

## Week 35, Lecture 110.<sup>1</sup> The Story of Mattathias Begins, 1 Macc 2:1-28

### The Family of Mattathias; His Lament, 1 Macc 2:1-14

**1 Macc 2:1-5.** In those days **Mattathias** the son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in **Modein**.<sup>2</sup> He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi,<sup>3</sup> Simon called Thassi,<sup>4</sup> Judas called Maccabeus,<sup>5</sup> Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

#### Remark from Josephus

Accordingly Matthias, the son of **Asamoneus**, one of the priests who lived in a village called Modin, armed himself, together with his whole family, which had five sons of his in it,<sup>2</sup>

Josephus makes him Mattathias the “son” of **Asamoneus**, after whom the **Hasmonean dynasty** will be named.

**Modein** is about 7 miles East of Lydda, modern Lod, site of Ben Gurion Airport, the main entrance to modern Israel.

Surnames	Meaning <sup>3</sup>	
Gaddi	Fortunate, “Lucky”	
Thassi	Burning,	[speculation is futile]
Maccabeus	Designated by YHWH	the Hammerer, hammer-headed, hammer-like
Avaran	Awake	Paleface
Appus	Favorite	[possibly from the word “to desire”]

**2 Macc 2:6-14.** He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem,<sup>7</sup> and said,

**The Lament of Mattathias** (note the many examples of synonymous parallelism)

“Alas! **Why was I born** to see this, the ruin of my people,  
the ruin of the holy city,

and to dwell there when it was given over to the enemy,  
the sanctuary given over to aliens?

<sup>8</sup> **Her temple** has become like a man without honor;

<sup>9</sup> her glorious vessels have been carried into captivity.

**Her babes** have been killed in her streets,

her youths by the sword of the foe.

<sup>10</sup> What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils?

<sup>11</sup> All her adornment has been taken away;

no longer free, she has become a slave.

<sup>12</sup> And behold, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste;

the Gentiles have profaned it.

<sup>13</sup> **Why should we live** any longer?”

**Narrator’s conclusion.**

<sup>14</sup> And Mattathias and his sons rent their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.<sup>4</sup>

Inclusion begins

Inclusion ends

### “Inclusion” formed by Questions

The first question is in the singular, “Why was **I** born?” The second one is plural, “Why should **we** live?”

The effect is to make the prayer of Mattathias the prayer of the reader.

### The Revolt Begins at Modein, 1 Macc 2:15-28

**The King’s Officers Arrive, 2:15-16.** Then the king’s officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> Many from Israel **came to them**; and Mattathias and his sons **were assembled**.<sup>17</sup> Then the king’s officers spoke to Mattathias as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Lectures are numbered consecutively. Although this is this week’s first lecture, its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

<sup>2</sup> *Wars*, 1.36, accessed via *BibleWorks*. According to McEleney (“1 Maccabees,” *NJBC*, 427) he was actually the grandson of Asamoneus.

<sup>3</sup> McEleney, *ibid.*; Jonathan A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 41, AYB (Yale, 2008), 232. Doran (“1 Maccabees,” 42-43) says the meanings are “enigmatic,” but thinks “Hammerer” is most likely.

<sup>4</sup> All scripture quotes are from the RSV.

### “Came to them,” *prosēlthon*

The Greek word is related to the word “proselyte.” The implication is that they came willingly.<sup>5</sup>

### “Were assembled.” (RSV, NRSV); “came together” (KJV)

These translations give the picture of Mattathias & sons standing **with** the people, **as a distinct group**.

Other translations portray them as **more aloof** from the rest of the populace.

“**but** Mattathias and his sons gathered **in a group apart**.” (NAB)

“**but** Mattathias and his sons **drew together**.” (NABRE)

Many Israelites came up to meet them, **and** Mattathias and his sons **were brought** into the gathering.<sup>6</sup>

This final is by **Goldstein**. He translates the verb as **passive** rather than **reflexive** (all other translations).

He contrasts this with the **active** verb *prosēlthon*, which describes the willing participation of the others.

The Greek word *kai* normally means “**and**.” But the underlying Hebrew word could also mean “**but**.”

This illustrates one of the complications of translating biblical Greek.

**Speech of the King’s Officer, 2:17-18.** “You are a leader, honored and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers.<sup>18</sup> Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and **the men of Judah** and those that are **left in Jerusalem** have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the **friends** of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts.”

**Comments.** The address is respectful.

It points out that many of the people living in Jerusalem & Judea have complied.

Did they see this as a betrayal of their religion? Or did they regard the new practices as “reforms?”

In the contemporary USA, Reform Jews do not have a problem with eating items that are not “kosher.”

Was honoring the emperor’s birthday just being “patriotic,” like saying “The Pledge of Allegiance?”

### **Friends of the King.** McEleney gives 4 classes of friends.<sup>7</sup>

From lowest to highest: friends, honored friends, first friends, first and preferred friends

**The Speech of Mattathias, 2:19-22.** **But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice:** “Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers,<sup>20</sup> yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers.<sup>21</sup> Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances.<sup>22</sup> We will not obey the king’s words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.”

Mattathias views following the commands of the kings as a betrayal of his religion.

For him and his family, there will be no compromise about observing traditional practices.

**Aftermath of the Speech, 2:23.** **When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein, according to the king’s command.**

Obviously, at least one other Jew saw things differently.

Was he a “plant?” Would others follow? We never find out.

**The Actions of Mattathias, 2:24-25.** **When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar.<sup>25</sup> At the same time he killed the king’s officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar.**

### **Three actions**

1) the killing of the Jew sacrificing; 2) the killing of the king’s officer; 3) tearing down the altar.

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<sup>5</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 232. For those who know some Greek *pros-* is the prefix. *ēlthon* is a past tense of the irregular verb *erxchomai* (come), and *eleusomai* is the future. The *ēlutos* of “proselyte” (*prosēlutos*) comes from *eleus-omai*

<sup>6</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 229.

<sup>7</sup> McEleney, “1 Maccabees,” *NJBC*, 427.

These three actions are **motivated by “zeal.”**

Biblical zeal is not simply “piety” or “love of religion.” It is **violence** on behalf of religion.

In NT times, not to long after this, those who opposed Roman rule with violence were called “Zealots.”

N.T. Wright, in a book about Paul, describes the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin as a modern act of zealotry.

Rabin had entered into peace negotiations with Egypt. His assassin regarded him as a traitor, not “a real Jew.”

**Narrator’s Evaluation, 2:26.** Thus he burned with **zeal** for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu.

The narrator has already designated the zealous actions of Mattathias as the result of “righteous anger.”

He is in agreement with the political-religious views of Mattathias.

Here he compares the **zeal** of Mattathias with the **zeal** of Phinehas, grandson of Aaron.

**Phinehas.** The story is found in Numbers 25:6-15.

A plague has struck Israel. Moses attributes this to consorting with pagans & worshipping their gods.

An Israelite, in full view of Moses and the people, takes a Midianite woman into his tent.

Moved by **zeal**, Phinehas takes his spear, and enters the tent.

He kills the Israelite man and the Midianite woman with a single thrust of his spear.

The narrator of numbers reports: “Thus the plague was stayed from the people of Israel.”

Psalms 106:28-31 praises Phinehas;

Sirach 45:23-24 also praises him, and states that his family have an “eternal priesthood” because he was **zealous**.

**Conclusion, 2:27-28.** Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" <sup>28</sup> And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city.

**The Call to Resistance.** “Zealous for the law” means “willing to **fight** for our religion.”

Observation: Those who think that Islam is inherently more violent than Judaism or Christianity have not read Maccabees!

Or Joshua, or many other parts of the OT & NT.

Nor have such people read the history of the crusades.

**The Response?**

We are told that Mattathias and his sons fled to the hills. We are not told how many others joined them.

The editor is a supporter of Mattathias. He could have ended with, “and all the other men followed him.”

He did not.

## Week 35, Lecture 111. The Revolt Continues, 1 Macc 2:29-48

**The Fate of “Those Seeking Righteousness”**

**1 Macc 2:29-38.** Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the **wilderness** to dwell there, <sup>30</sup> they, **their sons, their wives, and their cattle**, because evils pressed heavily upon them. <sup>31</sup> And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in **Jerusalem the city of David**, that men who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. <sup>32</sup> Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the **sabbath** day. <sup>33</sup> And they said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live." <sup>34</sup> But they said, "We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day." <sup>35</sup> Then the enemy hastened to attack them. <sup>36</sup> But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, <sup>37</sup> for they said, "Let us all die in our **innocence**; **heaven and earth testify** for us that you are killing us unjustly." <sup>38</sup> So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of a thousand persons.

**Wilderness.** The Wilderness of Judea was a traditional hiding place. David hid out from Saul there.

**Not Guerilla Warriors**

These “seekers of righteousness” were not out to fight against the king.

They took their wives and their cattle with them. They just wanted to go to a place where they would be left alone.

### Jerusalem, the City of David.

Due to what I call “Lucan sleight of hand,” many Christians think of Bethlehem when they think of “the city of David.” The phrase occurs 49 times in the OT (RSV), where it always refers to Jerusalem, never once to Bethlehem. It occurs twice in the NT (Luke 2:4 & 2:11), both times referring not to Jerusalem, but to Bethlehem!

**Innocence, *haplotēs*.** This rare word occurs only 7x in the Greek OT, 8x in the NT.

Later in this chapter (verse 60) it will be used to describe the actions of Daniel’s resistance to King Nebuchadnezzar.

**Heaven & Earth Testify.** Doran: frequently “heaven and earth” are called to witness covenant violations.<sup>8</sup>

**Dying for the Sabbath.** We saw a brief reference to this event in 2 Macc 6:11.

These “seekers of righteousness” are not described as pacifists. They do not object to killing enemies in war. Rather, it is violating the Sabbath that is their concern.

Doran: the total destruction of all the people & the animals is reminiscent of “the ban” inflicted by Joshua on Canaanites<sup>9</sup>

**Josephus** alludes to this strict type of religious observance of some Jews.

**Quoting Agatharchides:** <sup>209</sup> “There are a people called Jews, and dwell in a city the strongest of all other cities, which the inhabitants call Jerusalem, and are accustomed to **rest on every seventh day**; on which times they make **no use of their arms**, nor meddle with husbandry, nor take care of any affairs of life, but spread out their hands in their holy places, and pray till the evening.” . . . [Josephus replies] <sup>212</sup> Now this our procedure seems a ridiculous thing to Agatharchides, but will appear to such as consider it without prejudice a great thing, and what deserved a great many encomiums; I mean, when **certain men constantly prefer the observation of their laws, and their religion toward God, before the preservation of themselves and their country.**<sup>10</sup>

### The Response of Mattathias & Company

**2Macc 2:39-48.** When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. <sup>40</sup> And each said to his neighbor: “If we all do as our brethren have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, **they will quickly destroy us** from the earth.” <sup>41</sup> So they made this decision that day: “Let us fight against every man who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our brethren died in their hiding places.” <sup>42</sup> Then there united with them a company of **Hasideans**, mighty warriors of Israel, every one who offered himself willingly for the law. <sup>43</sup> And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. <sup>44</sup> They organized an **army**, and **struck down sinners** in their anger and **lawless men** in their wrath; the survivors **fled to the Gentiles** for safety. <sup>45</sup> And Mattathias and his friends went about and **tore down the altars**; <sup>46</sup> they **forcibly circumcised** all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. <sup>47</sup> They hunted down the **arrogant men**, and the work prospered in their hands. <sup>48</sup> They **rescued the law** out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

“**They will destroy us from the earth.**” The narrator states that they “**rescued the law.**”

However, Doran states that the primary objective of the Maccabees is not the **preservation of the law.**

It is the **preservation of Israel.**

**Hasideans.** These appear again in 1 Macc 7:13; 2 Macc 14:6.

They were an extremely Torah observant group. The Greek *Asidaioi* appears to come from *Hasidīm*, “pious ones.”

Some scholars link them as ancestors of both the Essenes (Dead Sea) and the Pharisees.<sup>11</sup>

The editorial placement of the episode shows that the author is anxious to show this religious group allied the Maccabees. However, later in the story (7:13), the Hasideans will be willing to make peace before the Maccabees are willing.

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<sup>8</sup> Doran, “1 Maccabees,” *NIB* 4. 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.209-212, accessed via *BibleWorks*.

<sup>11</sup> Doran, “1 Maccabees,” 47.

**Army.** Doran calls this a “grandiose term” for a rag-tag band of resisters.

**Struck Down “Sinners, Lawless men”** (*hamartoloi, andres a-nomoi*)

Phrase echoes the “sinful (*harmartolos*) nation,” and “renegade men” (*andres para-nomoi*). Those in the Akra in 1:34. These are almost certainly **fellow Jews** who are cooperating with “the enemy.”

The **forcible circumcision** taking place is clear evidence the fight of the Maccabees was not just against Gentiles. Also, the fact that they “**fled to the Gentiles**” is an indication they were Jewish.

## Week 35, Lecture 112. The Death of Mattathias, 1 Macc 2:49-71

**Narrator’s Introduction 2:49.** Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons:

### The Final Speech of Mattathias

**Introduction, 2:50-51.** Arrogance and reproach have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. <sup>50</sup> Now, my children, show **zeal** for the law, and **give your lives** for the **covenant** of our fathers. <sup>51</sup> Remember the deeds of the fathers, which they did in their generations; and receive **great honor** and an **everlasting name**.

### Final Speech as a Genre

Other examples: Jacob (Genesis 49), Moses (Deuteronomy 33), Joshua 23, Samuel (1 Samuel 12), David (1 Kings 2). John 13-17 will give an extended “final speech” to Jesus in his version of the Last Supper.

### Themes

**Zeal.** This is not simply “devotion.” It is willingness to **fight to the death**.

Like the martyrs, these “zealots” are willing to die for their beliefs.

### Great Honor / Everlasting Name

Unlike 2 Maccabees, the author of 1 Maccabees does not have the new hope or resurrection from the dead.

Rather his hopes are more “traditional.” Belief in individual resurrection was a **new belief** at this time.

As Jesus’ controversy with the Sadducees will show, even 2 centuries into the future, the belief was not yet universal.

**List of Heroes.** <sup>52</sup> Was not **Abraham** found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? <sup>53</sup> **Joseph** in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. <sup>54</sup> **Phinehas** our father, because he was deeply **zealous**, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. <sup>55</sup> **Joshua**, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. <sup>56</sup> **Caleb**, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. <sup>57</sup> **David**, because he was **merciful**, inherited the throne of the kingdom for ever. <sup>58</sup> **Elijah** because of great **zeal** for the law was taken up into heaven. <sup>59</sup> **Hannaniah, Azariah, and Mishael** believed and were saved from the flame. <sup>60</sup> **Daniel** because of his innocence was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

**Abraham** willingness to sacrifice his son, a parallel to the current situation

**Joseph** he resisted the seduction of a foreign woman, Potiphar’s wife

**Jubilees.** But he did not surrender his soul, and he remembered the Lord and the words which Jacob, his father, used to read from amongst the words of Abraham, that no man should commit fornication with a woman who has a husband; that for him the punishment of death has been ordained in the heavens before the Most High God, and the sin will be recorded against him in the eternal books continually before the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

Zealous Phinehas (we have already explained this)

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<sup>12</sup> *Jubilees* 39:6, accessed via *BibleWorks*. I misspoke in the lecture, and said “Josephus” instead of Jubilees.

**Joshua** imposed “the ban” on Canaanites; summoned Israel to worship YHWH alone

**Caleb** along with Joshua, the only spy to urge fighting against the “giants” who inhabited Canaan

**Merciful (?) David** A mistranslation of *hesed* (cf. Psalm 118)

The Greek *eleos* (mercy, cf. *kyrie eleison*) often translates the Hebrew *hesed* (covenant love).

Kings in their greatness he slew for his mercy is everlasting!

He slew Sihon, King of the Amorites for his mercy is everlasting!

He slew Og, King of Bashan for his mercy is everlasting!

This does not sound too “merciful.” The problem is the English translation.

It is “covenant love.” God did not have a covenant with Sihon and Og. They were beating up on his covenant people!

So God’s slaying of these kings was “merciful,” i.e., **loyalty** to those with whom he had a covenant.

So a better translation would be **David’s** “loyalty” to God’s covenant.

**Hannaniah, Azariah, Mishael** 3 young men in the fiery furnace, rather than worship false gods

**Daniel** Lion’s den rather than worship false gods

**Two-Fold “Moral” of Story. 2:61-63.** And so observe, from generation to generation, that none who put their trust in him will lack strength. <sup>62</sup> Do not fear the words of a sinner, for his splendor will turn into dung and worms. <sup>63</sup> Today he will be exalted, but tomorrow he will not be found, because he has returned to the dust, and his plans will perish.

1) God rewards the righteous

2) Do not fear sinners -- they are mortal; their power is only temporary.

**Final Exhortation, 2:64-68.** My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will **gain honor**. <sup>65</sup>

"Now behold, I know that Simeon your brother is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. <sup>66</sup>

Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. <sup>67</sup> You shall rally about you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people.

<sup>68</sup> Pay back the Gentiles in full, and heed what the law commands."

Mattathias divides up the responsibilities. Simeon is the overall leader; Judas is to be the “general.”

The relationship of Moses and Joshua seems to provide a model.

The commands to “avenge the wrong” and “pay back in full” are concrete examples of **zeal**.

### **Narrator’s Conclusion**

<sup>69</sup> Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his fathers. <sup>70</sup> He died in the **one hundred and forty-sixth year** and was buried in the tomb of his fathers at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation. (RSV)

“Gathered to his fathers.” The phrase is traditional in biblical death scenes.

**146<sup>th</sup> year**, i.e., of the reign of the Seleucids. Commentators give this as 166 B.C.