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# 1 and 2 Maccabees—Same Story, Different Meaning

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**THE AUTHOR SKETCHES BRIEFLY THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL TWO CENTURIES BEFORE Christ and indicates the varied viewpoints toward and interpretations of that history that are recorded in the books of First and Second Maccabees.**

**T**he two centuries before Christ were tumultuous times in the history of Israel. Shaken by cultural, religious and political revolutions, seared by violent persecution that threatened the existence of their ancient faith, and scarred by civil wars, the little people sank to the depths of woe, from which they reached to the heavens with their hopes and convictions that the judgment was imminent or that the Lord's Anointed must soon make His appearance, or both. On the other hand, there were moments when the glory and prosperity of a new "monarchy" led to the conclusion that, for all intents and purposes, the messianic age had arrived.

The history of this period can be extracted in bits and pieces from many documents: the so-called Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the Book of Daniel, the Scrolls of Qumran, the histories of Josephus, and the rabbinical writings. In this article we shall treat two contemporary histories of the 2d century B.C.—1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees—both found in all collections of the Old Testament Apocrypha. We shall compare and contrast their different treatments of their subject matter, attempting to show how their authors' presuppositions—theological and otherwise

—led them to select their material and shape their histories. But first, a brief sketch of the events of the period.

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

When Alexander the Great marched across Asia Minor (334—323 B.C.), he came not only as a military conqueror but also as a missionary of Greek culture. The ensuing fusion of Greek and Oriental cultures, known as Hellenism, took many forms.<sup>1</sup> Of particular importance for the present study is the clear emergence, sometime around 200 B.C., of a sector of the Palestinian Jewish community who feel that it is to their advantage to modernize—to exchange their Jewish "barbarism" for the "civilized" Greek way of life (1 Macc. 1:11). The crucial event occurs in 175 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes has just ascended the throne of the Seleucid kingdom, of which Palestine is a part. The Jewish high priest is Onias III. His brother Jason, a partisan of the Hellenizing Jewish party, appears before Antiochus

<sup>1</sup> See Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), to which the following historical reconstruction is largely indebted.



and succeeds in buying the high priesthood for himself. At the same time he obtains permission to establish Greek cultural and civic institutions in Jerusalem. A list of "citizens" is drawn up. The typical Greek educational institutions, the *gymnasion* and the *ephebeion*, are established to feed the roll of citizens. These political and cultural changes also have important religious consequences. Jewish law is set aside for those who participate in the new Hellenistic way of life. The young men attending the *gymnasion* follow the current custom of wearing the broad-brimmed hat of the god Hermes. Participants in the athletic games of the *gymnasion*, among them many priests, exercise nude. Evidently ashamed of their circumcision (considered a barbarism by the Greeks), some of these athletes resort to surgical means to remove the sign of the covenant (1 Macc. 1:15). Both 1 and 2 Maccabees consider the Hellenizers to be not just modernizers but apostates.

A few years later, Jason is beaten at his own game, when a certain Menelaus outbids him for the high priesthood. Ruling like a tyrant, Menelaus alienates a significant part of the population. The Hellenizers themselves are divided in their allegiance between Jason and Menelaus. Furthermore, over against the Hellenizers, a second group now emerges into view — the *Hasidim*, "the pious ones," who find their identity in their faithful adherence to the prescriptions of the Torah. Among these factions, an escalating series of revolts breaks out in the years 170—168, followed by bloody reprisals on the part of Antiochus and his generals. So intense is the hostility that the king refortifies the Jerusalem citadel and occupies it with his

mercenaries. Jason is driven into exile, but the *Hasidim* continue their struggle. In their view, the very existence of the Jewish religion is at stake. By December 167, Judea has become a seething caldron of revolt.

Again revolt brings royal reprisal. This time Antiochus strikes at the heart of the matter. He proscribes the Jewish religion. Circumcision and the celebration of festivals, including the Sabbath, are forbidden. All copies of the Torah are to be burned. Pagan cult ("the sacrilege that desolates") is officially sanctioned in the Jerusalem temple. Jews are forced to march in the festal processions of Dionysus and to eat swine's flesh. Opposition to the royal decree is penalized by death. Sides must be chosen. Many forsake the covenant to save their lives. The *Hasidim* take their stand, choosing to die rather than to transgress the laws of their fathers. Many flee to the wilderness, hiding out in caves; and not a few die, refusing to defend themselves on the Sabbath. As the roll of the martyrs lengthens, the expectation increases that God must soon act to avenge the blood of the righteous. The judgment and the kingdom are at hand.

Enter now the Hasmonean family: a priest named Mattathias, and his sons John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan. They quickly bring direction and much-needed leadership to the dispersed bands of the pious. Since, in fact, God has not intervened, they themselves will take up the sword of the Lord. On the one hand, they direct their attacks against Hellenizing Jews (1 Macc. 2:42-48), but, more important, Judas gathers an army to take on the Syrian forces. Nicknamed Maccabeus (perhaps "mallet-head"), this daring and



brilliant general possesses all the advantages of a warrior employing guerrilla tactics in his home territory to defend a cause for which he is willing to die. In a series of lightning strokes, he leads his little army to victory against the hordes of the foreign invader. In three years the temple mount is retaken, and in December 164, the sanctuary is purified, its lights relit, and the orthodox cult reestablished. Two millenia later, this event is still commemorated on the feast of *Hanukkah*, or "dedication."

Although the temple has been liberated, the war continues, and in 161 Judas dies on the battlefield. His brother Jonathan succeeds him and presses for freedom from Syrian domination. For the first time in two decades, "the sword rests" in the land of Israel. Robed in purple, Jonathan sits in the presence of the Syrian king, Alexander. Then in 152 a most significant event occurs: Alexander appoints Jonathan high priest of the Jews. Two years later he receives the additional political titles, *strategos* and *meridarchēs*. The roots have been sunk for a new dynasty of religious-political rulers.

In 143 Jonathan dies a violent death at the hand of Tryphon, a Syrian general contending for the Seleucid throne. Jonathan's successor is Simon, the last of the sons of Mattathias. His accomplishments are manifold. He expels the Syrian garrison from the Jerusalem citadel, fortifies the cities of Israel, expands the borders of his nation, and extracts new concessions from the Syrian throne. But most important, he is declared hereditary high priest by popular decree. The legality of the Hasmonean dynasty is now an accomplished fact. Herein lie the roots of the situation that

prompts the writing of both 1 and 2 Maccabees. The rise of the Hasmonean dynasty does not go unopposed. Indeed, with a twist of historical irony, the hasidic Jews, whose cause the Hasmoneans once championed, now turn and repudiate their erstwhile leaders. The Essenes, declaring the Hasmonean high priesthood to be illegitimate, forsake the temple and take up residence at Qumran by the shores of the Dead Sea, there to await the End. The Pharisees break with the Hasmoneans some time later. It is in this period, the early 1st century, and out of this situation of internal strife, that the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees are written.

#### FIRST MACCABEES

The viewpoint of 1 Maccabees is tersely stated in a story related in chapter 5. Two of Judas' generals meet with stinging defeat in an unauthorized sortie against the Syrian army. The author comments:

Thus the people suffered a great rout because, thinking to do a brave deed, they did not listen to Judas and his brothers. But *they did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel.* (5:61-62)<sup>2</sup>

The writer of 1 Maccabees compiles his history in order to defend the legitimacy of the Hasmonean dynasty, presumably against its Pharisaic or Essene opponents. He implements his purpose by describing how the God of Israel used "Judas and his brothers"<sup>3</sup> to remove the yoke of Syrian oppression and how the high priesthood came to reside quite naturally, logically, and

<sup>2</sup> Translations are mainly from the RSV.

<sup>3</sup> The expression occurs 12 times in 1 Macc. 3-8.



legitimately in the Hasmonean house. The book may be outlined as follows:

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| A. Hellenization and persecution                        | 1:1-64     |
| B. Mattathias leads the revolt and commissions his sons | 2:1-70     |
| C. The exploits of Judas Maccabeus                      | 3:1—9:22   |
| D. The deeds of Jonathan                                | 9:23—12:53 |
| E. The deeds and reign of Simon                         | 13:1—15:41 |
| F. The deeds of John Hyrcanus                           | 16:1-24    |

Chapter 1 sets the background for the action. The beginnings are found in Alexander's conquest and the appointment of his successors (1:1-9). The author greatly telescopes the history of 175—168. The archvillain is Antiochus Epiphanes, and throughout the book it is primarily against him and his successors that the Hasmonean house wages war. Little attention is paid to the Hellenizers (1:11-15). Moreover, the author makes no mention whatsoever of the brewing civil war and escalating hasidic revolt that led to Antiochus' proscription of the practice of Judaism (1:41-64). Rather, he makes it appear that Mattathias was the first to raise the standard of revolt against the Syrian crown. Salvation began in the house of the Hasmoneans. This is the subject of chapter 2.

The chapter begins with the introduction of "the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel" — the patriarch Mattathias and his five sons (2:1-14). Without a doubt, the central figure is Mattathias. Around him the author skillfully weaves a number of older sources. He combines two such stories to describe the incident in Modein (vv. 15-22

and 23-26). In the latter, Mattathias' action is cast in the mold of the ancient story of Phinehas the zealot (Num. 25:6-13). The point is clear: in his zeal for the Torah, Mattathias, like Phinehas, turns away the wrath of God from Israel. But there is more. In his dying words, Mattathias recites the roll of the patriarchs, noting that "Phinehas *our father*, because he was deeply zealous, *received the covenant of everlasting priesthood*" (v. 54). Again the author's intent is evident. He is asserting the legitimacy of the Hasmonean high priesthood by claiming that the Hasmoneans are descended from Phinehas, with whom God made a covenant of everlasting priesthood.<sup>4</sup> The argument is supported by a description of Mattathias as a "new Phinehas."

Verses 15-22 are the remnants of a second story. Its original form occurs in The Assumption of Moses (9), a hasidic apocalypse from about the year 166.<sup>5</sup> It tells how "Taxo," a hasidic patriarch, and his seven sons meet their death at the hands of the Syrians. The theological viewpoint of this version of the story is that the innocent deaths of the hasidic martyrs will trigger the *eschaton*, bringing judgment on the oppressors and salvation to the faithful. However, in the view of 1 Maccabees, it was not the deaths of the *Hasidim* that brought salvation to Israel. Indeed the apocalyptic catastrophe did not occur, as the *Hasidim* had hoped. Yet salvation did come — by the hand of Judas and his

<sup>4</sup> For another current reference to Phinehas' priesthood, see Sirach 45:23-24.

<sup>5</sup> This apocalypse is usually dated to the time of Herod's sons; however, for a definitive dating to the hasidic period, see J. Licht, "Taxo, or the Apocalyptic Doctrine of Vengeance," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 12 (1961), 95—103.



brothers, who took up the work of their father. Thus the author uses the old hasidic story but changes the characters. The protagonist is not Taxo but Mattathias, whose zealous deed stayed the wrath of God and who on his deathbed commissioned his sons to fight as the instruments of divine judgment. The commission is described in 2:49-68, and it leads to the following chapters, which relate the execution of the commission.

Upon his father's death, Judas assumes leadership of the revolt (3:1), and the author devotes 40 percent of his history to a description of the Maccabean exploits (3:1—9:22). He prefaces the section with a poem depicting Judas as a mighty warrior and hero (3:3-9). His epilog further evinces his opinion of Judas:

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, for they were very many. (9:22)

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suppose that chapters 3—9 are simply a tribute to the mighty deeds of a great hero. Judas enters battle with prayer (3:46 ff.; 4:30-33; 5:33; 7:40-42), and victory is followed by the praises that belong to the Lord, the Savior of Israel (4:24, 33, 55). Judas' victories against vastly larger and superior armies are not to be attributed merely to his military prowess. All victory comes from God, and so Judas encourages his fainting and frightened troops:

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. (3:18-19; cf. 4:8-11)

Thus, while the author eulogizes the heroism and mighty deeds of Judas, he sees these deeds as the acts of the God of Israel. Herein lies the significance of Judas Maccabeus. He was God's instrument for the deliverance of Israel. Thus Judas could pray, "Strike them [the Syrians] down with the sword of those who love Thee . . ." (4:33). It is God Himself whom Judas addresses as "Savior of Israel" (4:30); yet when Judas is slain in battle, his people sing this dirge: "How is the mighty fallen, the savior of Israel" (9:22). In the author's view, God's salvation of Israel was accomplished through Judas.

The author prefaces his treatment of Jonathan (9:23—12:53) by clearly establishing the line of succession from Judas to Jonathan. Judas assumed leadership in the place of (*anti*) Mattathias (3:1). When Judas dies and the situation in Israel again disintegrates, "the friends of Judas" assemble and elect Jonathan to take command in the place of (*anti*) Judas his brother (9:23-31). Thus it is in accordance with popular demand that the succession continues within the Hasmonian house.

Jonathan too is a mighty warrior, yet one who, like his brother, recognizes that his help comes from heaven (9:43-46; 11:71; 12:15). But his is more than a story of wars and battles. During his time, "the sword ceased from Israel. . . . And Jonathan began to judge the people" (9:73). Once peace is made with the Syrians, there is no reason why Jonathan should not show himself a loyal subject of the king, Alexander; and such he is (chapters 10—11). Although certain "lawless men" attempt to discredit Jonathan in the eyes of Alexander and Demetrius, his successor,



Jonathan is vindicated (10:61; 11:21-27), and the land is quiet (11:38, 52). Indeed it is only by an act of treachery that Jonathan meets his violent death. (12:46 to 13:23)

Lest anyone oppose Jonathan's high priesthood, the author enumerates the deeds of Alcimus, the high priest who held office shortly before Jonathan. This scoundrel slaughtered a group of *Hasidim* in cold blood (7:12-17), and God struck him dead because of his order to raze the wall of the inner court of the temple, "the work of the prophets" (9:54-57). In contrast to this perfidious character in whom, the author notes ironically, the *Hasidim* trusted, Jonathan proved to be the benefactor of his nation.

When Jonathan is captured, the leaderless people are again shaken to the roots. In a dramatic scene, we see Simon assemble "the people" and deliver a stirring speech that is both a summary of the glorious achievements of the Hasmonean house and an exhortation that the people accept his leadership.

You yourselves know *what great things I and my brothers and the house of my father have done for the laws and the sanctuary; you know also the wars and difficulties which we have seen. By reason of this all my brothers have perished for the sake of Israel, and I alone am left. And now far be it from me to spare my life in any time of distress, for I am not better than my brothers. But I will avenge my nation and the sanctuary and your wives and children, for all the nations have gathered together out of hatred to destroy us.* (13:3-6)

The author's inclusion of these words leaves little doubt as to his attitude regarding the Hasmonean house, and he is

careful to record the response of "the people" to Simon's speech:

. . . and they answered in a loud voice, "You are our leader in place of *{anti}* Judas and Jonathan your brother. Fight our battles, and all that you say to us we will do." (13:8-9)

Thus the succession moves on to Simon, but whereas Jonathan was elected and acclaimed by "the friends of Judas," here "the people" choose Simon.

In the third year of his reign, Simon's popular acclamation is fully legitimized. The author preserves the full text of a lengthy decree passed by "the great assembly of the priests and the rulers of the nation and the elders of the country" (14:27-49). It rehearses the great deeds of the Hasmonean house and of Simon in particular and declares him to be "leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise" (14:41). By inclusion of this text, the author is calling the reader's attention to that fact to which, in his view, the whole history of the period has been moving: *the establishment of the Hasmonean house as the legitimate seat of the Jewish high priesthood and as the ruling dynasty in Israel.* The closing verses of the decree invoke sanctions against any who oppose his authority (14:44-45). From these words, it is evident that the Hasmoneans have their enemies within Israel, and it is against the latter-day manifestations of these enemies that the writer of 1 Maccabees has been pleading his case.

The author is quick to point out that the honors heaped on Simon are well deserved, and he happily provides his readers with a list of the Hasmonean prince's accomplishments: complete amnesty and total tax exemption by the Syrian crown



(13:36-40); an end to the 25-year Syrian occupation of the Jerusalem citadel (13:49-53); fortification of a number of cities and the securing of Israel's borders (14:33-34); the ushering in of an era of peace and prosperity. This last item is spelled out in a poetic passage that may well date from the reign of Simon (14:4-15). It is virtually a pastiche of Biblical allusions and may well indicate that some of Simon's contemporaries believed that, for all intents and purposes, the messianic age had arrived. At the very least, the poem attributes to Simon's era some of the glories of the Davidic and Solomonic age and the fulfillment of some of the hopes awaited in the golden age of the future.

That the messianic age had not arrived the author of 1 Maccabees was well aware. There are still battles to be fought. But Simon has grown old. There is a final transferral of authority, as the last of Mattathias' sons appoints his two sons—John and Judas—to fight for their nation in the place of (*anti*) him and his brother (16:1-3). Some time later, in a fortress high over the Jordan Valley near Jericho, an inebriated Simon and his sons, Judas and Mattathias, are treacherously slain (16:11-17).<sup>6</sup> The mantle of leadership now falls on John. His deeds are only alluded to (16:23-24), partly because they have already been recorded, but also because our author has accomplished his purpose. He has recorded the history of the foundation, the succession, and the establishment of the Hasmonean house, and he has docu-

<sup>6</sup> The author is not departing from his favorable attitude toward the Hasmoneans. He mentions the drunkenness of Simon and his sons only to underscore Ptolemy's treachery. (16:17)

mented its legitimacy by royal decree, popular acclaim, and the attestation of the God who worked His purposes through the Hasmonean family and its early heroes.

#### SECOND MACCABEES

Second Maccabees is a condensation of a five-volume history of Israel during the years 180—161 B.C., composed by one Jason of Cyrene some time between 90 and 80 B.C. In his prolog, the anonymous epitomizer claims that he has not changed the substance of Jason's work (2:19-32).<sup>7</sup> We shall accept his word and deal with the epitome as a unified whole, not attempting to distinguish between the sources and the editorial work of the epitomizer.

The organizing principle for the contents is a historical scheme whose roots are found in the latter chapters of Deuteronomy.<sup>8</sup> It presumes a close correlation between piety and prosperity. Obedience to the commandments issues in the blessings of the covenant; disobedience brings on the curses. In the outline that follows, this historical scheme is evident in sections C to G. The respective sections of Deuteronomy are indicated in parentheses.

<sup>7</sup> The events listed in 2:19-22 correspond to the contents of 2 Maccabees 3—13. Only the incident in chapters 14—15 occurs in the reign of Demetrius (not mentioned in the prolog), and it need not indicate that the story "of his brothers" (2:19) continued past the death of Judas. Perhaps Jason's history contained further pejorative references to the brothers beyond those that, we shall see, the epitomizer has retained. The letters in 1:1—2:18 are later additions to the epitomizer's work.

<sup>8</sup> The pattern is commonly in use during this period. See such contemporary Jewish writings as Jubilees, The Assumption of Moses, and The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs.



A. Two prefixed letters	1:1—2:18
B. The epitomizer's prolog	2:19-32
C. BLESSING: Jerusalem during the priesthood of Onias	3:1-40 (Deut. 28:1-14; 32:7-14)
D. SIN: Hellenization of Jerusalem under Jason and Menelaus	4:1—5:10 (28:15; 32:15-18)
E. PUNISHMENT: Antiochus' reprisals	5:11—6:17 (28:16-68; 32:19-25)
F. TURNING POINT: Deaths of the martyrs	6:18—7:42 (30:2; 32:26-33)
G. JUDGMENT AND SALVATION: The victories of Judas	8:1—15:36 (30:3-10; 32:34-43)
H. The epitomizer's epilog	15:37-39

The peace and prosperity of Jerusalem during the days of Onias III are attributed to the fact that "the laws were very well observed because of the piety of the high priest" (3:1). Here, as throughout the book, the temple and its status are in focus (3:2-3). The Heliodorus incident is cited as an example of how God protects the temple as long as His people are obedient (3:39; cf. 5:18). Incidentally, the story is the first of a number of "manifestations" (*epiphaneia*) that the author recounts as illustrations of divine intervention in the affairs of Israel.

The account of the Hellenization of Jerusalem (4:1—5:10) is the main source of our information on these events, which are barely referred to in 1 Maccabees (1:11-15). The author has his reasons for including this material. He wishes to show the extent to which Israel or its leaders have forsaken the covenant and violated the laws (4:7, 11-15, 25, 34, 39, 50; 5:6). Here, in our author's view, lies the real reason for the disaster that subsequently befalls the nation. He glosses over the fact that Antiochus is acting to quell a revolt (5:11) and moves to what he considers to be the heart of the matter. God is shaving with a hired razor. Antiochus is the

agent of divine judgment on the people who have violated the covenant (5:17-18; cf. 4:16-17),<sup>9</sup> and since the temple has been a principal site of the Hellenizers' sin (4:14, 32, 42), divine judgment falls swiftly on the house of the Lord. (5:15-20; 6:2-5)

The grisly horror of Antiochus' persecution is recounted in dramatic fashion in the stories of the martyrs: Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother (6:18-31; 7:1-42). The stories reveal a paradox. The persecution is punishment for Israel's sin (7:18); yet these martyrs are put to death precisely because they refuse to disobey the Torah and capitulate to the sin of Hellenizing (6:27, 30; 7:2, 9, 11, 23, 37). It is this obedience and these innocent deaths that mark the next step in the historical drama (F). Chapter 7 in particular is the turning point in the book, the linchpin in Jason's history. The brothers and their mother believe and confess that God will again have mercy on His people. As evidence, they make explicit reference to what "Moses declared in his song" (7:6), quoting that part of Deu-

<sup>9</sup> The author has already mentioned several incidents of individual punishment: chapter 3; 4:36-38; 5:8-10.



teronomy 32 (v. 36) which describes God's salvation in the final part of the historical scheme (G). The last brother expresses the reason for their belief that God's wrath will turn to mercy.

I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, *appealing to God to show mercy* soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that He alone is God, and *through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty* which has justly fallen on our whole nation. (7:37-38)

The obedient deaths of the brothers are a vicarious act of repentance, intended to give God cause to change His wrath against Israel to mercy and, on the other hand, to execute vengeance on the oppressor for his slaughter of the innocent. (See 8:2-4.)

Here we meet in new dress the old hasidic story, first recounted of Taxo and his sons and then applied to Mattathias and his sons.<sup>10</sup> In all three cases the function of the story is the same. It describes the event that triggers divine judgment against the oppressor. The Assumption of Moses, written in the heat of the persecution, anticipates an apocalyptic catastrophe (10:1 ff.). First Maccabees, after the fact, and with its strong pro-Hasmonean stance, cites the Maccabean victories as the enactment of judgment against the Syrians (2:66-68). Judas has wielded the sword of the Lord. Jason of Cyrene knows full well that, in point of historical fact, it was Judas Maccabeus who

<sup>10</sup> A comparative literary analysis of these stories is beyond the scope of this article. It is left to the ingenuity of the curious reader. The present writer will publish his own analysis in a forthcoming volume of the *Harvard Theological Studies*.

turned back the Syrian armies and brought deliverance to Israel. However, different from the author of 1 Maccabees, Jason remains true to the hasidic ideology of the original story. As he tells the story, it is the death of the martyrs that makes possible the victories of Judas. The brothers anticipate God's *mercy* (7:6) and offer their deaths as an appeal for the end of His *wrath* (7:38). Chapter 8 spells out progressively the sequel (vv. 1-5, 27-28). The Gentiles cannot withstand Judas, for God's *wrath* toward Israel has turned to *mercy* (8:5). It has turned to mercy because of the blood of the martyrs which cries to heaven. (8:3)

Thus the final act of the historical drama unfolds. Antiochus is struck down by an act of divine judgment (chapter 9). The temple is regained, purified, and rededicated (10:1-8). The Maccabean army continues on its road to victory. Finally, when Nicanor attempts a campaign against the temple (chapters 14—15), he is slain in a battle that is described as a divine manifestation. The people sing the praises of Him "who has kept His own place undefiled" (15:34). The story has gone full circle. Divine blessing has returned to Israel, and the sanctuary is once more secure. The divine Judge has acted. Wickedness has been punished and righteousness rewarded.

Or has it? There still remains the question of the violent deaths of the hasidic heroes. This problem is treated in Jason's passages on resurrection. The most important of these occur in chapter 7. At the heart of the problem is the fact that the martyrs are dying precisely *because* they choose to obey the Torah—surely a confounding of most Old Testament canons



of divine justice. The answer to this problem is resurrection, which is God's undoing of these violent and unjust deaths.

*You dismiss us from this present life,  
but the King of the world will raise us  
to an everlasting renewal of life,  
because we have died for His laws. (7:9)*

From Heaven I got these [tongue and hands],  
And for His laws I disregard them,  
And from Him I hope to get them back again. (7:11)

It is preferable to be put to death by men  
And await the hope given by God to be raised by Him. (7:14)

The resurrection will be an act of God's judgment. In this story we are witnessing a trial in which the brothers are condemned for violating the king's command. Constitutive in their civil disobedience is their obedience to the divine law. Regarding this, their mother tells them:

Therefore the Creator of the world . . . will again give you life and breath . . . because you now disregard yourselves for His laws. (7:23; cf. 7:9)

Although they are *condemned* in a human court for disobeying the king's law, at the resurrection they will be *vindicated* in the divine court because they have obeyed the law of the "King of the world" (7:9). Theirs will be a bodily resurrection (7:10-11), and this is specifically appealed to as a remedy for their bodily tortures. God will heal what Antiochus has hurt; He will bring to life those whom Antiochus has killed. What God created He will recreate—in spite of the king's attempt to destroy it (7:22-23, 28-29). Similar views on resurrection occur in 12:39-45 and 14:37-46.

One final observation about 2 Macca-

bees is in order. The author closes his history before the death of Judas. The accomplishments of Jonathan and Simon are ignored. Moreover, when the exploits of Judas are related, the central figures are never "Judas and his brothers," as in the early chapters of 1 Maccabees, but rather the more vague "Judas [or Maccabeus] and those with him."<sup>11</sup> Jonathan is mentioned only once in 2 Maccabees, in a matter-of-fact statement that Judas' brothers served as his generals (8:22). In addition to this passage, Simon is mentioned twice. In 10:20 we are told that "the men with Simon, who were money hungry, were bribed. . . ." The other passage describes a battle in which "Simon had been temporarily checked . . ." only to be relieved when the enemy heard about "the valor of Judas and those with him" (14:15-18). For 2 Maccabees *the* Hasmonean hero is Judas, "who was ever in body and soul the defender of his fellow citizens" (15:30). Mattathias is never mentioned. Jonathan and Simon are all but ignored, and where Simon is mentioned, he appears in a bad light.

#### SUMMARY

The years 141—70 B. C. witnessed the ascending glory and power of the Hasmonian kingdom. However, Simon and John and his son Alexander had their enemies and opponents within Israel. To our knowledge these were mainly the Essenes and the Pharisees, the successors of the *Hasidim*. Over against this opposition, the

<sup>11</sup> The Greek is *peri* or *syn*. Note the first mention of Maccabeus, 5:27: "Judas Maccabeus and about nine others." The only occurrence of the expression "Judas . . . and his brothers" in 2 Maccabees is in the prolog, where it may well refer to the ill deeds of the brothers.



author of 1 Maccabees maintains the legitimacy of the Hasmonean line, proclaiming them as *the family* that delivered Israel. He relates their deeds, through which God accomplished this deliverance, and calls to mind the popular acclaim that prompted Jonathan and Simon to assume the leadership.

Second Maccabees, on the other hand, appears to issue from the successors of the *Hasidim*, that is, the opponents of the Hasmoneans. The later Hasmoneans are mainly ignored. The real heroes of the piece are the hasidic martyrs: Eleazar, the seven brothers and their mother, Razis, and countless unnamed persons who died rather than transgress the laws of their fathers. The author makes it clear that it was only because of the obedient heroism of the martyrs that Judas and his men were able to wage a successful war against the Syrians. Judas himself is called the leader of the *Hasidim* (14:6). His concern for the Torah is repeatedly asserted (5:27; 6:21; 8:26, 28; 10:26; 12:38, 43). Before his last battle, he is commissioned in an apparition of Onias, the hasidic high priest who had been deposed by Jason, the first of the Hellenizing high priests. If Judas' prayers and speeches in 1 Maccabees depict him as a pious man, the point is belabored in 2 Maccabees. Finally, the author of the latter attributes to Judas a belief in resurrection, which together with the references in chapter 7 may suggest a Pharisaic origin for 2 Maccabees.

The author of 2 Maccabees writes with the internal situation of Palestine in mind. He intends to confute the kind of interpretation of 2d-century history expressed in 1 Maccabees. He does so by asserting the heroism and redemptive activity of the

hasidic martyrs, enlisting Judas into their ranks and ignoring the accomplishments of the later Hasmoneans. He may also be writing with a view toward the Gentile world. His scheme of history, as well as his specific interpretive comments (5:18-20; 6:12-16), make clear that the disaster that befell Israel was a consequence of the nation's sins and not due to any weakness on the part of its God. The negative form of the brothers' strictures against Antiochus (7:16, 18, 19, 34-35: "do *not* think," and so forth) may be intended as a warning to the Gentiles to keep hands off Israel. The grim fulfillment of the brothers' prophecies (chapter 9) serves as documentation of the consequences. Finally, many of the adjectives used to describe the heroes suggest an audience that valued the virtues of the Hellenistic world.<sup>12</sup> The author may have in mind either Gentiles or Jews who had adopted those aspects of Hellenism that did not conflict with a strict *observance* of the Torah.<sup>13</sup>

Our study has dealt with two different and, at points, diametrically opposing interpretations of the same historical events. Each author starts with his own presuppositions and his own ideas of who the heroes are and who the villains are. The resultant interpretations were bound to clash. The exercise serves to alert us to the pitfalls of overly facile conclusions about the directions of God's footprints in

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, 6:27 f., 31; 7:12, 20 f.; 12:42; 14:18, 43.

<sup>13</sup> The penetration of Greek *language* and *thought patterns* into Palestinian Judaism was deep, but is here to be distinguished from the kind of Hellenization that led to an abandonment of the laws and against which the *Hasidim* protested.



history. Other literature contemporary to 1 and 2 Maccabees makes the point even clearer. Whereas 1 Maccabees describes Simon's murder as an act of perfidy, the Essene Scrolls of Qumran see it as an act of divine judgment. First Maccabees rides the crest of the wave of the Hasmonean successes and extols the glories of the House of the Lord's anointed priests. The last section of the Book of Enoch (chapters 92—104), written almost contemporary with 1 Maccabees, berates what it considers to be the excesses of the Hasmonean rulers and their aristocratic hangers-on. The writer warns that their present

prosperity is no sure sign of divine favor, and he thunders woes against them in the face of the imminent judgment. Indeed, Enoch's most frequent term for 1 Maccabees' God-fearing heroes is "the sinners." History seems to cry out for interpretation, and theologians are quick to take up the challenge. The combined message of these documents is that the exercise should be carried out carefully, tentatively, and with humility. The God of history defies and, perhaps more often than not, eludes the historians—both professional and arm-chair.

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Readers with a more detailed concern for the contents of 1 and 2 Maccabees and the history of this period will find much new light shed on these matters in *The Anchor Bible* commentary on 1 and 2 Maccabees, presently being prepared by my colleague, Jonathan Goldstein, who was kind enough to read a draft of this article and make a number of valuable suggestions.