

LECTURE 3

THEMES IN 1 AND 2

MACCABEES

DR JESSICA SANFORD

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EMAIL: J.KEADY@UWTSD.AC.UK



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

THEMES IN 1 & 2 MACCABEES

- Gymnasium
- Circumcision
- Antiochus IV
- Mattathias
- Specific themes in 2 Maccabees
- Hannukah

HELLENISTIC / GENTILE INFLUENCE: GYMNASIUM IN JERUSALEM AND NON-CIRCUMCISION

I MACCABEES 1:10-15

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks. In those days **certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, “Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us.”** This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorised them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. **So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant.** They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

2 MACCABEES 4:9-17

When the king assented and Jason came to [the High Priest's] office, he at once shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life. He set aside the existing royal concessions to the Jews...and he destroyed the lawful ways of living and introduced new customs contrary to the law...he founded a gymnasium right under the citadel, and he induced the noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat.

There was such an extreme of Hellenization and increase in the adoption of foreign ways because of the surpassing wickedness of Jason, who was ungodly and no high priest, that the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar.

Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hastened to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena after the call to the discus, disdaining the honours prized by their fathers and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of prestige.

I MACCABEES 1:14-15

“So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.”

GYMNASIUM



The Bath/Gymnasium Complex at Sardis (late second century CE)

Gymnasium, large room used and equipped for the performance of various sports. The history of the gymnasium dates back to ancient Greece, where the literal meaning of the Greek word *gymnasion* was “school for naked exercise.”



EPISPASM: REMOVING THE MARK OF CIRCUMCISION

"Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised on the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." So said God to Abraham, establishing the covenant of circumcision, a covenant "between me and you and your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:10,14).

- Circumcision happens when a baby boy is eight days old (Genesis 17:12).
- This was challenged in the Hellenistic period (after about 133 B.C.E). Hellenistic and Roman societies widely practiced public nakedness, but they did not expose the tip of the penis, called the glans. To expose the glans was considered vulgar and indecent. This combination of attitudes could be—and often was—devastating for circumcised Jews.



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- Enjoying oneself in a Greek *gymnasium* or Roman bath, where nudity was practiced daily, was a popular and stylish pastime. Here politics was discussed and business deals concluded.
 - Athletic contests and exhibitions were also conducted in the nude. Participation in athletics was often a prerequisite for social advancement. Yet a circumcised penis effectively precluded this participation.

Once Mattathias re-established control of Jerusalem it is said that they: “And Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars; they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel” (1 Macc. 2:45-46).

EPISPASM: LASTING EFFECTS OF CIRCUMCISION / NON CIRCUMCISION

And now I announce unto thee that the children of Israel will not keep true to this ordinance, and they will not circumcise their sons according to all this law; for in the flesh of their circumcision they will omit this circumcision of their sons, and all of them, sons of Beliar, will leave their sons uncircumcised as they were born. And there will be great wrath from the Lord against the children of Israel because **they have forsaken His covenant and turned aside from His word, and provoked and blasphemed, inasmuch as they do not observe the ordinance of this law; for they have treated their members like the Gentiles**, so that they may be removed and rooted out of the land. And there will no more be pardon or forgiveness unto them [so that there should be forgiveness and pardon] for all the sin of this eternal error.
(Jubilees 15:33-34)

Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? **Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.** Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. **For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision**, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.
(1 Corinthians 7:18-20)



ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES – HELLENISTIC KING OF THE SELEUCID EMPIRE FROM 175 BCE – 164 BCE

Amin, O. S. M. (2019, October 27). [Head of Antiochus IV](https://www.ancient.eu/image/11367/).
Ancient History Encyclopedia. Retrieved from
<https://www.ancient.eu/image/11367/>

ANTIOCHUS IV

When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt. (1 Maccabees 1.16-19)

And he shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south with a great army. And the king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him.²⁶ Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. (Daniel 11.25-26)

ANTIOCHUS' RAID ON THE JERUSLAEM TEMPLE

After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. (1 Maccabees 1:20-23)

DESECRATION OF THE TEMPLE

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that **all should be one people**, and that **all should give up their particular customs**. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; **they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath**. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; **he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised...He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."**...Now on the fifteenth day of **Chislev**, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a **desolating sacrilege** on the altar of burnt offering.

(I Maccabees 1:41-50, 54)

PERSECUTION OF JEWISH PEOPLE

According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel.

(I Maccabees 1:60-64)



MATTATHIAS, SON OF HASMONEUS (HASMONEAN)

MATTATHIAS – LEADER OF THE REVOLT

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

Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town.

At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there...
(1 Maccabees 2.23-28)

JUDAS MACCABEUS

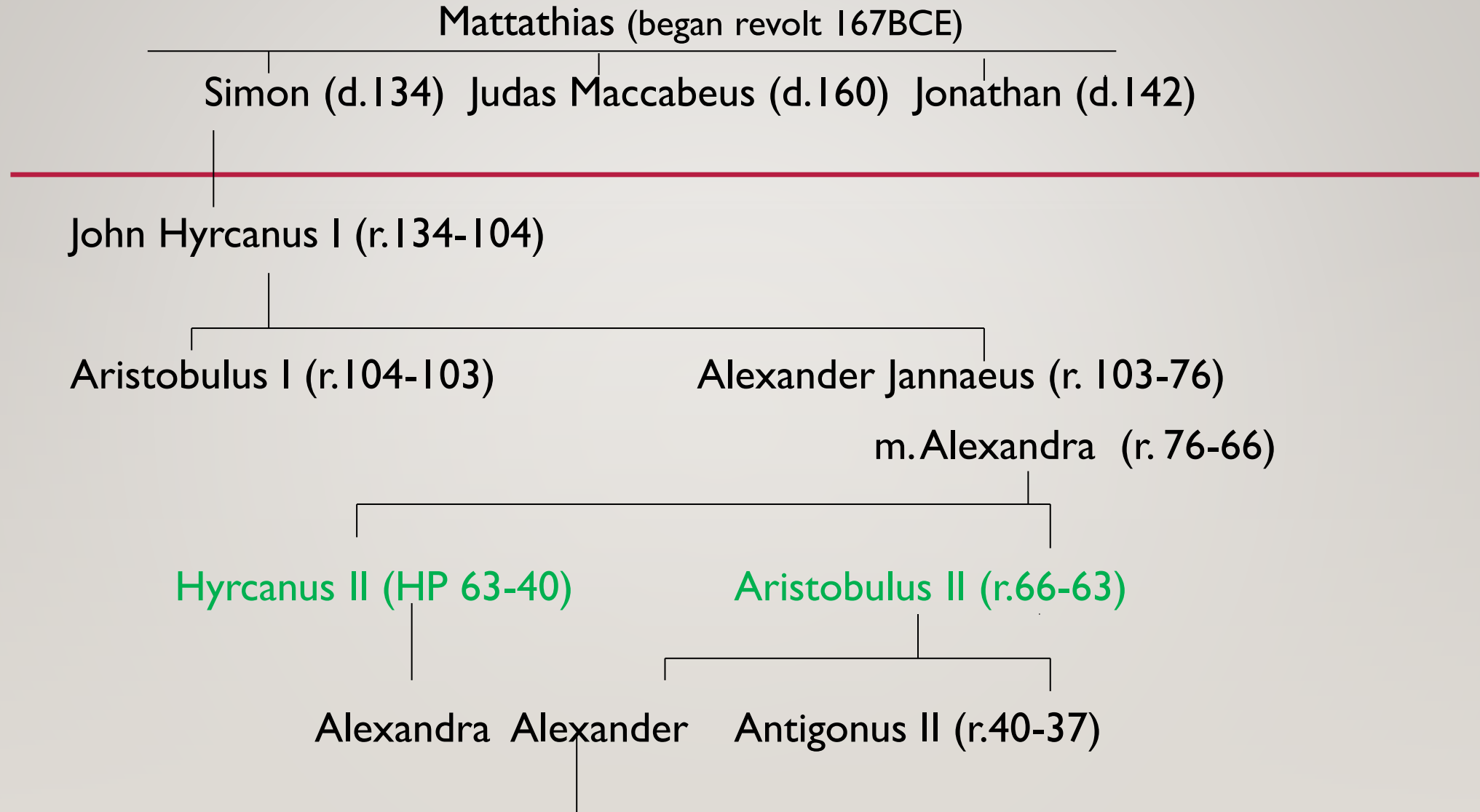
When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, “How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and so strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today.” Judas replied, “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. It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. **They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws. He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them.**” (1 Macc. 3:17-22)

JUDAS MACCABEUS

The battle became desperate, and many on both sides were wounded and fell. Judas also fell, and the rest fled. Then Jonathan and Simon took their brother Judas and buried him in the tomb of their ancestors at Modein, and wept for him. All Israel made great lamentation for him; they mourned many days and said,
“How is the mighty fallen,
the saviour of Israel!”

Now the rest of the acts of Judas, and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and his greatness, have not been recorded, but they were very many.
(1 Maccabees 9.19-22)

THE MACCABEES



Mariamne (m. Herod the Great)

KEY DATES

- Jonathan takes over from Judas; leads Jews (160-142BCE)
- Alexander a Seleucid claimant makes a deal with Jonathan appointing him High Priest in 152BCE
- High Priesthood a political as well as religious role
- Jonathan lured into the Seleucid camp and murdered
- Simon takes over, forges alliance with Syria: tributes and taxes stopped in 142BCE (independence)
- Seleucids attack again in 134BCE; Two of Simon's sons lead Jewish army and win
- Simon's son John Hyrcanus becomes priest/ruler in 134BCE.
- Romans invade in 63BCE

THEMES IN 2 MACCABEES

DIVINE DELIVERANCE

As 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. (2 Macc. 11:13)

Nicanor and his troops advanced with trumpets and battle songs, but Judas and his troops met the enemy in battle with invocations to God and prayers. 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. (2 Macc. 15:27)



MARTYRDOM:ELEAZAR (2 MACC. 6:18-31)

Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honour rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh... Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, so that by doing this he might be saved from death... [But he said "Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life," he said, "for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretence, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age." ... Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws." ... So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation.

BELIEF IN THE AFTERLIFE

And when he was at his last breath, he said, “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but **the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life**, because we have died for his laws.” (2 Macc. 7:9)

When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and **courageously stretched forth his hands**, and said nobly, “I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and **from him I hope to get them back again.**” (2 Macc. 7:10-11)

When he was near death, he said, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But **for you there will be no resurrection to life!**” (2 Macc. 7:14)



BELIEF IN THE AFTERLIFE

But he looked at the king, and said, “Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, **and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!**” (2 Macc 7.16-17)

Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet **whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty.** (2 Macc 6.26)

...And there shall be a time of trouble...But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And **many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.** And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12.1-3)

HANUKKAH (DEDICATION IN HEBREW)

To find out more about the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple please read:

1 Macc. 4: 36-58 (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Maccabees+4&version=NRSV>)

2 Macc. 10: 1-9

(<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Maccabees+10&version=NRSV>)

Interview on Moodle Page with Simon Schama on the Hanukkah, which may be of interest to some of you too 😊



ARCH OF TITUS



OTHER THEMES THAT WILL BE DISCUSSED
TOMORROW INCLUDE MARTYRDOM AND PRAYER

UPLOADED READINGS ON MOODLE

Now, any of these themes (or a mix of them) might be an area that you would like to look focus on for your assignment. If you would like to read around the subject area, then I have uploaded a few articles that might help you to get started, they include:

- 1) Chapter 2 from Shaye Cohen's book
- 2) Online article: Joshua Ezra, Gendered Language and Construction of Jewish Identity in 2 Maccabees
- 3) Online article: Martha Himmelfarb, Judaism and Hellenism in 2 Maccabees
- 4) Online article: Isaac T. Soon, Rereading the Circumcision of the Uncircumcised in 1 Macc. 2:46

WORK FOR FRIDAY

Remember – we are meeting in our groups later on this afternoon.

For tomorrow's class, I would like you to watch Professor Daniel Schwartz's Lecture on 1 and 2 Maccabees and complete the Worksheet alongside it.

I have created a link for you to upload your worksheet if you would like me to see how you are progressing / understanding the main points.

