

Lesson 5

From Alexander to Hanukkah & Maccabees

As we continue our study of the Intertestamental Period we follow the footsteps of significant kings and characters who influenced this period. Contrary to the popular theory that God was not active during this period the following stories will show that the Lord is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He sets up kingdoms and makes them to succeed or fail according to his perfect plan.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

In 333 B.C. the Persian armies stationed in Macedonia were defeated by Alexander the Great. Alexander was convinced that he could unite the world under the banner of the Greek culture. He conquered most of the then known world and it is said that he wept that there were no more worlds to conquer. There are some exciting records in Josephus' history concerning Alexander, Israel and the prophecies of Daniel.

Manasseh, brother of the High Priest

The elders of Jerusalem were very uneasy with Manasseh, the brother of the high priest, who had married a foreigner. The Jews considered marriage to foreigners a breaking of the command of God. Therefore they argued that Manasseh should not be a partner in the high priesthood, and quarreled with him.

They finally commanded Manasseh to divorce his wife, or not approach the altar as a priest. Whereupon Manasseh went to his father-in-law, Sanballat, and told him that he loved his wife and did not want to divorce her and that he was not willing to give up the priesthood for her since it was a noble honor and a family responsibility.

Sanballat then promised to make him a high priest and a governor of the people if he would not divorce his wife. He told him furthermore that he would even build him a temple like the one in Jerusalem, upon Mount Gerizzim, which is the highest of all the mountains in Samaria. He explained that he would accomplish this through the favor of King Darius the Persian. In the meantime many of the priests in similar circumstances fled to Sanballat and were promised a temple and position as well.

King Darius was then on his way to Syria to fight a battle against Alexander. Unfortunately for Sanballat, Darius lost the battle and even his family was taken captive.

Alexander then continued his southward descent conquering as he went to Syria, and then Damascus, then Sidon and Tyre. It was then that Alexander sent a message to Jerusalem to the Jewish high priest to send him help and provisions. The

high priest informed him that his allegiance was to Darius and therefore he could not and would not supply his troops.

Sanballat and the Temple on Mt Gerizim

Alexander was furious. He remained in Tyre but threatened that as soon as he finished there he would go to Jerusalem and teach those men with whom they should keep their oaths. From Tyre he proceeded south to Gaza where he laid siege to that city as well. It was then that Sanballat thought he had another opportunity to promote his son-in-law as high priest.

Sanballat denounced Darius and took 7,000 men to offer their services in Alexander's army. Alexander promised to allow Sanballat to build his temple to assure himself that the Jews would be a divided people. With all haste Sanballat and company built the temple on Mount Gerizim in just seven months. But then Sanballat suddenly died.

High Priest Juddua

Once Alexander had taken Gaza he moved with haste to go to Jerusalem. When the high priest Juddua heard this news he was terrified. He therefore ordered a fast and that the people should offer sacrifices to God that he would protect their nation. It was then that God warned him in a dream, which came on him at the altar of sacrifice, that he should not be discouraged but decorate the city, open the gates, and dress all the high priests in priestly fine linen and the people in white to meet King Alexander without fear of any ill consequences.

So it was, when the high priest heard that Alexander was approaching the city he ordered the processional to march as God had commanded. When they reached the high place outside the city from which you could see a panorama of Jerusalem and the Temple, they stopped.

Alexander Worshiped Yahweh

As Alexander approached he saw the procession, the multitude of priests in fine linen, the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing with his mitre on his head, and having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved. He, Alexander the Great, approached by himself bowed and worshipped that name and saluted the high priest.

Stunned, Alexander's generals thought he had lost his mind. When one general approached him and asked why he should adore a high priest of the Jews, Alexander replied.

"I did not adore him, but that God who has honored him with his high priesthood; for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would

conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind."

From there he gave the priest his hand and entered the city where he offered sacrifices to God according to the direction of the high priest. Then they took the book of Daniel* and showed Alexander where Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians. Alexander was elated and gave gifts and favor to the Jews. Whereupon he granted their request that not only in Jerusalem but in Babylon and Media as well the Jews could worship their God and enjoy their laws freely.

* The Daniel passages that speak of Alexander's conquests would have been Daniel 7:6;/ 8:3-8, 20-2, 26; and Daniel 11:3.

Video Links to Alexander the Great

2 hour History

<https://youtu.be/imRNmDnkUcE>

Alexander the Great all parts

<https://youtu.be/K7lb6KWBanI>

Hannibal

The story of Hannibal is a fascinating story of one man fighting Rome through clever strategies and technical skills almost conquered the mighty empire. It is not directly related to our history of the Intertestamental Period, but history is incomplete without reference to his use of Elephants in crossing the Alps to attack Rome. Hannibal was a worshiper of Baal. Later in life he was defeated and exiled where he found a safe have with Antiochus III, thus another connection to the Antiochus IV Epiphanes story.

Hannibal Stories from Patrick Hunt

Patrick Hunt lecture on Hannibal Crossing the Alps – 1 hour 13 minutes

https://youtu.be/q_6YAvIGT0k

Recommended Reading: *Hannibal* by Patrick Hunt

Biological warfare

https://youtu.be/q_6YAvIGT0k

Hannibal's secret weapon

<https://youtu.be/7iEi6t8rtC8>

Great battles of 2nd Punic Wars

<https://youtu.be/7iEi6t8rtC8>

History Channel 1 hr+Rome vs Hannibal

<https://youtu.be/1ahem9Mr0v0>

Hannibal Romes greatest enemy Part 1-5

<https://youtu.be/e3JPe75W-Eg>

Hannibal Romes greatest enemy Part 6-10

https://youtu.be/BWH_6ie7Pi4

Hannibal Romes greatest enemy Part 11-13 Battle of Cannae

<https://youtu.be/zDQDv-znHIE>

Engineering Rise and fall of Carthage

<https://youtu.be/Y29ExnvwWXU>

Nightmare of Rome

<https://youtu.be/qdB8r8itpAo>

PTOLEMIES AND SELEUCIDS

Alexander the Great died of a fever in 323 at 32 years of age. (Review his story in last week's lesson.) After Alexander the Great's death in 323 B.C. his four generals divided his empire into four parts. Ptolemy took Egypt, Seleucus took Syria, Lysimachus held Thrace and Asia Minor, and Cassander ruled Macedon. Of interest to Palestine are two, the Ptolemy and Seleucus dynasties which fought a tug of war for the area known as Israel. Ptolemies controlled Palestine from 323 to 198 B.C., then the Seleucids of Syria controlled it from 198 to 142 B.C. Palestine was a pawn in the hands of foreign kings for nearly 200 years.

The Roman Senate had declared war on the leader of the Seleucid Empire, Antiochus III. By 190 B.C., being soundly defeated by the Romans, Antiochus was mercilessly brought to his knees, disarmed of much of his army, and was forced to pay a huge tribute. But the Seleucids refused to die. Before the empire finally cracked and fell, one last surge of power against Egypt and Judea would bring it to a close. Like the last surge of flames in a dying fire the new ruler, Antiochus IV, moved against Egypt only to be thwarted by Rome's intervention. Now his anger was vented against Judea, his remaining stronghold.

ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES

It was during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-154) that the Jews greatly suffered. Antiochus came to Jerusalem with a vengeance. His demon-like fury was set against the Jews and the God they served.

There were in Jerusalem those who wanted peace with the Greeks at any cost. They were the liberal thinkers who believed that any religion was good. Upon being deposed of their religious powers they appealed to king Antiochus to gain his favor. They told him of their desire to leave the laws of their countrymen and become like the Greeks embracing their religion and way of life. They implored the king to build a Greek gymnasium (where men exercised in the nude.) They even went so far as to hide their circumcision by surgical mutilation so as to appear Gentile when accompanying non-Jews in the public baths. Antiochus granted them their requests and retired to his home in Antioch.

Upon his defeat in Egypt Antiochus set his heart on the city of Jerusalem and its treasures. He now had allies within the city and so he was able to come without fighting into the city proper. It was on the occasion of the 153 Olympiad that the king entered the city under peaceful pretenses. He suddenly turned on the people and murdered those of his own party and stole a great deal of money. He had looted the Temple of the treasures he had envied for so long. He left the Temple bare taking away the golden candlesticks, the golden altar of incense, the table of shewbread, and the altar of burnt-offering. He emptied the secret treasures and left absolutely nothing, even carrying away the veils of the Temple. He then murdered many in the temple and carried 10,000 men, women, and children away captive. He burned many of the city buildings and tore down its walls.

He tried to exterminate the Jews and their religion. He ordered the destruction of all the copies of the Torah, the Pentateuch, and required that Jews make offerings to his god, Zeus. His final

atrocities was to enter the Temple and build a statue of Zeus, then offer a pig on the altar. He poured the swine broth throughout the temple polluting it. This was known to the Jews as the "abomination of desolation" prophesied by Daniel. Antiochus identified himself as the god Zeus and wished to make his own worship the religion of the Jews.

Antiochus commanded every Jew, on penalty of death, to conform to the Greek religion. He then ordered that everyone raise altars to Zeus and other Greek gods throughout the land and to offer sacrifices to the same. He forced the Jews to work on the Sabbath and worship on the king's birthday by eating idol sacrifices and entering into the public idolatrous parades.

His actions mirror the future final act of the Antichrist who is yet to come before the Return of Christ. Even the minted coins of Antiochus were stamped with the image of the Greek god, (which looked much like the king) and imprinted with Antiochus' assumed name, Epiphanes, meaning "god manifest." (Others nicknamed him Epimanes, "the madman", because of his bizarre behavior carousing with lowlives, both men and women, bathing with them in public, and throwing stones at passers by.

Many Jews refused to abandon their faith choosing rather to die than to shame the Lord God of their fathers. Two women who refused the kings' command and circumcised their boys were thrown headlong over the wall. An eighty year old priest named Eliazar, when forced to eat swine's flesh, spit it out and was murdered on the spot. One young man who spoke to the king saying, "I will not eat of it (swine's flesh) for we would rather die than disobey the laws of God," had his tongue cut off, parts of his hands and feet cut off, and then was fried in a huge cooking pan. Others were roasted alive in caves where they fled from the kings command. This horrible persecution lasted three years. (This event is referred to in Hebrews 11:35-37) Josephus reported that these committed people,

"...they every day underwent great miseries and bitter torments; for they were whipped with rods, and their bodies were torn to pieces, and were crucified, while they were still alive, and breathed. They also strangled those women and their sons whom they had circumcised, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as they were upon the crosses. And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found miserably perished also."

(Josephus, Antiquities Book 12, ch. 5 part 4)

MATTATHIAS the ELDERLY PRIEST

Opposition and deliverance from Antiochus came from an unlikely source through an elderly villager, *Mattathias* ben Johanan was a Kohen (Jewish priest) and his priestly family of five sons - Judas (Maccabeus), Jonathan, Simon, John, and Eleazar. Because, according to Josephus, Mattathias' great-great-grandfather was called Hasmoneus, the family is often designated Hasmonean rather than Maccabee.

The occasion was a visit from the king's emissary to a small village 20 miles from Jerusalem with the intent of forcing the Jews there to offer sacrifices to Greek gods. He commanded Mattathias the priest to offer the sacrifice so that the rest of the village would follow his example. Mattathias boldly refused and preached his reasons. At that point another villager stepped forward and offered the sacrifice as Antiochus commanded. Mattathias was enraged! He and his sons leaped forward killing the one who sacrificed as well as Apelles, the king's general, and a few soldiers. Mattathias boldly destroyed the Greek altar in his home village. He then cried out in a loud voice, "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" He and his sons fled to the hills and everyone left the village for the caves in the desert.

When the king heard the news he sent all his forces at the citadel in Jerusalem against the rebels. Finding them in a cave and failing to persuade them to exit or to fight on the Sabbath they set fire to the caves where thousands of men, women and children were burned alive. This triggered a 24 year war (166-142) that eventually brought the independence of Judah.

JUDAS MACCABEUS

Mattathias died in 166 BC and his son, Judas, became the leader of the battle against Antiochus' armies. The title "Maccabee" (the hammer) allegedly was given to Judas who took the appellation derived from the first letters of the Hebrew words of Exodus 15:11, "Who is like unto thee among the gods, O Jehovah?"

The stories of God's deliverance of the Jews by the hand of Judas and his brothers is nothing short of miraculous. It reads much like the miraculous victories of Gideon.

Judah assumed leadership of the revolt in accordance with the deathbed wish of his father. The First Book of Maccabees praises Judah's valor and military talent, suggesting that those qualities made Judah a natural choice for the new commander.

Origin of the name "The Hammer"

In the early days of the rebellion, Judah received a surname Maccabee. Several explanations have been put forward for this surname. One suggestion is that the name derives from the Aramaic *maqaba* ("makebet" in modern Hebrew), "hammer" or "sledgehammer" (cf. the cognomen of Charles Martel, the 8th century Frankish leader), in recognition of his ferocity in battle. Others believe it is in reference to his weapon of choice.

According to Josippon the name Maccabee is an acronym for the Torah verse *Mi kamokha ba'elim Adonai*, "Who among the gods is like you, O Adonai?", the Maccabean battle-cry to motivate troops. (Exodus 15:11). Some scholars maintain that the name is a shortened form of the Hebrew *maqab-Yahu* (from *naqab*, "to mark, to designate"), meaning "the one designated by Yahweh." Although originally the surname Maccabee was exclusive to Judah (his brothers had different surnames), at a later date it came to signify all the Hasmoneans who fought during the Maccabean revolt.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judas_Maccabeus

Within two years of Judas Maccabee taking leadership the Jews had successfully driven the Syrians out of Jerusalem, relying largely on guerilla warfare tactics.

HANUKKAH or CHANUKAH - FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

The Chanukah (or Hanukkah) is the Jewish Festival of Lights or Feast of Dedication that remembers the atrocities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and the victorious war led by Judas Maccabeus. The Apocryphal Books of the Maccabees tell the story of Hanukkah. Jesus attended the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem as mentioned in the New Testament Book of John 10:22-24.

Then came the Festival of Dedication[a] at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Judah called on his followers to cleanse the Second Temple, rebuild its altar and light its menorah—the gold candelabrum whose seven branches represented knowledge and creation and were meant to be kept burning every night. In 165 BC after a three year struggle against the far superior forces of Antiochus' armies, Judas Maccabeus defeated the Syrian tyrant in heroic and miraculous engagements.

After cleansing the Temple of the idols and destruction that Antiochus wrought against it, they found only one small cruse of oil with which to light the sacred lamps. But miraculously that oil lasted eight days.

The Hanukkah 'Miracle'

According to the Talmud, one of Judaism's most central texts, Judah Maccabee and the other Jews who took part in the rededication of the Second Temple witnessed what they believed to be a miracle. Even though there was only enough untainted olive oil to keep the menorah's candles burning for a single day, the flames continued flickering for eight nights, leaving them time to find a fresh supply.

This wondrous event inspired the Jewish sages to proclaim a yearly eight-day festival. (The first Book of the Maccabees tells another version of the story, describing an eight-day celebration that followed the rededication but making no reference to the miracle of the oil.)

The celebration is usually in December on our calendar, but really begins on the eve of the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev and lasts eight days. It corresponds to the celebration of Christmas in that gifts are exchanged and contributions are made to the poor. Each evening a menorah candle is lighted until the eighth day. There are eight candles, one for each night of Chanukah.

Hanukkah Decorations and Traditions

The Hanukkah celebration revolves around the kindling of a nine-branched menorah, known in Hebrew as the hanukiah. On each of the holiday's eight nights, another candle is added to the menorah after sundown; the ninth candle, called the shamash ("helper"), is used to light the others. Jews typically recite blessings during this ritual and display the menorah prominently in a window as a reminder to others of the miracle that inspired the holiday.

Foods of Hanukkah

In another allusion to the Hanukkah miracle, traditional Hanukkah foods are fried in oil. Potato pancakes (known as latkes) and jam-filled donuts (sufganiyot) are particularly popular in many Jewish households.

The Dreidel (Dredyl)

Another Hanukkah custom includes playing with four-sided spinning tops called dreidels and exchanging gifts. The dreidel has an interesting story. During the period of the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes people were forbidden to go to the Temple and to read from the the Torah, the bible. So they invented a game using a dreidel, a four-sided spinning top with a Hebrew letter printed on each side. Each side is imprinted with a Hebrew letter: ן (Nun), ג (Gimmel), ה (Hay), or ש (Shin). The letters stand for the Hebrew phrase "Nes Gadol Haya Sham," meaning "a great miracle happened there."

Those that defied the overwhelming enemy - doing what they could to continue following Jehovah and teach their children His Way and His Word - they wrote material to teach on the four flat sides of the top and used that little chalk-board, if you will, to instruct the children about the God of Israel.

When Greek soldiers would come by, they would quick pick up the top and spin it. What was written on the four flat sides became only a blur! The soldiers would only perceive that they were playing a game, nothing more. This shows how the faithful Jews were willing to risk their lives to continue teaching their children the Scriptures! THIS IS HOW THE DREDFYL WAS BORN! <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/hanukkah>

ELEAZER'S DEATH BY AN ELEPHANT

Mattathias' fourth son - Eleazer - was in battle against the Greeks with his brothers. With them was only a remnant that also were choosing Jehovah over the Greek ways and Greek religion. They had already made their choice throughout their lives to prefer Jehovah over anything else.

Judas Maccabeus besieged the Temple Mount fortress, but a Seleucid army of 50,000 men, accompanied by 30 war elephants, marched to its relief. So he lifted the siege and marched out with 20,000 men to intercept the enemy.

Unfortunately, Judas abandoned the guerrilla tactics that had won him victories and served him well until then. Instead, he lined up his men to meet the Seleucids in formal battle. It was a mistake. Judas' forces proved no match for the Seleucid heavy infantry phalanx, and a professional cavalry. One of the weapons of war that the Greek's had perfected was the use of armored elephants. Imagine a tank before there was powerful artillery or airplanes with rockets and bombs. Elephants were like that - the apex predator of the battle field.

The Jews began to panic and break in fear of the elephants, so Eleazar Maccabeus tried to encourage his comrades by demonstrating the elephants' vulnerability. He charged at the biggest elephant he could find, got beneath it, thrust his spear into its unarmored belly, and killed the beast. He did not get to savor his success for long, however: the dying elephant collapsed on top of Eleazar and crushed him to death.

<https://historycollection.com/odd-historic-moments-that-are-almost-too-weird-to-handle/26/>

His death illustrates Hebrews 11 where Paul says,

³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning,^[a] they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

LINKS FOR FURTHER READING & STUDY

Reading historical accounts of history from original or ancient sources is important for every believer so that we understand events and their impact on history. I would encourage each of you to read Josephus writings concerning Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, and the Maccabean Revolt. All of these events shaped and influence Israel before the coming of Christ.

Antiquities, Book XII, Chapters V - VII

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/josephus/complete.toc.html>

The Book of Macabees.

<https://ia800905.us.archive.org/6/items/fivebooksofmacca00cott/fivebooksofmacca00cott.pdf>

Edersheim, Book 4, Chapter 14

<http://www.godrules.net/library/edersheim/ederb4c14.htm>

Questions for Discussion Lesson 5

1. Can you tell the story of Alexander the Great and his encounter with God? What impressed you the most? Do you think Alexander's worship was acceptable to God?
2. The story of the Macabean revolution is an important story. It is not found in our Bible. Where is it found? Have you read it? It is important to the Intertestamental Period?
3. What similarities do you see between what Jews faced under Antiochus IV and what the church faces today within our own culture?
4. Can you apply the story of Hanukkah to our Christmas celebration and the first coming of Christ? Do you believe Hanukkah foreshadows Christ? In what way?
5. Do you now understand the expression "abomination of desolation?" How is it important for believers today to understand it? Explain what it is?
6. Is the Intertestamental Period silent? Since God did such wonderful things to defend his people, why would we still call this period the "400 Years of Silence?"
7. Can you describe and explain three important events of the Intertestamental Period/ Can you describe the event and show why it was an important prelude to the coming of Jesus Christ?

Video Links

R.C. Sproul and Ligionier Ministries – The Maccabean Revolt

<https://youtu.be/JKu7gl0wzYo> (5 min)

Origins of Hanukkah - Maccabean Anti-Hellenic Rebellion

<https://youtu.be/TaanPpi8LK0> (24.5 min)

Alexander the Great (All Parts)

<https://youtu.be/K7lb6KWBanI> (57 min)

Hannibal Barca: Nemesis Of Rome | Man Who Hated Rome | Timeline

<https://youtu.be/2GH1c50zcYc> (1 hr 15 min)

The Real Truth About Hanukkah – Fact or Myth?

<https://youtu.be/WSFK1CsOJG4> (47 min)

Rabbi Israel Yakobov - Secrets of Chanukah and Candles

<https://youtu.be/l0JBVMnZPI8> (1 hr 9 min)

Jonathan Cahn: Hanukkah foreshadows the Antichrist and End Time

<https://youtu.be/deK4TOJ2cNE> (17 min)

Understanding the Prophetic Mysteries of Hanukkah – Triumph in Truth

<https://youtu.be/axz492LSH0k> (53 min)

Why Hanukkah IS Biblical – Triumph in Truth

<https://youtu.be/mFJteUK0sa8> (1 hr 8 min)

Happy Hanukkah



1. Be light in a dark world
2. Be strong in the Lord
3. Be committed to the Word of God
4. Be faithful to the House of God

5. Fight the good fight of faith
6. Stand up and be counted
7. Cleanse the temple of God
8. Rededicate your life to God

And this is the verdict: The Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (John 3:19-21)