



The Historical Books

Session 9 – 1 & 2 Maccabees

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So What do you Think?

- Read the 1 & 2 Maccabees
 - What leads to the rebellion of Mattathias and his sons?
 - What lesson does Judas give his followers in 1 Mac 3?
 - Why do you think that Judas and his brother celebrated the restoration of the Temple every year?
 - What does King Antiochus IV learn at his death?
 - Where do the brothers of Judas finally find security?
 - What events lead to the desecration of the Temple?
 - What does the author want us to know by the end of 2 Maccabees?

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Some say that Maccabeus means “Chosen by God” while others say it means “Hammer”
- Either meaning seems to suit Judas, the son of Mattathias
- Judas was a prominent leader in a Jewish struggle against oppression known as the Maccabean Revolt
- It began when King Antiochus IV of Syria wanted to unite his sprawling empire

1 & 2 Maccabees

- To unite them he encouraged his subjects to accept the Greek culture and shun their old ways
- The Jewish people resisted this policy and the trouble began
- Antiochus IV eventually sent armies to Palestine to force the issue
- Violence against Jews who remained faithful escalated dramatically

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Finally, Mattathias and his seven sons broke out in open rebellion against the empire
- Judas became the military leader
- After a series of victories against increasingly powerful forces – Judas was able to reclaim the temple
- By doing so, he restored worship to the God of Israel and saved his people
- It was in the spring, 163 years before Jesus' birth

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Jonathan succeeded his brother as the leader of the people
- Like Judas, he was a very capable leader
- The narrative of his work reads like the military exploits of just about any nation
- Jonathan makes alliances with one nation and then another
- He ultimately dies at the hands of a supposed ally

1 & 2 Maccabees

- The same patter is repeated with Simon, brother of Jonathan
- The book 1 Maccabees ends with Simon's son John narrowly escaping death
- The final verses suggest that we pick up the rest of the story in the chronicles of John's high priesthood

1 & 2 Maccabees

- The first book of Maccabees focuses mainly on the human initiative in the struggle
- Mainly it concentrates on the bravery of Judas and the lesser achievements of his brothers Jonathan and Simon
- The second book of Maccabees focuses on the spiritual aspects of the struggle and frequently brings God into the picture (in just about every paragraph)

1 & 2 Maccabees

- This book puts emphasis on the devotion of the Jewish people to their faith and their tradition
- The book begins with a pair of letters which set the tone (joyous) for the book
- The Jews in Jerusalem invite the Jews in Egypt to join them in celebrating the dedication of the Jerusalem temple
- We know this feast as Hanukkah – which means dedication

1 & 2 Maccabees

- The book highlights the spiritual success enjoyed by Israel during the hard years of struggle for renewed freedom
- While we hear about theft, intrigue and murder by those who held the office of high priest – we also read about the miracle of God to keep the temple treasury from the wicked
- Still the book doesn't ignore the cruelty of Antiochus IV as he imposes Greek ways on the Jews

1 & 2 Maccabees

- In the book the king's power to harm is overshadowed by the great faith of ordinary people
 - An old man dies a noble death for God
 - A mother and seven sons are martyred for their convictions
- The rest of the book is about the victories won by Judas against Antiochus and his generals – especially Nicanor

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Maccabees 2 is more spiritually enlightening and satisfying than Maccabees 1
- It looks for all of the spiritual positives among a rather bleak story of Israel's struggle for independence
- All along we have the feeling that God's people will prevail over the power of Antiochus
- Antiochus represents the power, greed and wickedness of the world

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Taken together, Maccabees 1 & 2 provide a significant spiritual lesson
- The power and might of warriors can win only a limited kingdom while trust in God will always lead to everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven
- Together the books make yet another contribution to the Biblical message that security and happiness is found in God alone

1 & 2 Maccabees

- 1 Maccabees has 16 chapters
 - 1 – 9 Judas leads the struggle for religious freedom
 - 10 – 16 The qualified success of Jonathan and Simon
- 2 Maccabees has 15 chapters
 - 1 – 2 Celebrating the purification of the Temple
 - 3 – 10 How God protected the Temple
 - 11 – 15 How God protected the people

1 & 2 Maccabees

- When does it take place
 - Victory over Seleucus – 312 BC
 - Judas Maccabeus – 167 – 160 BC
 - Roman Palestine – after 63 BC
- The Maccabean Revolt was from 167 – 164 BC
- 1 Maccabees was probably written early in the first century
- 2 Maccabees may be the older book
- Scholars estimate it was written in about 124 BC

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Interesting points
 - **Reader's Digest** – 2 Maccabees is a digest of a five volume work on the Revolt by Jason of Cyrene. He relates God's role in human history and wants readers to enjoy the book. The final verse says, "the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work. And here will be the end."
 - **Hanukkah** - Meaning "dedication" it is the 8 day celebration that took place after faithful Jews freed the Jerusalem temple and restored worship. The feast includes lighting lamps in the temple.

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Interesting points
 - **Prayers for the Dead** – In 2 Maccabees 12:42-45 Judas takes up a collection to provide for a sin offering in the temple on behalf of those who died in battle. The text states he did it out of the conviction that they would rise from the dead. The passage is part of the foundation of the teaching on purgatory
 - **Saints** – The devout high priest Onias was praying for the people and the prophet Jeremiah appeared alongside of him doing the same thing. This passage clearly exhibits the conviction that saints intercede for us

1 & 2 Maccabees

- Interesting points
 - **Nicanor Day** – This day in the month of Adar (February) celebrated the victory over one of the most notorious enemy of the Jews. Nicanor was ruthless in his anti-Jewish policies. Nicanor day was observed until the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
 - **Hasideans** – They are “the faithful ones” – Jews noted for loyalty to the Law of Moses. They are mentioned for the first time in 1 Maccabees 2:42-48. Their spiritual descendants are the Pharisees of the time of Jesus.

Lessons from 1 & 2 Maccabees

- The best defense can be found in doing things God's way
- Our bond with God is not broken by death
- A great miracle can take place wherever and whenever we are open to God's plan