

JUDAS MACCABEUS

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Son of the priest Mattathias, and, after his father's death, leader against the Syrians. When he entered on the war he must have been in the prime of his manhood. At first he did not fight pitched battles, but made unexpected night attacks upon villages and small towns on the edge of the desert, in order to drive out the Syrians, destroy the heathen altars, and punish Jewish traitors (I Macc. iii. 8; II Macc. viii. 1; Josephus, "Ant." xii. 6, § 4).

He and his brothers probably had then only a small troop of fugitives about them, as his father had had, and could not carry on an open warfare; it was the continued small conflicts that gradually created for him an organized army.

At first only the Syrian local authorities who were immediately concerned paid any attention to the Jewish rebellion. Apollonius, strategus of Samaria, attacked Judas with his army, but was defeated and slain, and his sword was thenceforth borne by Judas; on that occasion the Jews took a great deal of booty (I Macc. iii. 10-12; "Ant." xii. 7, § 1).

This victory must have brought Judas many recruits, and the news of the battle moved Seron, strategus of Cœle-Syria, to march against him with a considerable army, including many Jewish traitors. The small Jewish band, weak with fasting, was at first dismayed by the might of the enemy, but Judas succeeded in inflaming their zeal for the holy cause, and they gave battle in the narrow pass of Bethhoron, northwest of Jerusalem. The Syrians were defeated and pursued as far as the plain; 800 of them fell, and the rest fled into the country of the Philistines (I Macc. iii. 13-14; Josephus, l.c.).

Syrians Advance Against Judas.

Antiochus undertook an expedition (166-165 B.C.) into Persia (I Macc. iii. 37); he needed money to meet the war-tax of the Romans, and the tax-income from Judea had been interrupted by the disturbances; he left the government and his minor son, Antiochus V., in the care of Lysias, a man of royal blood. Lysias then sent Ptolemy, son of Darymenes (II Macc. viii. 8 makes him strategus of Cœle-Syria and Phenicia), Nicanor, son of Patroclus, and Gorgias—men experienced in war—to Judea with an army of 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry; they went as far as Emmaus ("Ant." xii. 7, § 3).

Victory seemed to the Syrians so assured that they had Phenician traders with them in camp prepared to buy as slaves the captives whom they expected to take; the money was intended by Nicanor to defray the Roman war-tax (II Macc. viii. 10). The Jews assembled in Mizpah, the old place of worship (I Macc. iii. 46; Josephus and II Macc. do not name the place), where, in sackcloth and ashes, they observed a solemn day of prayer and repentance.

Judas' 3,000 men were scantily armed; he had no cavalry, and there were not even enough helmets and swords for his force; but his followers were well disciplined (I Macc. iii. 55, iv. 6; comp. vi. 6; "Ant." xii. 7, §§ 3-4). According to another authority, Judas had as many as 6,000 men, who were divided into four equal companies of 1,500, and commanded by four of the Maccabean brothers, the first division by Judas himself; the fifth brother, Eleazar, read aloud from the Bible (comp. the difficult passage I Macc. iii. 48), and gave the password: "Help of God" (II Macc. viii. 16-23).

This authority deserves credence in preference to I Maccabees or Josephus (who slavishly follows I Macc.). By a stratagem, Judas gained an advantage over Gorgias (I Macc. iv. 1-25; "Ant." xii. 7, § 4), overcame both him and Nicanor, and killed 9,000 Syrians (perhaps 900); he captured much spoil, including the money of the Phenician traders (II Macc. viii. 23-25). It is probably only a tradition that this battle took place on Sabbath eve and that the stricter Jews were thereby prevented from pursuing the enemy (II Macc. viii. 23-29).

Ḥanukkah

The next battle was with Lysias himself (autumn of 165 B.C.), who approached from the south, where he had hoped to find support from the Idumeans. The two armies met at Beth-zur, south of Jerusalem and on the road to Hebron. Judas, although much weaker, gained a brilliant victory and compelled Lysias to retreat to Antioch (I Macc. iv. 26-35; "Ant." xii. 7, § 5; II Macc. xi. 1-15 places Lysias' campaign much later and makes the enemies conclude peace with each other, which can hardly be true). Judas and his associates could now enter Jerusalem; only the citadel, the Acra, remained in the hands of the Syrian garrison; with them, probably, were also the Jewish traitors, perhaps with the high priest Menelaus at their head. The first thing the patriots did was to reconsecrate the profaned Temple, and with this is connected the origin of the Ḥanukkah feast. This closes the first period of the Maccabean revolt.

Judas was left in peace for about two years. But the small neighboring tribes, which did not like to see the Jews once more in power, arose again, as in the time of Nehemiah. Judas punished first the Idumeans in Acrabatene, in the region of the Dead Sea; then the tribe of Baans. He proceeded next against the Ammonites in the land east of the Jordan, who were led by Timotheus; took their city Jaazer, and made their wives and children captives (I Macc. v. 1-8; "Ant." xii. 8, § 1). The Jews in Gilead, who had taken refuge in the fortress Diathema, sent word to Judas that they were severely beset by Timotheus, and begged for aid; other messengers reported the straits of the Jews in Galilee, who likewise were harassed by their neighbors. Judas sent his brother Simeon to Galilee with 3,000 men; the enemies of the Jews were punished, and the comparatively few Jews there were transferred to Jerusalem with their wives and children.

March Against Gilead.

Judas and his brother Jonathan went next against Gilead with 8,000 men, leaving the remainder of the army to Joseph b. Zechariah and Azarias, who, contrary to orders, fought with Gorgias for the possession of Jabneh, and suffered a severe defeat. They

"came not of the seed of those by whose hand deliverance was given unto Israel" (I Macc. v. 62). Judas and Jonathan fought with great success in Gilead; the city of Bosor was taken and Timotheus put to flight; the latter, indeed, gathered his forces together again, but was again defeated. The Jews of Gilead were transferred also to Judea, whither Judas returned victoriously by way of Scythopolis, after being compelled to fight his way through Ephron (I Macc. v. 3-50; "Ant." xii. 8, §§ 2-5). Judas had been successful in all these battles, which were planned with great skill.

Battle at Beth-zur.

Meanwhile, Antiochus IV. died (164 B.C.; Seleucidan era 148, not 149 as in I Macc. vi. 16).

Before his death he appointed his trusted friend Philip as regent and guardian of his son. There was really no government to keep watch on the Jews. Thus Judas undertook the siege of the Acra, the garrison of which continually annoyed those who attended the Temple, although the latter was strongly fortified. Some in the Acra, among them renegade Jews, escaped and fled to Antioch, bitterly complaining that they, who had remained faithful to the king, were threatened in life and property.

Thereupon another strong army was sent into Judea; Lysias commanded 100,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalry, and 32 elephants; the young king, nine years of age, marched with him. It was an imposing army, such as the Jews, probably, had never previously seen. The Syrians could not, indeed, easily capture the fortified Beth-zur, yet Judas was obliged to abandon the siege of the Acra and turn against the enemy.

A battle ensued (162 B.C.) at Bath-zacharias, four hours north of Beth-zur. One of the brothers, Eleazar, was killed in the execution of an act of daring; Judas, too, was conquered, and Beth-zur fell into the hands of the Syrians (I Macc. vi. 28-48 [where the defeat is scarcely mentioned]; "Ant." xii. 8, §§ 3-5; "B. J." i. 1, § 5; in II Macc. xiii. 1-17 a victory is made of it).

The Syrian army then besieged the Temple mount; the besieged, who had their brethren from Galilee and Gilead among them, were in want of provisions, since it was the Sabbatical year (Seleucidan era 150), and hence they sued for peace. Lysias granted them complete religious freedom, which was what they had been fighting for, and this right was not again taken from them. The Jews were compelled, however, to submit to the Syrians, as before the war, and even the fortifications of the Temple were destroyed (I Macc. vi. 49-54; "Ant." xii. 9, § 5; II Macc. xiii. 18-22).

Bacchides and Alcimus.

The cause of all the evil, Menelaus, was executed at this time ("Ant." xii. 9, § 7; II Macc. xiii. 3-8). Perhaps it was this peace with Lysias to which II Maccabees xi. 14 intended to refer, although the passage places it as early as Lysias' first campaign. Probably, Lysias concluded peace in order to be able the more easily to subdue his rival Philip.

But soon a more formidable enemy appeared in the person of the new king Demetrius I. (162-150), who put to death both Lysias and his royal ward. The renegade Jews, among them Alcimus, whom Josephus for some strange reason calls high priest, even at this stage, went to Demetrius and again complained of the persecutions they endured at the hands of Judas and his party. Demetrius, energetic and impulsive as he then was, immediately sent Bacchides to Judea with a large army, placed Alcimus under his protection, but bade him remove Judas and his companions. Bacchides endeavored to lure Judas into his power by pacific assurances; Judas, however, saw through his craft. But now internal divisions again became manifest; the Hasidæans, when they saw their religious freedom assured to them, willingly recognized Alcimus and the Syrian dominion—but to their misfortune, for Bacchides, in spite of his solemn oath, killed sixty of them, thereby cowing the others.

Although the land was by no means pacified, Bacchides went back to Antioch, leaving behind only one command to protect Alcimus. The party of Alcimus fought now with that of Judas, but the latter was the stronger, and Alcimus sent again to the king with a plea for aid (I Macc. vii. 1-25; "Ant." xii. 10, §§ 1-3).

The king sent a strong army under Nicanor (not the Nicanor of Antiochus Epiphanes), a man who had enjoyed his confidence in Rome. Nicanor also first tried stratagem, and for a time Judas believed in his friendly disposition, but he then discovered the treachery and escaped the danger in time (I Macc. vii. 26-30; "Ant." xii. 10, § 4). II Macc. xiv. 12-27 represents Nicanor as feeling real respect for Judas; he made peaceful propositions to him through Posidonius, Theodotus, and Mattathias, which were accepted; the friendship was increased by their personal acquaintance, and Nicanor is said to have advised Judas to take a wife and found a race of heroes. But Alcimus looked upon these developments with alarm, charged Nicanor with treachery before the king, and declared that Judas desired to be high priest in his stead.

Then, for the first time, hostility broke out between Nicanor and Judas, and a battle was fought at Capharsalama. Graetz, Schürer, and Wellhausen state that it ended in the defeat of Nicanor, and that is, indeed, the literal statement of I Macc. vii. 32, where it is said: "There were slain of Nicanor's side about 5,000 men, and [the rest] fled into the city of David." But one would naturally suppose that the Syrian army would flee into the Acra, since the city of David was in Judas' hands; and it is also said immediately afterward (verse 33): "After this went Nicanor up to Mount Sion": hence Judas must be intended in verse 32, not Nicanor. In fact, Josephus ("Ant." xii. 10, § 4), who always uses I Maccabees, has another version: "He beat Judas, and forced him to fly to that citadel which was at Jerusalem" (i.e., to that part of the mount fortified by Judas). Since, then, Judas had fled to Jerusalem, it is comprehensible that Nicanor, being threatened by the priesthood there, demanded his surrender (I Macc. vii. 26-38; "Ant." xii. 10, §§ 4, 5; II Macc. xiv. 11-36).

Nicanor Day.

Thereupon Nicanor proceeded to the region of Beth-horon, northwest of Jerusalem, a place situated favorably for the Jews, who were acquainted with the country; Judas encamped against him at Adasa. The battle that ensued was desperate, and ended in a glorious victory for the Jews; Nicanor fell, and his troops to the number of 9,000 were put to flight (I Macc. vii. 39-50; "Ant." xii. 10, § 5; II Macc. xv. 1-36). Judas appointed the 13th of Adar, the day of the victory (161 B.C.), as a feast-day, and it still has a place in the calendar of special days ("Megillat Ta'anit").

Was Judas High Priest?

Judas was again the ruler of the whole land. According to Josephus ("Ant." xii. 10, § 6), the sudden death of Alcimus occurring at this time, the people gave the office of high priest to Judas. Josephus ("Ant." xii. 11, § 2), in relating Judas' death, observes also that he was high priest for three years; but in another place he says that after the death of Alcimus there was an intermission of seven years in the office of high priest ("Ant." xx. 10).

Judas' three years, then, fell probably immediately after the consecration of the Temple (165-162), that is, before the election of Alcimus, who, moreover, according to I Maccabees, may possibly have died after Judas. Neither I Maccabees nor the rabbinical authorities, however, speak of Judas occupying the high-priesthood (see Grätz, "Gesch." 2d ed., ii. 365, note 3).

Treaty with Rome

I Macc. viii. (comp. "Ant." xii. 10, §§ 6, 11; II Macc. iv. 11) then relates in detail how Judas made a treaty with Rome, and describes the power of that country, probably not as it appeared to Judas, but as it appeared to the author. Judas may safely be accredited with political sagacity enough to see the advantage of suing for the favor of the Romans, for he must have observed that they were continually concerned in Syrian trade.

The narrative is also furnished with names and details, which show that it has some real foundation in fact. This is the opinion of Graetz, Schürer, and Niese. That Josephus, in "B. J." i. 1, § 4, does not mention the treaty is probably due to the fact that he is merely summarizing. Justin (xxxvi. 3, § 9) speaks of the "amicitia Romanorum" for which the Jews had asked, only it is not known whether he intends to refer it to the time of Demetrius I. or to that of Demetrius II. The document, however, which the Romans are said to have given to Judas' ambassadors (I Macc. viii. 23-30) is generally held to be not genuine.

After the defeat of Nicanor, Demetrius again sent a large army under Bacchides, which encamped near Berea (Berzetho); Judas encamped near Elasa (Eleasa). The courage of the Jews sank at the sight of the large army confronting them, and they fled, only 800 men remaining for the battle.

Judas' Death.

There was no escape for Judas. Once more he performed prodigies of valor; with a few courageous followers he put the right wing of the enemy to flight, but he was hard pressed by the left wing and fell fighting (160 B.C., in the month of Nisan). His body was concealed by his brothers and buried in Modin (I Macc. ix. 1-21; "Ant." xii. 11, § 6). The patriotic party, called "Friends of Judas," was now relentlessly persecuted.

I Macc. iii. 1-9 gives an enthusiastic description of the warlike ability, heroism, and bravery of Judas and of the punishment he inflicted upon the enemies of God, both heathen and Jews;

Josephus ("Ant." xii. 11, § 2) emphasizes the fact that Judas, like his father, Mattathias, fought for the freedom of his people and won everlasting renown. This characterization is wholly confirmed by fact. Judas' strict piety should also be emphasized; he prays to God before almost every battle; he fulfils the commandment of Deut. xx. 1-9; he sings psalms (I Macc. iv. 24); he watches for the true prophet (ib. iv. 46); he introduces Hanukkah and Nicanor Day.