

DEFENDERS, CONQUERORS AND VANQUISHED

Lecture 31: Antiochus IV and the Jews

Judea



Jewish Sources

- The Jewish Bible (Hebrew: books of Genesis to Daniel)
- Kings, Chronicles I and II : Time of Saul and David to the end of captivity in Babylon under the Persian king Cyrus 539 BC
- Ezra, Nehemiah, up to restoration of the Jerusalem temple
- Esther. Achaemenid Persian rule over the Jews
- Daniel. Pseudo-prophetic narrative of Jewish history from Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (604-562 BC) to Antiochus IV c. 164 BC

Alexander and Jerusalem

And when he understood that he was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens. The procession was venerable, and the manner of it different from that of other nations. It reached to a place called Sapha, which name, translated into Greek, signifies a prospect, for you have thence a prospect both of Jerusalem and of the temple. And when the Phoenicians and the Chaldeans that followed him thought they should have liberty to plunder the city, and torment the high priest to death, which the king's displeasure fairly promised them, the very reverse of it happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander, and encompass him about; whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, Parmenio alone went up to him, and asked him how it came to pass that, when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom he replied, "I did not adore him, but that God who hath honored him with his high priesthood; for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is that, having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the Divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind."

Josephus AJ 11.8.329-337

Jewish Rights

And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present; but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favours they pleased of him; **whereupon the high priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year.** He granted all they desired. And when they entreated him that he would permit the Jews in **Babylon and Media** to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired. And when he said to the multitude, that if any of them would enlist themselves in his army, on this condition, that they should continue under the laws of their forefathers, and live according to them, he was willing to take them with him, many were ready to accompany him in his wars.

Josephus AJ 11.8.338-339

Ptolemaic Rule

- Under Ptolemaic rule 311 -c. 200 BC.
- Local Jewish families acted as Ptolemaic agents: the Tobiads
- Antiochus III takes control c. 201/0 BC

Book of Daniel on Hellenistic history

- 11.3 Mighty king will arise (Alexander)
- 11.4 Kingdom divided into four (Sel., Ptol., Lys., Antigon.)
- 11.5 King of the South (Ptolemy I) strongest
- 11.6 Daughter of King of the South marries king of the North -Berenice, d. of Ptol. II = Antiochus II 252 BC
- 11.7-12 Kings of South (Ptol. III and IV) prevail over kings of North, victory of Ptol. IV over Ant. III at Raphia, 217 BC
- 11.13-17 King of North (Ant. III) conquers south Syria and Palestine. His daughter Cleopatra marries Ptol. V, 194 BC
- 11.18-19 Ant. III goes to the islands, turns back, and dies, 187 BC
- 11. 20 Successor Sel. IV, dies 175 BC
- 11. 21-34 King of the North (Ant. IV) twice invades kingdom of the South; attacks the “holy covenant”, imposes the “abomination of desolation” = suppression of temple sacrifice. Resistance of the Jews.
- 11. 35-45 Prophecies of end of reign of King of North.

Summary of Judean History

- **201/0 BC Antiochus III takes control of Jerusalem and gives gifts, privileges and autonomy to the temple-state of Jerusalem.**
 - *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews XII. 138-53 (Austin no. 167)*
- **189 BC Antiochus III defeated by Rome; excluded from Asia Minor**
- **187-175 BC reign of Seleucus IV. His brother Antiochus (IV) kept hostage at Rome**
- **175 BC Antiochus IV succeeds.**
- **169 BC Antiochus IV first invasion of Egypt**
- **168 BC Antiochus IV second invasion of Egypt.**
 - **Ordered to retreat by the Roman consul Popillius Laenas (Polybius XXXIX.27)**
- **167 BC Antiochus IV 'forces' non-Jewish religious observance on Jerusalem Jews**
- **164 BC Pressure of Jewish revolt of Judas Maccabaeus compels Antiochus IV to rescind these measures. Jews recover control of Jerusalem**
- **163-162 BC Antiochus V**
- **162-150 BC Demetrius I**

Antiochus III

- Follow “policy” of Alexander
- Had previously used Mesopotamian Jews as military settlers in Asia Minor on account of their loyalty to the Seleucid house

Antiochus IV

Antiochus Epiphanes, nicknamed from his actions Epimanes, would sometimes steal from the royal palace leaving his attendants behind, and appear wandering about any part of town with two or three companions . . . Often he would take off his royal dress, put on a *tebenna* and go about the agora canvassing for office, shaking hands with some and embracing others and urging them to vote for him, sometimes as *aedile* (*agoranomos*) sometimes as *tribune* (*demarchos*). And when he got the office and sat on the ivory chair in accordance with the Roman custom, he would listen to the suits which took place in the agora and would give his verdict with great seriousness and attention.

Polybius XXVI.1

Antiochus IV

As to his generosity towards the gods, the temple of Olympian Zeus at Athens can bear witness, the only temple in the world undertaken on a scale commensurate with the greatness of the god. But he also embellished Delos with magnificent altars and numerous statues, while at Antioch he promised to build among many other buildings in various places a magnificent temple of Jupiter Capitolinus . . . He also surpassed all previous kings in the magnificence of the shows of every kind he offered. Most of them conformed to his usual style and were staged by a large number of Greek artists, but he also put on gladiatorial games in the Roman style. At first this caused more alarm than pleasure to men who were not used to such a spectacle, but later by multiplying the shows and allowing the fighters to go only as far as wounds while sometimes even having fights without quarter, he familiarized men with this spectacle and made it popular, and filled most young men with an enthusiasm for arms.

The Jewish Conflict with Antiochus IV

- I Maccabees covers 40 years from 175-134 BC.
 - ▣ Coherent and detailed account of the revolt of the Jews from the domination of Antiochus IV, led by Judas Maccabaeus, and the creation of a Jewish national state, ruled by Judas' brothers Jonathan and Simon, who created a Hasmonaean high-priesthood.
- II Maccabees is 1-book version of a 5 book work written by Jason of Cyrene;

“ . . . the history of Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers, the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar. He has described the battles with Antiochus Epiphanes and with his son Eupator, and the apparitions from heaven which appeared with those who vied with one another in fighting manfully for Judaism. Few though they were they ravaged the whole country and routed the foreign hordes; they restored the world-renowned temple, freed the city of Jerusalem, and reaffirmed the laws which were in danger of being abolished. All this they achieved because the Lord was merciful and gracious to them. . . . I have tried to provide for the entertainment of those who read for pleasure, the convenience of students who must commit facts to memory, and the profit of even the casual reader.”

The tale of Onias and Heliodorus

- Jerusalem peaceful and prosperous under the high priest Onias. “Even Seleucus, the king of all Asia, bore all the expenses of sacrificial worship from his revenues.”
- Simon from the clan Bilgah quarrelled with Onias about the regulation of the market. Thwarted by Onias he goes to Apollonius son of Thraseus, governor of Coele-Syria and Palestine, alleging that the treasury at Jerusalem held untold undeclared riches. Apollonius reports this to the king, who selects Heliodorus, his chief minister, to remove the treasures.
- Simon explains that the wealth was held for widows and orphans. Heliodorus insists on making an inventory. The priests prayed to the Lawgiver to protect the savings of rightful owners. Distress of high priests, gnashing, wailing, women bare their breasts, unmarried girls take to the streets. Entreaties to heaven.

“When Heliodorus arrived at the treasury, the Ruler of the spirits and all powers produced a mighty apparition, Heliodorus’ bodyguard struck with terror. They saw a horse, splendidly caparisoned, with a rider of terrible aspect; it rushed fiercely at Heliodorus and, rearing up, attacked him with its hooves. The rider was wearing golden armour. There also appeared to Heliodorus two young men of surpassing strength and glorious beauty, splendidly dressed. They stood on either side of him and scourged him, raining ceaseless blows on him. He fell suddenly to the ground, overwhelmed by great darkness, and his men snatched him up and put him on a litter. This man, who had so recently entered the treasury with a great throng and his whole bodyguard, was now borne off by them quite helpless, publicly compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of God.”

Regime Change

From them came forth a sinful shoot, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of king Antiochus, who after being a hostage in Rome became king in year 137 of the kingdom of the Greeks. In those days there came forth from Israel a lawless generation who persuaded many others by saying, “Come let us make a treaty with the peoples around us, since many evils have fallen upon us from the time we separated from them.” This proposal seemed good in their eyes, and some of the people eagerly went to the king who granted them permission to practice the customs of the heathen. And they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem in accordance with the customs of the nations. They became uncircumcised, gave up the holy covenant to join the yoke of the gentiles, and sold themselves to cause evil.

1 Macc. 1.10-15

But when Seleucus was dead and had been succeeded by Antiochus known as Epiphanes, Jason, Onias’s brother, obtained the high-priesthood by corrupt means. He petitioned the king and promised him 360 talents in silver coin immediately, and 80 talents from future revenue. In addition he undertook to pay another 150 talents for the authority to institute a gymnasium, to arrange for the education of young men there, and to enrol in Jerusalem a group to be known as Antiochenes. The king agreed and as soon as he had seized the high-priesthood, Jason made the Jews conform to the Greek way of life.

2 Macc. 4.7-10

A summary of the beginning of 1 Maccabees

- **170 BC Antiochus IV decides to attack Egypt, defeats Ptolemy V; returns via Jerusalem and strips the temple of its treasures**
- **168 BC Sends revenue official to Jerusalem; plunders the city; installs garrison**

The king Issues a decree:

'his subjects were to become all one people and abandon their own laws and religion. The nations themselves everywhere complied with the royal command, and many in Israel accepted foreign worship, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. (Orders introducing foreign religious practices and forbidding sacrifice). 'Such was the decree the King introduced to all his subjects. He appointed superintendents over the people and instructed the towns of Judaea to offer sacrifice, town by town. People thronged to their side in large numbers, every one of them a traitor to the law.'

1Macc. 1. 41-52

'On the 15th day of Kislev he built the 'abomination of desolation' on the altar, and in the cities of Judea around they built altars, and offered incense at the doorsof houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law that were found were torn up and burnt.'

1Macc.1.54-58

Abandonment of Jewish Law

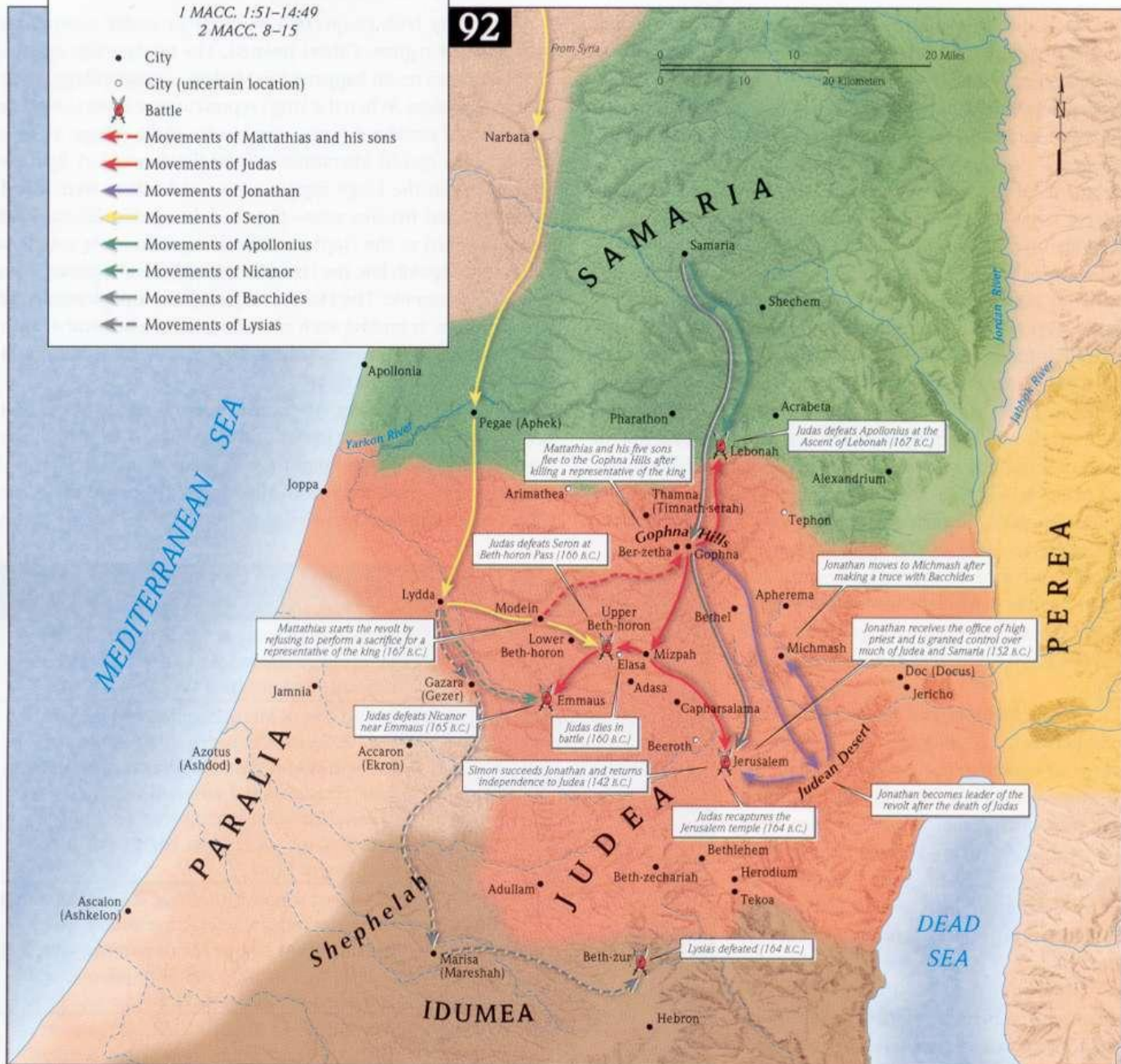
Shortly afterwards King Antiochus sent an elderly Athenian to force the Jews to abandon their ancestral customs and no longer regulate their lives according to the law of God. He was also commissioned to pollute the temple at Jerusalem and dedicate it to Olympian Zeus, and to dedicate the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim to Zeus God of Hospitality, following the practice of the local inhabitants. This evil hit them hard and was a severe trial. The Gentiles filled the temple with licentious revelry: they took pleasure with prostitutes and had intercourse with women in the sacred precincts. They also brought forbidden things inside and heaped the altar with impure offerings forbidden by the law. It was forbidden either to observe the Sabbath or to keep the traditional festivals. Or to admit to being a Jew at all. On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were driven by brute force to eat the entrails of sacrificial victims; and on the Feast of Dionysus they were forced to wear ivy-leaves and join the procession in his honour. At the instigation of the inhabitants of Ptolemais an order was published in the neighbouring Greek cities to the effect that they should adopt the same policy of compelling the Jews to eat entrails and should kill those who refused to change over to Greek ways.

2 Macc. 6.1-9

SELECTED EVENTS IN THE MACCABEAN REVOLT (168–142 B.C.)

1 MACC. 1:51–14:49
2 MACC. 8–15

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ✠ Battle
- Movements of Mattathias and his sons
- Movements of Judas
- Movements of Jonathan
- Movements of Seron
- Movements of Apollonius
- Movements of Nicanor
- Movements of Bacchides
- Movements of Lysias



Maccabean War

- Judas Maccabaeus and his 6000 partisans raise a revolt in the Judaeen countryside.
- Seleucid forces are mobilised by Ptolemaeus, governor of Coele Syria and Phoenicia, under the command of Nicanor, who:

determined to pay off the 2000 talents due from the king as tribute to the Romans, by the sale of the Jews that he would take prisoner; and he at once made an offer of Jewish slaves to the coastal towns, undertaking to deliver them at the price of 90 to the talent.

2 Macc. 8. 1-11

Maccabean War

- Nicanor is defeated and Timotheus, garrison commander in Jerusalem, is killed.

Thus by God's help, Nicanor, that double-dyed villain who had brought the thousand merchants to buy the Jewish captives, was humiliated by the very people whom he despised above all others. He threw off his magnificent uniform and all alone like a runaway slave made his escape through the interior, and was, indeed, very lucky to reach Antioch after losing his whole army. (2 Macc.8. 21-36)

Maccabean War

- In 164 BC Antiochus IV, on his death bed, repents and allows political and religious freedom for Jerusalem (2 Macc. 9.11-17; *writes a letter designating his son (Antiochus V) to succeed him (2 Macc. 9.19-27).*

Restoration of Freedom and Autonomy

We have learnt that the Jews do not consent to adopt Greek ways, as our father had wished, but prefer their own mode of life and request that they be allowed to observe their own laws. We choose therefore that this nation like the rest should be left undisturbed and decree that the temple shall be restored to them and that they shall regulate their lives in accordance with their ancestral customs

2 Macc. 11. 22-26

The Hasmonaean State

- Hellenic names for many of the rulers
- Hellenic style building projects
- Royal palaces
- Greek style coins
- Was the revolt about the introduction of Greek practice?



Follow-up Reading

- E. Gruen, “Jews and Greeks”, in A. Erskine (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to the Hellenistic World* (2003), 264-79
- Fergus Millar, “The background to the Maccabean revolution: reflections on Martin Hengel’s ‘Judaism and Hellenism’” in *The Greek world, the Jews, and the East* (2006), 67-90.
- Fergus Millar, “Hellenistic history in a Near Eastern perspective: the Book of Daniel”, in *The Greek world, the Jews, and the East* (2006), 51-66.