young men, he attacked the king's pavilion at night and killed as many as two thousand men in the camp. He stabbed the leading elephant and its rider. ¹⁶In the end they filled the camp with terror and confusion and withdrew in triumph. ¹⁷This happened, just as day was dawning, because the Lord's help protected him.

Antiochus Makes a Treaty with the Jews

¹⁸The king, having had a taste of the daring of the Jews, tried strategy in attacking their positions. ¹⁹He advanced against Beth-zur, a strong fortress of the Jews, was turned back, attacked again, and was defeated. ²⁰Judas sent in to the garrison whatever was necessary. ²¹But Rhodocus, a man from the ranks of the Jews, gave secret information to the enemy; he was sought for, caught, and put in prison. ²²The king negotiated a second time with the people in Beth-zur, gave pledges, received theirs, withdrew, attacked Judas and his men, and was defeated; ²³he got word that Philip, who had been left in charge of the government, had revolted in Antioch; he was dismayed, called in the Jews, yielded and swore to observe all their rights, settled with them and offered sacrifice, honored the sanctuary, and showed generosity to the holy place. ²⁴He received Maccabeus, left Hegemonides as governor from Ptolemais to Gerar, ²⁵and went to Ptolemais. The people of Ptolemais were indignant over the treaty; in fact, they were so angry that they wanted to annul its terms. ²⁶Lysias took the public platform, made the best possible defense, convinced them, appeased them, gained their goodwill, and set out for Antioch. This is how the king's attack and withdrawal turned out.

Background

The background leading up to the Battle of Beth Zechariah is rooted in the Maccabean Revolt, a rebellion led by the Jewish people against the Seleucid Empire. In autumn 164 BC, the Seleucid Empire's Regent Lysias launched an expedition to Judea to put down the rebellion. The Maccabees, led by Judas Maccabeus, fought against the Greeks at the Battle of Beth Zur. Lysias, either due to losses in the battle or from news of the death of King Antiochus IV, left Judea and negotiated a compromise. He returned to the Seleucid capital of Antioch to fend off a political challenge for leadership from Philip, a prominent official from Media who claimed to have been appointed regent by Antiochus IV before his death.

The Maccabees, in the meantime, captured Jerusalem, purified the temple, and rededicated the altar for Jewish worship. However, the Seleucid forces still controlled the Acra, a formidable fortress within the city that faced the Temple Mount. **The Maccabees participated in various campaigns across greater Palestine while the Seleucid government was preoccupied with internal politics in the capital.**

Around April 162 BC, Judas laid siege to the Acra in an attempt to eradicate the most prominent symbol of Seleucid power in Judea. This prompted a strong response from Lysias, who made a second expedition to Judea to relieve the Acra. Both sides struggled with food shortages, with the problem being exacerbated by a wave of Jewish refugees from outlying regions that had been brought to Judea for their own safety as the outlying regions descended into disorder due to raids and civilian violence between the Jewish and Gentile populations. Lysias's expeditionary force was quite large, with estimates of around 50,000 infantry, about 5,000 cavalry, and approximately **80 war elephants**. The size of the Jewish army is unknown, but it is speculated that they had trained a Hellenistic-style army in the year and a half since taking Jerusalem, with anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers.



*Image 21 Eleazar Avaran trampled by a war elephant. Adasa would be the last battle with significant war elephant use for the Seleucids, as the **Romans would hamstring the elephants** in the next months. Illustration by Gustave Doré 1866.*

Lysias's Expedition

In order to defeat the Maccabean rebellion, Lysias, **the Regent of the Seleucid Empire, led an expedition to Judea with a formidable army of Syrian Greeks. They approached Judea from the southwest, through Mount Hebron,** and successfully besieged Beth-zur. Afterwards, they continued northward towards Jerusalem, which was about 32 kilometers away. Rather than resorting to the guerrilla tactics used earlier in the revolt, Judas Maccabeus rallied an army to intercept the expedition and positioned his troops on high ground along the main road to Jerusalem in an effort to restrict the Seleucid's numerical advantage and force them to enter via a **narrow valley approach.**

In May 162 BC, **the two armies clashed at a pass near Beth Zechariah.** Lysias sent a force to take the nearby ridges to cover his main force's advance and their flanks, likely his cavalry and possibly skirmishers. The high ground provided better visibility and scouting for the battle's progress. Lysias's army comprised of light infantry at the front, **war elephants, and a Greek phalanx** armed with sarissas behind. The Jewish army was unnerved by the war elephants, causing them to break and retreat. Judas's brother, Eleazar Avaran, attempted to show his fellow soldiers that the elephants were vulnerable by charging into the mouth of the Syrian forces and attacking a large elephant, but he was killed by the animal.

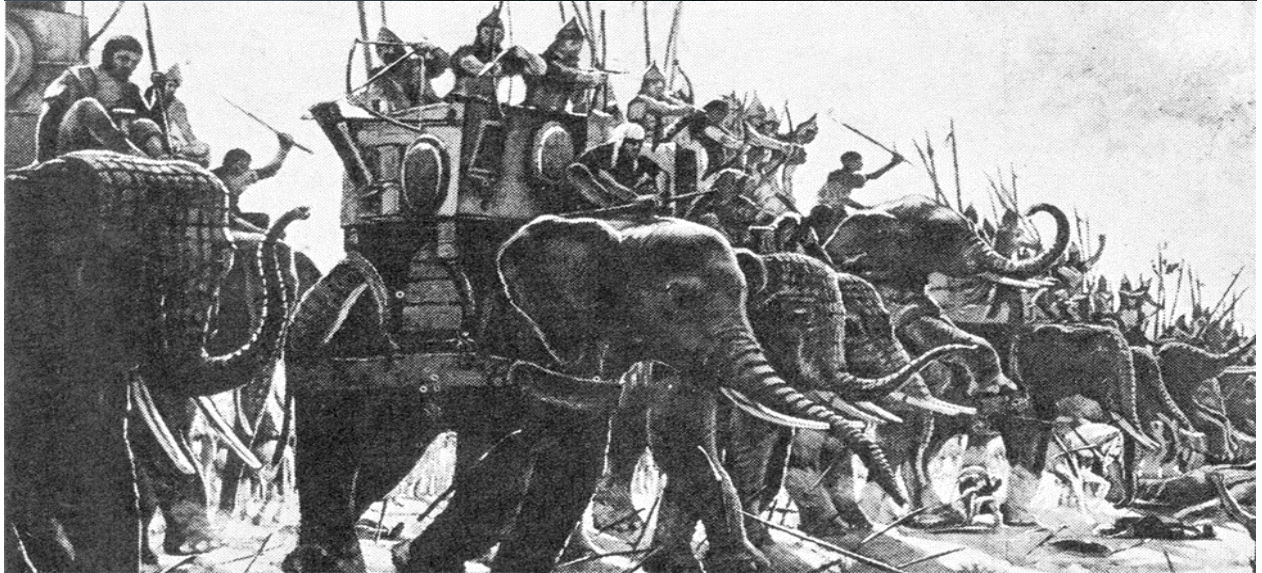
The Jewish forces collapsed under the heavy pressure of the Greek phalanx, and the Maccabees retreated to mountainous and defensible Aphairema, near the original center of the revolt. Lysias then marched north to Jerusalem and laid siege to the rebel forces there. However, Lysias was limited by time as he couldn't spend too long away from the capital without risking his position as leader. Both sides were running short on food. **The siege eventually ended with a peace deal where Lysias agreed to end his siege of Jerusalem, and the Maccabees ended their siege of the Acra. Lysias confirmed the repeal of Antiochus IV's anti-Jewish decrees and the Greeks tore down a defensive wall at "Mount Zion," possibly referring to the Temple Mount.** With the peace deal in place, Lysias was able to return to Antioch to fend off a renewed challenge from Philip for leadership of the Seleucid empire and guardianship of the young Antiochus V Eupator. He left around June or July 162 BC, although he may have sent some of his forces back earlier. According to Josephus, Philip was captured and executed, but it is unclear whether Josephus had some unknown and lost source for Philip's eventual fate or this was simply a conjecture based on the fact that Philip never did attain leadership of the Empire.

Analysis

In the analysis of the Battle of Beth Zechariah, it is important to note that 2 Maccabees 13:2 writes that 300 scythed chariots were deployed as part of the expedition. However, this information is doubted by scholars as scythed chariots were generally used for lowland combat on flat plains, and the ground in Judea is not very level, making it difficult to accelerate the chariots to the speed needed to make them effective. Additionally, it is uncertain that the Seleucids even had so many chariots to send, even if they wanted to. Neither 1 Maccabees nor Josephus mention chariots, with both sources being more interested in military details. While Polybius describes 140 chariots at the military parade at Daphne in 166-165 BC, he does not indicate scythes on them, and it is possible that these were merely ceremonial and utilitarian chariots meant for normal transportation rather than warfare.

1 Maccabees describes a larger army than Josephus does, saying that the expedition consisted of one hundred thousand foot-soldiers, twenty thousand horsemen, and thirty-two elephants. Scholars believe these numbers are likely exaggerated, as such manpower likely exceeds the entire Seleucid army, and if actually sent, would have been even more of a logistics nightmare to feed and supply than Josephus's suggestion of 50,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. The number of elephants is also uncertain; Josephus writes eighty elephants were with the expedition, although historian Bezalel Bar-Kochva argues for a lower figure.

A point of uncertainty in the conflict between Eleazar and the elephant is that 1 Maccabees writes that "the king" was on the elephant that Eleazar attacked. The ten-year old king is not described as accompanying the expedition. It is possible that **the term "king" referred to the regent, and Eleazar somehow thought that Lysias or some other important commander must have been on the elephant, perhaps due to some impressive royal seal or decoration**, but it is unclear if Eleazar's belief was correct or not. Additionally, 1 Maccabees also describes the elephant as dying "instantly," which is likely an exaggeration from the fog of war. The elephant may have eventually died, but as elephant hunters can attest, they do not die quickly or easily. With the technology of the era, only an arrow fired nearly point-blank from a powerful bow to the brain or heart could instantly fell an elephant, and even a grave abdominal wound could take a few hours to bleed the elephant to death. Another point of uncertainty is when Alcimus would come to power as High Priest. According to 1 Maccabees, it is only after Demetrius I Soter comes to power, suggesting a later date of 162-161 BC. However, 2 Maccabees suggests Alcimus was appointed during Antiochus V's reign. If the version in 2 Maccabees is trusted, then it is possible that Lysias arranged for Alcimus to be High Priest as part of the peace deal that concluded his expedition. These are all important points of consideration when analyzing the Battle of Beth Zechariah and the context surrounding it.



Legacy

The Battle of Beth Zechariah had a significant impact on the legacy of war elephants in ancient warfare. Following the battle, the Seleucid Empire may have been banned from using war elephants by the Treaty of Apamea, a peace treaty that ended the Roman-Seleucid War in 188 BC. **The treaty required the Seleucids to give up their war elephants, and the Romans sent a delegation in 162 BC to enforce the treaty and hamstring or burned any remaining elephants they could find. As a result, the Battle of Beth Zechariah was one of the last battles where the Seleucids were able to deploy a significant force of war elephants, and their use in warfare became rarer.**

In terms of cultural legacy, the Maccabees, including Judas Maccabeus and Eleazar Avaran, have been more frequently depicted in literature than in Jewish works. This is due to the fact that the Hasmoneans, the dynasty founded by the Maccabees, were not well-regarded by Jewish rabbis and sages who compiled the Jewish canon after the fall of the Hasmonean kingdom. However, in more recent times, Jews have returned to the topic of the Maccabean Revolt in literature. Eleazar's heroism in the Battle of Beth Zechariah was even commemorated in a Hanukkah coin. The town of Elazar in the West Bank was named after him, and the small Arab hamlet of Hirbeit Zakariya is believed to be the location of ancient Beth Zechariah.⁸

⁸ Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.



The ground quakes as

The

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Battle of Adasa



*Image 22 Judas is presented with a divine golden sword while asleep.
Woodcut by Julius von Carolsfeld from the 1860 Die Bibel in Bildern*

The Battle of Adasa occurred on the 13th of the month of Adar in 161 BC and took place at the location of Adasa, near Beth-horon. This battle was part of the Maccabean revolt, a rebellion led by Judas Maccabeus (also known as Judah Maccabee) against the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucid army was commanded by a man named Nicanor. The Maccabees emerged victorious in the battle, with Nicanor being killed early in the fighting. This battle was the result of months of political maneuvering, as the peace deal established a year prior by Lysias was challenged by new leaders such as Alcimus, Nicanor, and Judas Maccabeus. The date of the battle in the Hebrew calendar, 13 Adar, is celebrated as Yom Nicanor, or the "Day of Nicanor," to commemorate the Maccabees' victory.

Primary Sources

Primary sources for information on Nicanor's military governance of Judea, the Battle of Caphar-salama, and the Battle of Adasa can be found in several historical texts. These include the books of 1 Maccabees (1 Maccabees 7:26–50) and 2 Maccabees (2 Maccabees 14:12–33, 2 Maccabees 15:1–36), as well as in Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews Book 12, Chapter 10. These texts provide varying levels of detail about the battles. The Battle of Caphar-salama is described with relatively little information, which could be due to the fact that it was a short and one-sided battle, the author of 1 Maccabees was not present for it, or both. The Battle of Adasa is described with slightly more detail, but mainly in regards to the geographic region where it took place. The authors of these texts instead chose to focus more on the political maneuvering between Nicanor, Alcimus, and Judas.

1 Maccabees 7:26-50 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Nicanor in Judea

²⁶Then the king sent Nicanor, one of his honoured princes, who hated and detested Israel, and he commanded him to destroy the people. ²⁷So Nicanor came to Jerusalem with a large force, and treacherously sent to Judas and his brothers this peaceable message, ²⁸‘Let there be no fighting between you and me; I shall come with a few men to see you face to face in peace.’

²⁹So he came to Judas, and they greeted one another peaceably; but the enemy were preparing to kidnap Judas. ³⁰It became known to Judas that Nicanor had come to him with treacherous intent, and he was afraid of him and would not meet him again. ³¹When Nicanor learned that his plan had been disclosed, he went out to meet Judas in battle near Caphar-salama. ³²About five hundred of the army of Nicanor fell, and the rest fled into the city of David.

Nicanor Threatens the Temple

³³After these events Nicanor went up to Mount Zion. Some of the priests from the sanctuary and some of the elders of the people came out to greet him peaceably and to show him the burnt-offering that was being offered for the king. ³⁴But he mocked them and derided them and defiled them and spoke arrogantly, ³⁵and in anger he swore this oath, ‘Unless Judas and his army are delivered into my hands this time, then if I return safely I will burn up this house.’ And he went out in great anger. ³⁶At this the priests went in and stood before the altar and the temple; they wept and said,

³⁷‘You chose this house to be called by your name,
and to be for your people a house of prayer and supplication.

³⁸Take vengeance on this man and on his army,
and let them fall by the sword;
remember their blasphemies,
and let them live no longer.’

The Death of Nicanor

³⁹ Now Nicanor went out from Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-horon, and the Syrian army joined him. ⁴⁰ Judas encamped in Adasa with three thousand men. Then Judas prayed and said, ⁴¹ ‘When the messengers from the king spoke blasphemy, your angel went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians. ⁴² So also crush this army before us today; let the rest learn that Nicanor has spoken wickedly against the sanctuary, and judge him according to this wickedness.’

⁴³ So the armies met in battle on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. The army of Nicanor was crushed, and he himself was the first to fall in the battle. ⁴⁴ When his army saw that Nicanor had fallen, they threw down their arms and fled. ⁴⁵ The Jews pursued them a day’s journey, from Adasa as far as Gazara, and as they followed they kept sounding the battle-call on the trumpets. ⁴⁶ People came out of all the surrounding villages of Judea, and they outflanked the enemy and drove them back to their pursuers, so that they all fell by the sword; not even one of them was left. ⁴⁷ Then the Jews seized the spoils and the plunder; they cut off Nicanor’s head and the right hand that he had so arrogantly stretched out, and brought them and displayed them just outside Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ The people rejoiced greatly and celebrated that day as a day of great gladness. ⁴⁹ They decreed that this day should be celebrated each year on the thirteenth day of Adar. ⁵⁰ So the land of Judah had rest for a few days.

2 Maccabees 14:12-33 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

¹² He immediately chose Nicanor, who had been in command of the elephants, appointed him governor of Judea, and sent him off ¹³ with orders to kill Judas and scatter his troops, and to instal Alcimus as high priest of the great temple. ¹⁴ And the Gentiles throughout Judea, who had fled before Judas, flocked to join Nicanor, thinking that the misfortunes and calamities of the Jews would mean prosperity for themselves.

Nicanor Makes Friends with Judas

¹⁵ When the Jews heard of Nicanor’s coming and the gathering of the Gentiles, they sprinkled dust on their heads and prayed to him who established his own people forever and always upholds his own heritage by manifesting himself. ¹⁶ At the command of the leader, they set out from there immediately and engaged them in battle at a village called Dessau. ¹⁷ Simon, the brother of Judas, had encountered Nicanor, but had been temporarily checked because of the sudden consternation created by the enemy.

¹⁸ Nevertheless Nicanor, hearing of the valor of Judas and his troops and their courage in battle for their country, shrank from deciding the issue by bloodshed. ¹⁹ Therefore he sent Posidonius, Theodotus, and Mattathias to give and receive pledges of friendship. ²⁰ When the terms had been fully considered, and the leader had informed the people, and it had appeared that they were of one mind, they agreed to the covenant. ²¹ The leaders set a day on which to meet by themselves. A chariot came forward from each army; seats of honor were set in place; ²² Judas posted armed men in readiness at key places to prevent sudden treachery on the part of the enemy; so, they duly held the consultation.

²³ Nicanor stayed on in Jerusalem and did nothing out of the way, but dismissed the flocks of people that had gathered. ²⁴ And he kept Judas always in his presence; he was warmly attached to the man. ²⁵ He urged him to marry and have children; so, Judas married, settled down, and shared the common life.

Nicanor Turns against Judas

²⁶ But when Alcimus noticed their goodwill for one another, he took the covenant that had been made and went to Demetrius. He told him that Nicanor was disloyal to the government, since he had appointed that conspirator against the kingdom, Judas, to be his successor. ²⁷ The king became excited and, provoked by the false accusations of that depraved man, wrote to Nicanor, stating that he was displeased with the covenant and commanding him to send Maccabeus to Antioch as a prisoner without delay.

²⁸ When this message came to Nicanor, he was troubled and grieved that he had to annul their agreement when the man had done no wrong. ²⁹ Since it was not possible to oppose the king, he watched for an opportunity to accomplish this by a stratagem. ³⁰ But Maccabeus, noticing that Nicanor was more austere in his dealings with him and was meeting him more rudely than had been his custom, concluded that this austerity did not spring from the best motives. So he gathered not a few of his men, and went into hiding from Nicanor. ³¹ When the latter became aware that he had been cleverly outwitted by the man, he went to the great and holy temple while the priests were offering the customary sacrifices, and commanded them to hand the man over. ³² When they declared on oath that they did not know where the man was whom he wanted, ³³ he stretched out his right hand towards the sanctuary, and swore this oath: 'If you do not hand Judas over to me as a prisoner, I will level this shrine of God to the ground and tear down the altar, and build here a splendid temple to Dionysus.'



Image 23 Hartmann-schedel_DESTRVCCIO-IHEROSOLIME 1493

2 Maccabees 15:1-36 Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Nicanor's Arrogance

1 When Nicanor heard that Judas and his troops were in the region of Samaria, he made plans to attack them with complete safety on the day of rest. **2** When the Jews who were compelled to follow him said, 'Do not destroy so savagely and barbarously, but show respect for the day that he who sees all things has honored and hallowed above other days', **3** the thrice-accursed wretch asked if there were a sovereign in heaven who had commanded the keeping of the sabbath day. **4** When they declared, 'It is the living Lord himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who ordered us to observe the seventh day,' **5** he replied, 'But I am a sovereign also, on earth, and I command you to take up arms and finish the king's business.' Nevertheless, he did not succeed in carrying out his abominable design.

Judas Prepares the Jews for Battle

6 This Nicanor in his utter boastfulness and arrogance had determined to erect a public monument of victory over Judas and his forces. **7** But Maccabeus did not cease to trust with all confidence that he would get help from the Lord. **8** He exhorted his troops not to fear the attack of the Gentiles, but to keep in mind the former times when help had come to them from heaven, and so to look for the victory that the Almighty would give them. **9** Encouraging them from the law and the prophets, and reminding them also of the struggles they had won, he made them the more eager. **10** When he had aroused their courage, he issued his orders, at the same time pointing out the perfidy of the Gentiles and their violation of oaths. **11** He armed each of them not so much with confidence in shields and spears as with the inspiration of brave words, and he cheered them all by relating a dream, a sort of vision, which was worthy of belief.

12 What he saw was this: Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence, was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews. **13** Then in the same fashion another appeared, distinguished by his grey hair and dignity, and of marvelous majesty and authority. **14** And Onias spoke, saying, 'This is a man who loves the family of Israel and prays much for the people and the holy city—Jeremiah, the prophet of God.' **15** Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judas a golden sword, and as he gave it he addressed him thus: **16** 'Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries.'

17 Encouraged by the words of Judas, so noble and so effective in arousing valor and awaking courage in the souls of the young, they determined not to carry on a campaign but to attack bravely, and to decide the matter by fighting hand to hand with all courage, because the city and the sanctuary and the temple were in danger. **18** Their concern for wives and children, and also for brothers and sisters and relatives, lay upon them less heavily; their greatest and first fear was for the consecrated sanctuary. **19** And those who had to remain in the city were in no little distress, being anxious over the encounter in the open country.

The Defeat and Death of Nicanor

²⁰ When all were now looking forward to the coming issue, and the enemy was already close at hand with their army drawn up for battle, the elephants strategically stationed and the cavalry deployed on the flanks, ²¹ Maccabeus, observing the masses that were in front of him and the varied supply of arms and the savagery of the elephants, stretched out his hands towards heaven and called upon the Lord who works wonders; for he knew that it is not by arms, but as the Lord decides, that he gains the victory for those who deserve it. ²² He called upon him in these words: ‘O Lord, you sent your angel in the time of King Hezekiah of Judea, and he killed fully one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of Sennacherib. ²³ So now, O Sovereign of the heavens, send a good angel to spread terror and trembling before us. ²⁴ By the might of your arm may these blasphemers who come against your holy people be struck down.’ With these words he ended his prayer.

²⁵ Nicanor and his troops advanced with trumpets and battle-songs, ²⁶ but Judas and his troops met the enemy in battle with invocations to God and prayers. ²⁷ So, fighting with their hands and praying to God in their hearts, they laid low at least thirty-five thousand, and were greatly gladdened by God’s manifestation.

²⁸ When the action was over and they were returning with joy, they recognized Nicanor, lying dead, in full armor. ²⁹ Then there was shouting and tumult, and they blessed the Sovereign Lord in the language of their ancestors. ³⁰ Then the man who was ever in body and soul the defender of his people, the man who maintained his youthful goodwill towards his compatriots, ordered them to cut off Nicanor’s head and arm and carry them to Jerusalem. ³¹ When he arrived there and had called his compatriots together and stationed the priests before the altar, he sent for those who were in the citadel. ³² He showed them the vile Nicanor’s head and that profane man’s arm, which had been boastfully stretched out against the holy house of the Almighty. ³³ He cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor and said that he would feed it piecemeal to the birds and would hang up these rewards of his folly opposite the sanctuary. ³⁴ And they all, looking to heaven, blessed the Lord who had manifested himself, saying, ‘Blessed is he who has kept his own place undefiled!’ ³⁵ Judas hung Nicanor’s head from the citadel, a clear and conspicuous sign to every one of the help of the Lord. ³⁶ And they all decreed by public vote never to let this day go unobserved, but to celebrate the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—which is called Adar in the Aramaic language—the day before Mordecai’s day.

Nicanor's Governorship

In 162 BC, Regent Lysias led an expedition to regain control of Judea and lift the siege of the Acra citadel in Jerusalem. After the Maccabees were defeated in the Battle of Beth Zechariah, they were forced to retreat. However, Lysias's return to the Seleucid capital of Antioch was expedited due to political considerations. **Despite fending off a challenge from a Seleucid leader named Philip, a greater threat emerged soon after in the form of Demetrius I Soter. Demetrius, the son of Seleucus IV, had escaped captivity in Rome with the help of the Greek historian Polybius and returned to Syria. He successfully convinced the Greek leaders of Antioch to support him, and he took the throne, ordering the arrest and execution of Antiochus V and Lysias.**

This action strained relations between the Seleucid Empire and the Roman Republic, and Rome began to offer support to potential sources of rebellion and disunity within the Seleucid Empire, such as Timarchus, Ptolemaeus of Commagene, and the Maccabees.

Demetrius's first move in regards to the situation in Judea was to send a new military expedition there under Seleucid general Bacchides. The size and scope of the expedition is unknown, but one of its purposes was to install Alcimus as High Priest of Judea. Alcimus was a moderate Hellenizer who worked to divide Jewish support for the Maccabees, and he was apparently successful to some extent. Tensions continued to simmer between the Maccabees in the countryside, the moderate Hellenist Jews in the cities, and the Greeks.

Against this backdrop, Nicanor was appointed strategos (general/governor) of the region, likely ruling from the Acra. Nicanor had previously been a commander of Seleucid war elephants and had taken part in the Battle of Emmaus four years earlier. **On his way to assume the governorship, he fought a skirmish with Maccabee forces under Simon Thassi (Simeon) at a place called Dessau or Caphar-dessau, and Nicanor won, forcing the Maccabees to retreat.**

As part of his governorship, Nicanor attempted to negotiate and even befriend Judas, according to 2 Maccabees. Judas was even given an official government role, and he was tentatively involved in the administration and management of Judea. However, a rivalry between Nicanor and Alcimus undid this potential warming of relations. Alcimus, perhaps worried about being replaced or his authority being undermined, complained to the authorities in Antioch. New orders from Demetrius at the behest of this rivalry forced Nicanor to move more aggressively against Judas. Realizing something had changed, Judas retreated back to the countryside where his remaining army waited.

Caphar-Salama and Adasa

Nicanor, with a small force, set out from Jerusalem to track down Judas and the rebels. At Caphar-salama, a skirmish was fought, in which the Seleucids suffered 500 casualties and were forced to retreat back to Jerusalem. **Nicanor is said to have then made a threat to the priests at the Second Temple, threatening to burn it down if they did not help him find Judas.** The veracity of this account is unclear, as the surviving sources have a hostile view of Nicanor, and the priests at the Temple would have likely been subordinates of Alcimus.

Regardless, Nicanor's actions earned him the hatred of the rebels. He then camped in the region of Beth-horon, northwest of Jerusalem, to meet with Seleucid reinforcements traveling from Samaria. **The rebels set their forces against him at Adasa.**

According to 2 Maccabees 15, Judas inspired his troops by relating to them a dream-vision he had experienced, in which the Prophet Jeremiah presented him with a gold sword and said, "Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries."

The battle appears to have been a direct frontal confrontation, and Nicanor was killed early in the battle, which caused the Seleucid force to retreat. The Seleucid troops retreated toward Gazara, the nearest Seleucid fortress to the west around 30 kilometers away. The Jewish army followed in pursuit and Jewish partisans in the nearby towns harried their retreat, inflicting significant casualties on the fleeing government army.

Aftermath

After the Battle of Adasa, Nicanor's body was desecrated as a form of punishment and to raise the morale of the rebels. His head and right hand were cut off, a Persian punishment, and displayed near Jerusalem, as he was the first high-ranking officer killed by the Maccabees. **The victory at Adasa also allowed Judas Maccabeus to negotiate with the Romans from a position of greater strength, and he was able to extract a weak promise of potential Roman support in the future against Demetrius.** However, King Demetrius would suppress the rebellion of Timarchus in the eastern satrapies around early 160 BC, freeing up soldiers for other tasks such as suppressing the Judean unrest. Despite the victory at Adasa, Judas Maccabeus was defeated and killed in the Battle of Elasa next year.

Analysis

The location of the battle at Dessau, where Simon fought Nicanor before he assumed the governorship, is unknown. Some scholars speculate that the location may have been confused with Caphar-salama, but there is no clear evidence to support this. The historical accuracy of the negotiations between Nicanor and Judas is also debated among scholars, with some believing that the depiction in 1 Maccabees is more reliable, while others argue that 2 Maccabees provides a more accurate account.

The Battle of Adasa itself was a small-scale engagement, with estimates for the size of the Judean army ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers, and the Seleucid army estimated at around 9,000 soldiers. However, some historians believe these estimates to be too low and that Judas would not have engaged in an open battle if he was heavily outnumbered. The presence of war elephants on the Seleucid side is also considered doubtful, as there is no clear evidence to support this claim.

The story of the Prophet Jeremiah bestowing a divine sword to Judas as a sign of God's favor is also seen as a literary device to bolster Judas's authority as a leader.

The date of the battle is given as 13 Adar, but the year is not specified, leading to some uncertainty about the duration of Nicanor's governorship.

Legacy

The victory at the Battle of Adasa led to the creation of a Jewish festival called Yom Nicanor, or the Day of Nicanor, to commemorate the defeat of Nicanor, who had threatened to burn the Temple, and the return of Judas Maccabeus to Jerusalem after a period of Seleucid rule. The festival is held on the 13th of Adar, the day of the battle. It still has a place in the Jewish calendar of special days, known as "Megillat Ta'anit." Later rabbinical writings, such as in the Ta'anit tractate of the Talmud, focus more on Nicanor's arrogance and threats backfiring on him, rather than the actions of Judas Maccabeus. This may have been an attempt to counterbalance the Hasmonean aggrandizement of the book of 1 Maccabees and avoid hero-worship of Judas. The Battle of Adasa and the Jewish resistance against the Seleucids is considered to be a significant event in Jewish history, as it marked a major victory for the Maccabees and helped to secure Jewish independence.⁹

⁹ Andrews, E. (2023). [*The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew*](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.

Battle of Elasa

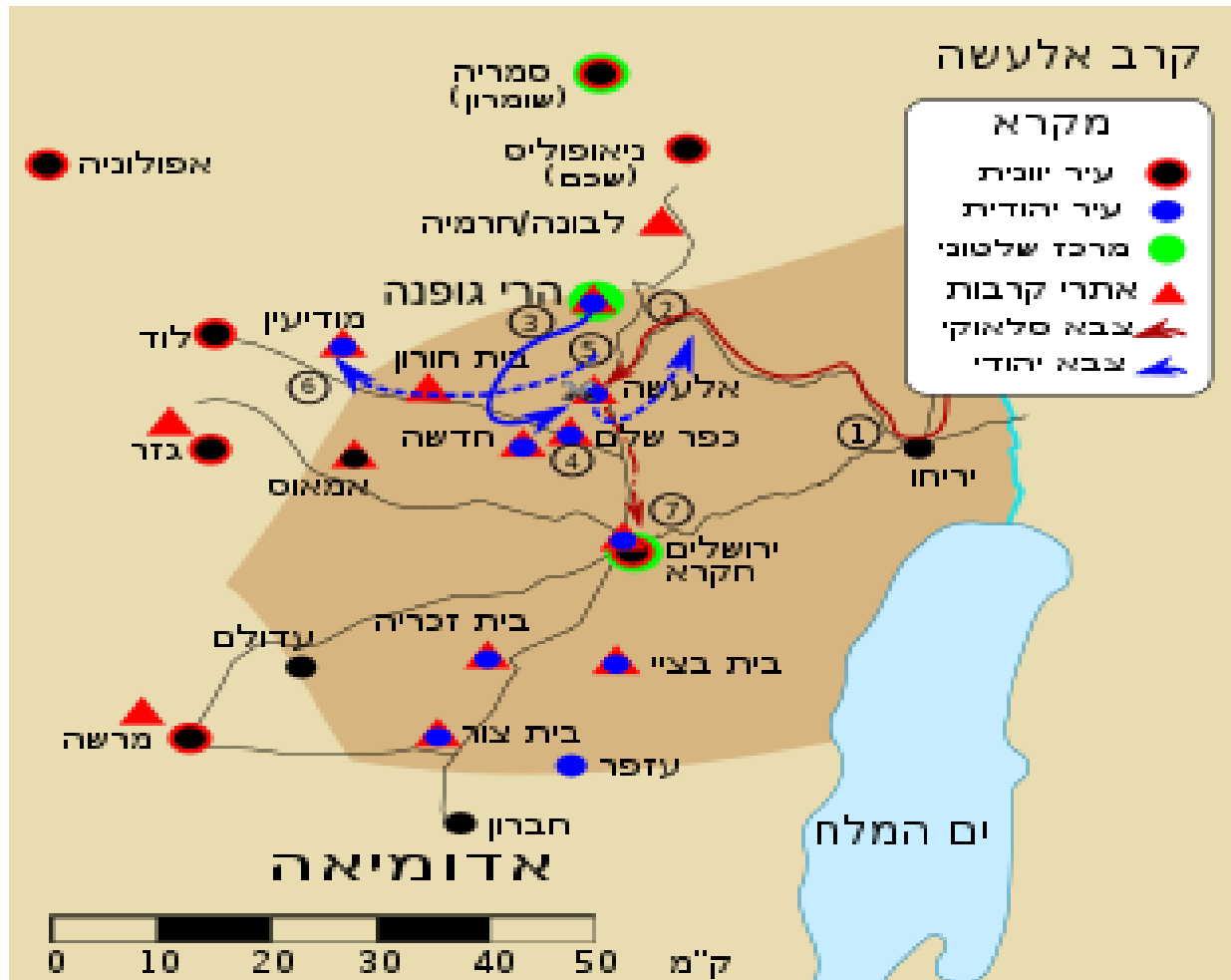


Image 24 Rough reconstruction of line of Bacchides' march (in red) in second expedition

The Battle of Elasa was a significant engagement in the Maccabean Revolt, a Jewish rebellion against the Seleucid Empire. The battle was fought in April 160 BC, and was led on the Jewish side by Judas Maccabeus (also known as Judah Maccabee), and on the Seleucid side by Bacchides. The Maccabees were a group of Jewish rebels who sought to reclaim their independence and religious freedom from the Seleucid Empire. The Battle of Elasa was one of a series of engagements fought by Judas Maccabeus, who emerged as a powerful leader and military commander during the revolt. The Maccabees were ultimately successful in their rebellion and established an independent Jewish state known as the Hasmonean Kingdom.

Primary Sources

The primary source for the Battle of Elasa is the First Book of Maccabees which is considered a historical book written in Hebrew by an anonymous author, it is part of the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books of the Bible. It provides an account of the Maccabean Revolt, including the Battle of Elasa. The book is considered to be written around 100 BC, so it is not a contemporary source to the events described but is a relatively early account of the revolt. The book is considered to be relatively accurate and detailed in its description of the events, but since it is written from a Jewish perspective and its author is not known, some bias may be present.

Another primary source is the works of the Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote about the Maccabean Revolt in his book "The Jewish War" and "Antiquities of the Jews" which were written in the 1st century CE, several decades after the events. Josephus' works provide a detailed account of the Maccabean Revolt and the Battle of Elasa. He was a Jewish general, and a historian and his works were written in Greek, but he had access to Jewish sources, yet his works are considered biased towards the Roman Empire.

Both the First Book of Maccabees and Josephus' works are considered reliable sources of information on the Maccabean Revolt and the Battle of Elasa, although they should be read with an awareness of their respective perspectives and potential biases.

1 Maccabees 9:1-22 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition

Bacchides Returns to Judea

1 When Demetrius heard that Nicanor and his army had fallen in battle, he sent Bacchides and Alcimus into the land of Judah a second time, and with them the right wing of the army. **2** They went by the road that leads to Gilgal and encamped against Mesaloth in Arbela, and they took it and killed many people. **3** In the first month of the one hundred and fifty-second year they encamped against Jerusalem; **4** then they marched off and went to Berea with twenty thousand foot-soldiers and two thousand cavalry.

5 Now Judas was encamped in Elasa, and with him were three thousand picked men. **6** When they saw the huge number of the enemy forces, they were greatly frightened, and many slipped away from the camp, until no more than eight hundred of them were left.

7 When Judas saw that his army had slipped away and the battle was imminent, he was crushed in spirit, for he had no time to assemble them. **8** He became faint, but he said to those who were left, 'Let us get up and go against our enemies. We may have the strength to fight them.' **9** But they tried to dissuade him, saying, 'We do not have the strength. Let us rather save our own lives now, and let us come back with our kindred and fight them; we are too few.' **10** But Judas said, 'Far be it from us to do such a thing as to flee from them. If our time has come, let us die bravely for our kindred, and leave no cause to question our honor.'

The Last Battle of Judas

¹⁴Then the army of Bacchides marched out from the camp and took its stand for the encounter. The cavalry was divided into two companies, and the slingers and the archers went ahead of the army, as did all the chief warriors. ¹⁵Bacchides was on the right wing. Flanked by the two companies, the phalanx advanced to the sound of the trumpets; and the men with Judas also blew their trumpets. ¹⁶The earth was shaken by the noise of the armies, and the battle raged from morning until evening.

¹⁷Judas saw that Bacchides and the strength of his army were on the right; then all the stout-hearted men went with him, ¹⁸and they crushed the right wing, and he pursued them as far as Mount Azotus. ¹⁹When those on the left wing saw that the right wing was crushed, they turned and followed close behind Judas and his men. ²⁰The battle became desperate, and many on both sides were wounded and fell. ²¹Judas also fell, and the rest fled.

²²Then Jonathan and Simon took their brother Judas and buried him in the tomb of their ancestors at Modein, ²³and wept for him. All Israel made great lamentation for him; they mourned for many days and said,

²⁴'How is the mighty fallen,
the savior of Israel!'

²⁵Now 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.

Background

The Battle of Elasa took place during the Maccabean Revolt, which was a Jewish rebellion against the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucid Empire was a Hellenistic state that emerged after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC. It controlled much of the territory of the former Achaemenid Persian Empire, including Palestine, where the Jewish people lived. The Seleucids attempted to impose their Greek culture and religion on the Jewish population, which led to resistance and rebellion.

The Maccabean Revolt was led by a family of Jewish priests known as the Maccabees, who sought to reclaim Jewish independence and religious freedom from the Seleucids. The rebellion began in 167 BC, when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes attempted to forcefully Hellenize the Jewish population, including outlawing Jewish religious practices and desecrating the Temple in Jerusalem. The rebellion was led by Judas Maccabeus, who emerged as a powerful leader and military commander. **The Battle of Elasa was one of a series of engagements fought by Judas Maccabeus and his followers, which ultimately led to the defeat of the Seleucids and the establishment of an independent Jewish state known as the Hasmonean Kingdom.**

The cultural context of the battle was the struggle of Jewish people to maintain their religious and cultural identity under the rule of the Seleucids who wanted to Hellenize the population and religious practices. The Maccabean Revolt was not only a political struggle, but also a religious and cultural one. The Maccabees were fighting not only for political independence but also for the preservation of their religious traditions and identity.

In addition, the Maccabean Revolt had a significant impact on the development of Jewish culture and religion. The successful rebellion led to the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, an event commemorated in the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. **The Hasmonean Kingdom also became a major center of Jewish scholarship and learning, and the Maccabees are remembered as heroes in Jewish tradition.** The Battle of Elasa was one of the key events in the Maccabean Revolt and had a significant impact on the development of Jewish history and culture.

In 160 BC, the Seleucid Empire, under the rule of King Demetrius I, was facing a rebellion led by Timarchus in the east. In response, Demetrius left his general, Bacchides, in charge of the western part of the empire and tasked him with maintaining control of the province of Judea. Bacchides led an army into Judea on a second expedition, following a previous visit in late 162/early 161 BC. **The Seleucid army carried out a massacre of Jews in the Galilee and marched south towards Jerusalem.** This tactic was intended to force Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Jewish rebellion, to engage in open battle and protect his reputation, as well as weaken the faction of Alcimus, who claimed to be better able to protect the people from future killings. **Bacchides then took a route towards Jerusalem that likely surprised the Maccabees: the arduous route through Mount Beth El, which required climbing an arid mesa. The Seleucids, possibly with an element of surprise, approached the area of Berea, just south of Beth El, to set up their camp. A mere kilometer away, Judas and the Maccabee army were camped at Elasa.** Bacchides' army was recorded as having 20,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry, while the size of the rebel army is disputed. Some sources, such as 1 Maccabees, claim that Judas's army at Elasa was small, with only 3,000 men of which 800 or 1,000 would actually fight. However, historians suspect the true numbers were larger, possibly as many as 22,000 soldiers, and the author may have downplayed their strength in an attempt to explain the defeat.

The Battle

The Battle of Elasa was fought on the plateau between Elasa and Berea. The slope of the terrain there was gentle enough to allow for the use of phalanx tactics, which favored the Seleucid heavy infantry. In order to gain an advantage, the Seleucids deployed their cavalry on the flanks, with a heavy infantry phalanx in the center and skirmishers, including archers and slingers, in front. Bacchides himself commanded from the elite cavalry on the right flank, as was custom in Hellenistic armies. Judas Maccabeus, on the other hand, opted to attack the right flank of the Seleucid army with the hope of killing the commander, similar to his victory over Nicanor at the Battle of Adasa. The loss of a commander could have caused the Seleucids to retreat the entire army.

The elite horsemen on the right retreated from the Jewish advance and the Maccabees pursued, possibly as far as Baal-hazor (modern Tall Asur) at the foot of the Judaeen Mountains. The battle is described as lasting from "morning until evening," suggesting that the pursuit by Judas's force after Bacchides may have lasted some time. **This retreat may have been a tactic from Bacchides, however, to feign weakness and draw the Maccabees in where they could be surrounded and defeated, with their own retreat cut off. Regardless of whether it was intentional or not, the Seleucids regained their formation and trapped the rebel army with their own left flank of cavalry, which circled around to cut off Judas's escape. Judas was eventually killed and the remaining Judeans fled.**

Despite the loss, the rebels were somehow able to recover Judas's body afterward, unlike Eleazar's body after his death. The account in 1 Maccabees reports that Judas's brothers Jonathan and Simon accomplished the deed, while Josephus reports it was thanks to an agreement with Bacchides afterward. 1 Maccabees concludes with a **lament for Judas, quoting King David's lament over the death of King Saul: "How the mighty have fallen!"** It is important to note that this battle was a significant setback for the Maccabees, losing their leader Judas Maccabeus and the battle itself. However, the Maccabees continued the rebellion, and under the leadership of Judas' brothers, Jonathan and Simon, they were able to establish an independent Jewish state known as the Hasmonean Kingdom.

Aftermath

The aftermath of the Battle of Elasa saw the Seleucid Empire reasserting their authority in Jerusalem and other major cities of Judea. Judas Maccabeus' brother, Jonathan Apphus, became the new leader of the Maccabees and continued to engage in skirmishes against Bacchides' troops. However, these skirmishes did not lead to significant gains for the Maccabees. Bacchides fortified the major cities of Judea and took hostages from prominent Jewish families as a guarantee of cooperation. He also garrisoned fortresses in Jericho, Emmaus, Beth-horon, Bethel, Timnath, Pharathon, and Tephon. The largest concentration of Greek troops remained at the Acra citadel in Jerusalem, Beth-zur, and Gazara.

The Hasmonean family suffered another loss when Judas and Jonathan's brother, John Gaddi, was sent to negotiate with the Nabateans, who had cooperated with the Maccabees in earlier years of the struggle, but was killed by the sons of Jambri, a family that had turned hostile to the Hasmoneans. Bacchides and Jonathan eventually came to a peace deal, but the Maccabees were reduced to their initial position at the start of the revolt in 167 BC: as a guerrilla movement based in the countryside. Bacchides returned to Syria in late 160 BC. Jonathan and his allies later attacked a wedding held by a member of Jambri's family, killing many of the attendees, to avenge the loss of his brother John.

It is important to note that, despite the setback of the Battle of Elasa, the Maccabean Revolt continued and ultimately led to the establishment of an independent Jewish state, the Hasmonean Kingdom, which was a significant achievement in Jewish history and culture. The Maccabees, who emerged as powerful leaders and military commanders, are remembered as heroes in Jewish tradition and celebrated in the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

Analysis

The Battle of Elasa, fought between the Maccabees and the Seleucid Empire in 160 BC, has been the subject of much analysis by historians. Israeli historian Bezalel Bar-Kochva argues that the Judeans would have had equal numbers to the Seleucids in this battle, that Bacchides' retreat was feigned in order to lure Judas into a vulnerable position, and that the Seleucid phalanx managed to best the Judean phalanx in a full-scale battle. Bar-Kochva believes that the author of 1 Maccabees, who admired Judas greatly, gave Judas an excuse for losing the battle by dramatically downplaying the number of soldiers. However, he maintains that the sources indicate that Judas was a superb military commander, and a superb military commander would not have charged an army outnumbered 20:1 in open terrain.

Bar-Kochva also cites other battles of the Seleucid army in places other than Judea, where the Seleucids were adept at using stratagems such as feigned retreats to lure their enemies into difficult positions, as well as other battles in uneven terrain in which the Seleucid phalanx acquitted itself well. Additionally, he notes that while 1 Maccabees gives little information on the composition of the Judean army, various "slips of the pen" suggest that the Jews themselves had their own cavalry and phalanxes.

1 Maccabees records a poetic lament for Judas as he sees his army slipping away. As with Judas's other pre-battle speeches and prayers in the book, this is best seen as a free composition by the author, not an actual transcription of Judas's words, in the style of Hellenistic historians to invent such dialogue to be more literary. One part of the speech also seemingly does not match Judas's other actions.

The Seleucid army is described as having slingers among its vanguard, which is unusual but not considered implausible. The sling was not generally a style that Syrian Greeks themselves trained in, but locals from Coele-Syria did, if used as auxiliaries, as could mercenaries from various nearby regions.¹⁰

¹⁰ Andrews, E. (2023). [The Maccabees: The Hasmonaean Dynasty between Malachi and Matthew](#). Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House.

- Practical independence was maintained until about **63 BC** when the Roman General Pompey invaded the country and brought it under Roman domination



