

1-2 MACCABEES



1 MACCABEES

Alexander the Great

Read 1 Maccabees 1:1-9

The conquest of the Near East by Alexander the Great brought the kingdoms of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Syria-Palestine under the rule of his generals and their successors and inaugurated the Hellenistic era.

Reflect: Consider that in spite of all that Alexander accomplished, he did not live to enjoy his vast empire. Reflect on the arrogance of his successors who styled themselves kings, ruling their portions of the empire.

Pray: Pray for humility in the midst of personal accomplishment. If you become a leader, ask for the ability to lead wisely and to avoid evil.

Act: Study history to better understand the present world. Seek out ways to heal rather than inflict injustice when there are opportunities for change in our society.

1 After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated^a King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.)² He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth.³ He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up.⁴ He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him.

⁵ After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying.⁶ So he summoned his most honored officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive.⁷ And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died.

⁸ Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place.⁹ They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth.

Antiochus Epiphanes and Renegade Jews

10 From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.^b

11 In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us."

^a Gk adds *and he defeated*

^b 175 B.C.

Read 1 Maccabees 1:10–64

As a result of the Seleucid victory over the Ptolemies (both successors of Alexander's generals) in 200 BC, Palestine became subject to Antiochus IV (Epiphanes). Some Jews adopted Hellenistic culture while others opposed it. Antiochus stripped the temple of its wealth and his general created a fortress in Jerusalem to support his forces. Antiochus ordered a series of anti-Jewish religious reforms that banned circumcision and other Jewish practices while introducing sacrifice to other gods in the Jerusalem temple.

Reflect: Consider how the imposition of a foreign or an aggressive culture would impact your life. Reflect on what your reaction to laws forbidding your traditional worship practices would be.

Pray: Pray for the courage to stand up for what you believe. Ask for the ability to discern the difference between what is harmful and what is simply different.

Act: Familiarize yourself with world events and other cultures. Recognize that we live in a global village with many different religions and political perspectives.

¹² This proposal pleased them, ¹³ and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, ¹⁵ and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

Antiochus in Egypt

¹⁶ When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. ¹⁷ So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. ¹⁸ He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. ¹⁹ They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

Persecution of the Jews

²⁰ After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year.^a He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹ He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. ²² He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. ²³ He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. ²⁴ Taking them all, he went into his own land.

He shed much blood,
and spoke with great arrogance.

²⁵ Israel mourned deeply in every community,

²⁶ rulers and elders groaned,
young women and young men became faint,
the beauty of the women faded.

²⁷ Every bridegroom took up the lament;
she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning.

²⁸ Even the land trembled for its inhabitants,
and all the house of Jacob was clothed with
shame.

The Occupation of Jerusalem

²⁹ Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. ³⁰ Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and

^a 169 B.C.

destroyed many people of Israel. ³¹ He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. ³² They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. ³³ Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. ³⁴ They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; ³⁵ they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace,

³⁶ for the citadel^a became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel at all times.

³⁷ On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood; they even defiled the sanctuary.

³⁸ Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled; she became a dwelling of strangers; she became strange to her offspring, and her children forsook her.

³⁹ Her sanctuary became desolate like a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into a reproach, her honor into contempt.

⁴⁰ Her dishonor now grew as great as her glory; her exaltation was turned into mourning.

Installation of Gentile Cults

⁴¹ Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, ⁴² and that all should give up their particular customs. ⁴³ All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. ⁴⁴ And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to

the land, ⁴⁵ to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, ⁴⁶ to defile the sanctuary and the priests, ⁴⁷ to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, ⁴⁸ and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, ⁴⁹ so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. ⁵⁰ He added,^b "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

⁵¹ In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. ⁵² Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; ⁵³ they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

⁵⁴ Now on the fifteenth day of Chisleu, in the one hundred forty-fifth year,^c they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, ⁵⁵ and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶ The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. ⁵⁷ Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. ⁵⁸ They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. ⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. ⁶⁰ According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, ⁶¹ and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

⁶² But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. ⁶³ They chose to die rather than

^a Gk *it*

^b Gk lacks *He added*

^c 167 B.C.

Read 1 Maccabees 2

Opposition to Antiochus's policies and the efforts of some Jews to assimilate to Hellenistic customs is led by Mattathias and his five sons. Acts of zealous indignation include destruction of property, the killing of the unfaithful, and an exhortation to display the courage of previous leaders like Moses, Phineas, David, and Daniel. After a thousand of the faithful are killed on the sabbath, dispensation is granted to fight back even if the sabbath laws are violated.

Reflect: Consider the dangers associated with choosing the more difficult path of defending one's principles rather than just going along with the crowd.

Pray: Pray for guidance in times of adversity and uncertainty. Ask for the ability to become a model of virtuous behavior to others.

Act: Become a student of history in order to understand the origin of traditions and to better analyze changes in these traditions in your own time. Be willing to speak out in defense of your values.

to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. ⁶⁴ Very great wrath came upon Israel.

Mattathias and His Sons

2 In those days Mattathias son of John son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. ² He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, ³ Simon called Thassi, ⁴ Judas called Maccabeus, ⁵ Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus. ⁶ He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, ⁷ and said,

“Alas! Why was I born to see this,
the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city,
and to live there when it was given over to the
enemy,
the sanctuary given over to aliens?”

- ⁸ Her temple has become like a person without honor;^a
⁹ her glorious vessels have been carried into exile.
Her infants have been killed in her streets,
her youths by the sword of the foe.
¹⁰ What nation has not inherited her palaces^b
and has not seized her spoils?
¹¹ All her adornment has been taken away;
no longer free, she has become a slave.
¹² And see, our holy place, our beauty,
and our glory have been laid waste;
the Gentiles have profaned them.
¹³ Why should we live any longer?”

¹⁴ Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.

Pagan Worship Refused

¹⁵ The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. ¹⁶ Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. ¹⁷ Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: “You are a leader, honored and great in this town, and supported by sons and brothers. ¹⁸ Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people 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.”

¹⁹ 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 obey his commandments, every one of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, ²⁰ I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. ²¹ Far

^a Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Other ancient authorities read *has not had a part in her kingdom*

be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. ²² We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left."

²³ When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. ²⁴ When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. ²⁵ At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. ²⁶ Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu.

²⁷ Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" ²⁸ Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town.

²⁹ At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there, ³⁰ they, their sons, their wives, and their livestock, because troubles pressed heavily upon them. ³¹ And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that those who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. ³² Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. ³³ They said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live." ³⁴ But they said, "We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day." ³⁵ Then the enemy^a quickly attacked them. ³⁶ But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, ³⁷ for they said, "Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly." ³⁸ So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they

died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons.

³⁹ When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. ⁴⁰ And all said to their neighbors: "If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." ⁴¹ So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places."

Counter-Attack

⁴² Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law. ⁴³ And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. ⁴⁴ They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. ⁴⁵ And Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars; ⁴⁶ they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. ⁴⁷ They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands. ⁴⁸ They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

The Last Words of Mattathias

⁴⁹ Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. ⁵⁰ Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors.

⁵¹ "Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. ⁵² Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reck-

^a Gk they

oned to him as righteousness? ⁵³ Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. ⁵⁴ Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. ⁵⁵ Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. ⁵⁶ Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. ⁵⁷ David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. ⁵⁸ Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹ Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. ⁶⁰ Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

⁶¹ “And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. ⁶² Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendor will turn into dung and worms. ⁶³ Today they

will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. ⁶⁴ My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor.

⁶⁵ “Here is your brother Simeon who, I know, is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. ⁶⁶ Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples.^a ⁶⁷ You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. ⁶⁸ Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law.”

⁶⁹ Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. ⁷⁰ He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year^b and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Mod-ein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.

The Early Victories of Judas

3 Then his son Judas, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. ² All his brothers and all who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel.

- ³ He extended the glory of his people.
Like a giant he put on his breastplate;
he bound on his armor of war and waged battles,
protecting the camp by his sword.
- ⁴ He was like a lion in his deeds,
like a lion's cub roaring for prey.
- ⁵ He searched out and pursued those who broke
the law;
he burned those who troubled his people.
- ⁶ Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him;
all the evildoers were confounded;
and deliverance prospered by his hand.
- ⁷ He embittered many kings,
but he made Jacob glad by his deeds,
and his memory is blessed forever.
- ⁸ He went through the cities of Judah;
he destroyed the ungodly out of the land;^c
thus he turned away wrath from Israel.
- ⁹ He was renowned to the ends of the earth;
he gathered in those who were perishing.

^a Or of the people

^b 166 B.C.

^c Gk it

Read 1 Maccabees 3

Judas Maccabeus emerges as the military leader of the Jewish resistance movement. After he wins a series of battles against Gentile commanders, Antiochus appoints Lysias, provides him with a vast army and orders him to completely eliminate all vestige of the Jewish people from the land. Judas invokes images of military triumphs of Joshua to rally the people and, after going to Mizpah with his army, calls upon God to save them in the coming battle.

Reflect: Consider how political and military leaders encourage their people by reminding them of past victories. Reflect on Judas's determination to allow "his will in heaven" to be done.

Pray: Pray for the ability to trust God to guide and protect us in times of trouble.

Act: Become familiar with the traditions of leadership and courage that have bolstered our nation in the past. Support our leaders to meet today's crises with courage and virtue and honor.

10 Apollonius now gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. ¹¹ When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he defeated and killed him. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled. ¹² Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle the rest of his life.

13 When Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful soldiers who stayed with him and went out to battle, ¹⁴ he said, "I will make a name for myself and win honor in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command." ¹⁵ Once again a strong army of godless men went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the Israelites.

16 When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. ¹⁷ But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and so strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today." ¹⁸ Judas replied, "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. ¹⁹ It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. ²⁰ They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; ²¹ but we fight for our lives and our laws. ²² He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them."

23 When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. ²⁴ They pursued them^a down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled into the land of the Philistines. ²⁵ Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell on the Gentiles all around them. ²⁶ His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas.

The Policy of Antiochus

27 When King Antiochus heard these reports, he was greatly angered; and he sent and gathered all the forces of his kingdom, a very strong army. ²⁸ He opened his coffers and gave a year's pay to his forces, and ordered them to be ready for any need. ²⁹ Then he saw that the money in the treasury was exhausted, and that the revenues from the country were small because of the dissension and disaster that he had caused in the land by abolishing the laws that had existed from the earliest days. ³⁰ He feared that he might not have such

^a Other ancient authorities read *him*

funds as he had before for his expenses and for the gifts that he used to give more lavishly than preceding kings.³¹ He was greatly perplexed in mind; then he determined to go to Persia and collect the revenues from those regions and raise a large fund.

32 He left Lysias, a distinguished man of royal lineage, in charge of the king's affairs from the river Euphrates to the borders of Egypt.³³ Lysias was also to take care of his son Antiochus until he returned.³⁴ And he turned over to Lysias^a half of his forces and the elephants, and gave him orders about all that he wanted done. As for the residents of Judea and Jerusalem,³⁵ Lysias was to send a force against them to wipe out and destroy the strength of Israel and the remnant of Jerusalem; he was to banish the memory of them from the place,³⁶ settle aliens in all their territory, and distribute their land by lot.³⁷ Then the king took the remaining half of his forces and left Antioch his capital in the one hundred and forty-seventh year.^b He crossed the Euphrates river and went through the upper provinces.

Preparations for Battle

38 Lysias chose Ptolemy son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor and Gorgias, able men among the Friends of the king,³⁹ and sent with them forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to go into the land of Judah and destroy it, as the king had commanded.⁴⁰ So they set out with their entire force, and when they arrived they encamped near Emmaus in the plain.⁴¹ When the traders of the region heard what was said to them, they took silver and gold in immense amounts, and fetters,^c and went to the camp to get the Israelites for slaves. And forces from Syria and the land of the Philistines joined with them.

42 Now Judas and his brothers saw that misfortunes had increased and that the

forces were encamped in their territory. They also learned what the king had commanded to do to the people to cause their final destruction.⁴³ But they said to one another, "Let us restore the ruins of our people, and fight for our people and the sanctuary."⁴⁴ So the congregation assembled to be ready for battle, and to pray and ask for mercy and compassion.

45 Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness;
not one of her children went in or out.
The sanctuary was trampled down,
and aliens held the citadel;
it was a lodging place for the Gentiles.
Joy was taken from Jacob;
the flute and the harp ceased to play.

46 Then they gathered together and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah.⁴⁷ They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their clothes.⁴⁸ And they opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles consulted the likenesses of their gods.⁴⁹ They also brought the vestments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they stirred up the nazirites^d who had completed their days;⁵⁰ and they cried aloud to Heaven, saying,

"What shall we do with these?
Where shall we take them?"

51 Your sanctuary is trampled down
and profaned,
and your priests mourn in
humiliation.

52 Here the Gentiles are assembled
against us to destroy us;
you know what they plot against us.

53 How will we be able to withstand them,
if you do not help us?"

54 Then they sounded the trumpets and gave a loud shout.⁵⁵ After this Judas ap-

^a Gk him

^b 165 B.C.

^c Syr: Gk Mss, Vg slaves

^d That is *those separated* or *those consecrated*

pointed leaders of the people, in charge of thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens. ⁵⁶ Those who were building houses, or were about to be married, or were planting a vineyard, or were fainthearted, he told to go home again, according to the law. ⁵⁷ Then the army marched out and encamped to the south of Emmaus.

⁵⁸ And Judas said, “Arm yourselves and be courageous. Be ready early in the morning to fight with these Gentiles who have assembled against us to destroy us and our sanctuary. ⁵⁹ It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and of the sanctuary. ⁶⁰ But as his will in heaven may be, so shall he do.”

Read 1 Maccabees 4:1–35

The ill-equipped and outnumbered army of Judas Maccabeus wins two victories over Gorgias and Lysias. Judas outmaneuvers the allied army of the Seleucids, and the reckless courage of his followers frightens their opponents who are not fighting for their homes or for the glory of their God.

Reflect: Consider the value of determination in the face of overwhelming odds. Reflect on boldness and the willingness to take calculated risks as keys to success.

Pray: Pray for the grace to do God’s will and to seek to find God’s purpose in our lives.

Act: Study tactics and psychology, but recognize the need to be spontaneous. Work to overcome pride and seek to make wise decisions.

The Battle at Emmaus

4 Now Gorgias took five thousand infantry and one thousand picked cavalry, and this division moved out by night ² to fall upon the camp of the Jews and attack them suddenly. Men from the citadel were his guides. ³ But Judas heard of it, and he and his warriors moved out to attack the king’s force in Emmaus ⁴ while the division was still absent from the camp. ⁵ When Gorgias entered the camp of Judas by night, he found no one there, so he looked for them in the hills, because he said, “These men are running away from us.”

⁶ At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armor and swords such as they desired. ⁷ And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry all around it; and these men were trained in war. ⁸ But Judas said to those who were with him, “Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. ⁹ Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. ¹⁰ And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us and remember his covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. ¹¹ Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.”

¹² When the foreigners looked up and saw them coming against them, ¹³ they went out from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets ¹⁴ and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed, and fled into the plain, ¹⁵ and all those in the rear fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, and to the plains of Idumea, and to Azotus and Jamnia; and three thousand of them fell. ¹⁶ Then Judas and his force turned back from pursuing them, ¹⁷ and he said to the people, “Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us; ¹⁸ Gorgias and his force are near us in the hills. But stand now against our enemies and fight them, and afterward seize the plunder boldly.”

¹⁹ Just as Judas was finishing this speech, a detachment appeared, coming out of the hills. ²⁰ They saw that their army^a had been put to flight, and that the Jews^a were burning the camp, for the smoke that was

^a Gk they

Read 1 Maccabees 4:36–61

Following his victory over Lysias, Judas takes his forces back to Jerusalem where in strict compliance with the law they restore and purify the temple complex. To mark the occasion they institute the annual feast of Chanukah.

Reflect: Consider how important it is to act on your convictions. Judas's insurgency was based on a desire for religious freedom, but it would have no validity if the desecration of the temple had been ignored.

Pray: Pray for the ability to recognize what is truly important and to work diligently to ensure that God's law is upheld as a model for right behavior.

Act: Volunteer your time for the upkeep of the church and be faithful in celebrating the major feasts of the faith.

seen showed what had happened. ²¹ When they perceived this, they were greatly frightened, and when they also saw the army of Judas drawn up in the plain for battle, ²² they all fled into the land of the Philistines. ²³ Then Judas returned to plunder the camp, and they seized a great amount of gold and silver, and cloth dyed blue and sea purple, and great riches. ²⁴ On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven—"For he is good, for his mercy endures forever." ²⁵ Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.

First Campaign of Lysias

²⁶ Those of the foreigners who escaped went and reported to Lysias all that had happened. ²⁷ When he heard it, he was perplexed and discouraged, for things had not happened to Israel as he had intended, nor had they turned out as the king had ordered. ²⁸ But the next year he mustered sixty thousand picked infantry and five thousand cavalry to subdue them. ²⁹ They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men.

³⁰ When he saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, "Blessed are you, O Savior of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. ³¹ Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. ³² Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. ³³ Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns."

³⁴ Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action.^a ³⁵ When Lysias saw the rout of his troops and observed the boldness that inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he withdrew to Antioch and enlisted mercenaries in order to invade Judea again with an even larger army.

Cleansing and Dedication of the Temple

³⁶ Then Judas and his brothers said, "See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." ³⁷ So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸ There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. ³⁹ Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled

^a Or and some fell on the opposite side

themselves with ashes ⁴⁰ and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

41 Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. ⁴² He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, ⁴³ and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. ⁴⁴ They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. ⁴⁵ And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, ⁴⁶ and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ⁴⁷ Then they took unhewn^a stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸ They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. ⁴⁹ They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. ⁵⁰ Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. ⁵¹ They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

52 Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the

month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year,^b ⁵³ they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. ⁵⁴ At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. ⁵⁵ All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. ⁵⁶ So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷ They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. ⁵⁸ There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

59 Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

60 At that time they fortified Mount Zion with high walls and strong towers all around, to keep the Gentiles from coming and trampling them down as they had done before. ⁶¹ Judas^c stationed a garrison there to guard it; he also fortified Beth-zur to guard it, so that the people might have a stronghold that faced Idumea.

Wars with Neighboring Peoples

5 When the Gentiles all around heard that the altar had been rebuilt and the sanctuary dedicated as it was before, they became very angry, ² and they determined to destroy the descendants of Jacob who lived among them. So they began to kill and destroy among the people. ³ But Judas made war on the descendants of Esau in Idumea, at Akrabattene, because they kept lying in wait for Israel. He dealt them a heavy blow and humbled them and despoiled them. ⁴ He also remembered the wickedness of the sons of Baeon, who were a trap and a snare to the people and ambushed them on the highways. ⁵ They were shut up by him in their^d towers; and he encamped against them, vowed their complete destruction, and burned with fire their towers and

^a Gk *whole*

^b 164 B.C.

^c Gk *He*

^d Gk *her*

Read 1 Maccabees 5

Jewish settlers are endangered in the region of Galilee, in Gilead in Transjordan, and in the south in Edom and Idumea. Judas divides his forces, taking his brother Jonathan east with him into Gilead and sending his brother Simon north to Galilee. Both are successful, and they bring many of the Jews back with them into Judea. A later campaign into Edom is also successful. Campaigns led by men other than Judas's brothers meet with failure.

Reflect: Consider the breakdown of civility in areas with mixed populations. Reflect on ways in which a solution could be found to end ethnic cleansing and foster peaceful coexistence.

Pray: Pray for understanding between neighbors and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Act: Work to ensure that efforts are made to integrate other cultures into the community without depriving them of their cultural identity.

all who were in them. ⁶ Then he crossed over to attack the Ammonites, where he found a strong band and many people, with Timothy as their leader. ⁷ He engaged in many battles with them, and they were crushed before him; he struck them down. ⁸ He also took Jazer and its villages; then he returned to Judea.

Liberation of Galilean Jews

9 Now the Gentiles in Gilead gathered together against the Israelites who lived in their territory, and planned to destroy them. But they fled to the stronghold of Dathema, ¹⁰ and sent to Judas and his brothers a letter that said, "The Gentiles around us have gathered together to destroy us. ¹¹ They are preparing to come and capture the stronghold to which we have fled, and Timothy is leading their forces. ¹² Now then, come and rescue us from their hands, for many of us have fallen, ¹³ and all our kindred who were in the land of Tob have been killed; the enemy^a have captured their wives and children and goods, and have destroyed about a thousand persons there."

14 While the letter was still being read, other messengers, with their garments torn, came from Galilee and made a similar report; ¹⁵ they said that the people of Ptolemais and Tyre and Sidon, and all Galilee of the Gentiles,^b had gathered together against them "to annihilate us." ¹⁶ When Judas and the people heard these messages, a great assembly was called to determine what they should do for their kindred who were in distress and were being attacked by enemies.^c ¹⁷ Then Judas said to his brother Simon, "Choose your men and go and rescue your kindred in Galilee; Jonathan my brother and I will go to Gilead." ¹⁸ But he left Joseph, son of Zechariah, and Azariah, a leader of the people, with the rest of the forces, in Judea to guard it; ¹⁹ and he gave them this command, "Take charge of this people, but do not engage in battle with the Gentiles until we return." ²⁰ Then three thousand men were assigned to Simon to go to Galilee, and eight thousand to Judas for Gilead.

21 So Simon went to Galilee and fought many battles against the Gentiles, and the Gentiles were crushed before him. ²² He pursued them to the gate of Ptolemais; as many as three thousand of the Gentiles fell, and he despoiled them. ²³ Then he took the Jews^d of Galilee and Arbatta, with their wives and children, and all they possessed, and led them to Judea with great rejoicing.

Judas and Jonathan in Gilead

24 Judas Maccabeus and his brother Jonathan crossed the Jordan and made three days' journey into

^a Gk *they*

^b Gk *aliens*

^c Gk *them*

^d Gk *those*

the wilderness. ²⁵ They encountered the Nabateans, who met them peaceably and told them all that had happened to their kindred in Gilead: ²⁶ “Many of them have been shut up in Bozrah and Bosor, in Alema and Chaspho, Maked and Carnaim”—all these towns were strong and large—²⁷ “and some have been shut up in the other towns of Gilead; the enemy^a are getting ready to attack the strongholds tomorrow and capture and destroy all these people in a single day.”

²⁸ Then Judas and his army quickly turned back by the wilderness road to Bozrah; and he took the town, and killed every male by the edge of the sword; then he seized all its spoils and burned it with fire. ²⁹ He left the place at night, and they went all the way to the stronghold of Dathema.^b ³⁰ At dawn they looked out and saw a large company, which could not be counted, carrying ladders and engines of war to capture the stronghold, and attacking the Jews within.^c ³¹ So Judas saw that the battle had begun and that the cry of the town went up to Heaven, with trumpets and loud shouts, ³² and he said to the men of his forces, “Fight today for your kindred!” ³³ Then he came up behind them in three companies, who sounded their trumpets and cried aloud in prayer. ³⁴ And when the army of Timothy realized that it was Maccabeus, they fled before him, and he dealt them a heavy blow. As many as eight thousand of them fell that day.

³⁵ Next he turned aside to Maapha,^d and fought against it and took it; and he killed every male in it, plundered it, and burned it with fire. ³⁶ From there he marched on and took Chaspho, Maked, and Bosor, and the other towns of Gilead.

³⁷ After these things Timothy gathered another army and encamped opposite Raphon, on the other side of the stream. ³⁸ Judas sent men to spy out the camp, and they reported to him, “All the Gentiles

around us have gathered to him; it is a very large force. ³⁹ They also have hired Arabs to help them, and they are encamped across the stream, ready to come and fight against you.” And Judas went to meet them.

⁴⁰ Now as Judas and his army drew near to the stream of water, Timothy said to the officers of his forces, “If he crosses over to us first, we will not be able to resist him, for he will surely defeat us. ⁴¹ But if he shows fear and camps on the other side of the river, we will cross over to him and defeat him.” ⁴² When Judas approached the stream of water, he stationed the officers^e of the army at the stream and gave them this command, “Permit no one to encamp, but make them all enter the battle.” ⁴³ Then he crossed over against them first, and the whole army followed him. All the Gentiles were defeated before him, and they threw away their arms and fled into the sacred precincts at Carnaim. ⁴⁴ But he took the town and burned the sacred precincts with fire, together with all who were in them. Thus Carnaim was conquered; they could stand before Judas no longer.

The Return to Jerusalem

⁴⁵ Then Judas gathered together all the Israelites in Gilead, the small and the great, with their wives and children and goods, a very large company, to go to the land of Judah. ⁴⁶ So they came to Ephron. This was a large and very strong town on the road, and they could not go around it to the right or to the left; they had to go through it. ⁴⁷ But the people of the town shut them out and blocked up the gates with stones.

⁴⁸ Judas sent them this friendly message, “Let us pass through your land to get to our land. No one will do you harm; we will simply pass by on foot.” But they refused to open to him. ⁴⁹ Then Judas ordered proclamation to be made to the army

^a Gk *they*

^b Gk lacks *of Dathema*. See verse 9

^c Gk *and they were attacking them*

^d Other ancient authorities read *Alema*

^e Or *scribes*

that all should encamp where they were. ⁵⁰ So the men of the forces encamped, and he fought against the town all that day and all the night, and the town was delivered into his hands. ⁵¹ He destroyed every male by the edge of the sword, and razed and plundered the town. Then he passed through the town over the bodies of the dead.

⁵² Then they crossed the Jordan into the large plain before Beth-shan. ⁵³ Judas kept rallying the laggards and encouraging the people all the way until he came to the land of Judah. ⁵⁴ So they went up to Mount Zion with joy and gladness, and offered burnt offerings, because they had returned in safety; not one of them had fallen.

Joseph and Azariah Defeated

⁵⁵ Now while Judas and Jonathan were in Gilead and their^a brother Simon was in Galilee before Ptolemais, ⁵⁶ Joseph son of Zechariah, and Azariah, the commanders of the forces, heard of their brave deeds and of the heroic war they had fought. ⁵⁷ So they said, "Let us also make a name for ourselves; let us go and make war on the Gentiles around us." ⁵⁸ So they issued orders to the men of the forces that were with them and marched against Jamnia. ⁵⁹ Gorgias and his men came out of the town to meet them in battle. ⁶⁰ Then Joseph and

Azariah were routed, and were pursued to the borders of Judea; as many as two thousand of the people of Israel fell that day. ⁶¹ Thus the people suffered a great rout because, thinking to do a brave deed, they did not listen to Judas and his brothers. ⁶² But they did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel.

⁶³ The man Judas and his brothers were greatly honored in all Israel and among all the Gentiles, wherever their name was heard. ⁶⁴ People gathered to them and praised them.

Success at Hebron and Philistia

⁶⁵ Then Judas and his brothers went out and fought the descendants of Esau in the land to the south. He struck Hebron and its villages and tore down its strongholds and burned its towers on all sides. ⁶⁶ Then he marched off to go into the land of the Philistines, and passed through Marisa.^b ⁶⁷ On that day some priests, who wished to do a brave deed, fell in battle, for they went out to battle unwisely. ⁶⁸ But Judas turned aside to Azotus in the land of the Philistines; he tore down their altars, and the carved images of their gods he burned with fire; he plundered the towns and returned to the land of Judah.

The Last Days of Antiochus Epiphanes

6 King Antiochus was going through the upper provinces when he heard that Elymais in Persia was a city famed for its wealth in silver and gold. ² Its temple was very rich, containing golden shields, breastplates, and weapons left there by Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian king who first reigned over the Greeks. ³ So he came and tried to take the city and plunder it, but he could not because his plan had become known to the citizens ⁴ and they withstood him in battle. So he fled and in great disappointment left there to return to Babylon.

⁵ Then someone came to him in Persia and reported that the armies that had gone into the land of Judah had been routed; ⁶ that Lysias had gone first with a strong force, but had turned and fled before the Jews;^c that the Jews^d had grown strong from the arms, supplies, and abundant spoils that they had taken from the

^a Gk *his*

^b Other ancient authorities read *Samaria*

^c Gk *them*

^d Gk *they*

Read 1 Maccabees 6:1–17

After a military defeat in Persia and upon hearing the news of Lysias' defeat by the Jews, Antiochus takes to his bed, repents his unjust acts against the Jews, and names his son Antiochus V Eupator as his successor.

Reflect: Consider how greed and unjust behavior can contribute to the ruin of one's plans. Reflect on the uselessness of power in the face of our mortality.

Pray: Pray for a willingness to always listen to God. Ask for the ability to recognize your faults and to repent your sins.

Act: Seek the pardon of those you have wronged and do what you can to rectify the evil you have caused others.

armies they had cut down; ⁷ that they had torn down the abomination that he had erected on the altar in Jerusalem; and that they had surrounded the sanctuary with high walls as before, and also Beth-zur, his town.

⁸ When the king heard this news, he was astounded and badly shaken. He took to his bed and became sick from disappointment, because things had not turned out for him as he had planned. ⁹ He lay there for many days, because deep disappointment continually gripped him, and he realized that he was dying. ¹⁰ So he called all his Friends and said to them, "Sleep has departed from my eyes and I am downhearted with worry. ¹¹ I said to myself, 'To what distress I have come! And into what a great flood I now am plunged! For I was kind and beloved in my power.' ¹² But now I remember the wrong I did in Jerusalem. I seized all its vessels of silver and gold, and I sent to destroy the inhabitants of Judah without good reason. ¹³ I know that it is because of this that these misfortunes have come upon me; here I am, perishing of bitter disappointment in a strange land."

¹⁴ Then he called for Philip, one of his Friends, and made him ruler over all his kingdom. ¹⁵ He gave him the crown and his robe and the signet, so that he might guide his son Antiochus and bring him up to be king. ¹⁶ Thus King Antiochus died there in the one hundred forty-ninth year.^a ¹⁷ When Lysias learned that the king was dead, he set up Antiochus the king's^b son to reign. Lysias^c had brought him up from boyhood; he named him Eupator.

Renewed Attacks from Syria

¹⁸ Meanwhile the garrison in the citadel kept hemming Israel around the sanctuary. They were trying in every way to harm them and strengthen the Gentiles. ¹⁹ Judas therefore resolved to destroy them, and assembled all the people to besiege them. ²⁰ They gathered together and besieged the citadel^d in the one hundred fiftieth year;^e and he built siege towers and other engines of war. ²¹ But some of the garrison escaped from the siege and some of the ungodly Israelites joined them. ²² They went to the king and said, "How long will you fail to do justice and to avenge our kindred? ²³ We were happy to serve your father, to live by what he said, and to follow his commands. ²⁴ For this reason the sons of our people besieged the citadel^f and became hostile to us; moreover, they have put to death as many of us as they have caught, and they have seized our inheritances. ²⁵ It is not against us alone that they have stretched out their hands; they have also attacked all the lands on their borders. ²⁶ And see, today they have encamped against the citadel in Jerusalem

^a 163 B.C.

^b Gk *his*

^c Gk *He*

^d Gk *it*

^e 162 B.C.

^f Meaning of Gk uncertain

Read 1 Maccabees 6:18–63

As the new king's guardian, Lysias responds to Jewish pressure on the Citadel in Jerusalem by sending an army to attack the southern fortress of Beth-zur. Judas sends his army to Beth-zachariah to confront the Seleucid forces. In the fighting, Judas's brother Eleazar is killed and Judas's troops withdraw to Jerusalem where a long siege ensues. The siege is ended with a peace treaty because of internal fighting between Lysias and another Seleucid general, Philip, who both want to control the boy-king.

Reflect: Consider the complexity of wars with battles on several fronts, the need to supply the armies, and the potential for sudden shifts in the struggle due to political events or rivalries.

Pray: Pray for an end to conflict between nations. Ask that our leaders may find the wisdom to seek solutions to problems that create frictions between nations and peoples.

Act: Work for peace and good will with all people. Give your support to efforts to end aggression and heal the damage caused by hatred and war.

to take it; they have fortified both the sanctuary and Beth-zur;²⁷ unless you quickly prevent them, they will do still greater things, and you will not be able to stop them.”

28 The king was enraged when he heard this. He assembled all his Friends, the commanders of his forces and those in authority.^a 29 Mercenary forces also came to him from other kingdoms and from islands of the seas. 30 The number of his forces was one hundred thousand foot soldiers, twenty thousand horsemen, and thirty-two elephants accustomed to war. 31 They came through Idumea and encamped against Beth-zur, and for many days they fought and built engines of war; but the Jews^b sallied out and burned these with fire, and fought courageously.

The Battle at Beth-zachariah

32 Then Judas marched away from the citadel and encamped at Beth-zachariah, opposite the camp of the king. 33 Early in the morning the king set out and took his army by a forced march along the road to Beth-zachariah, and his troops made ready for battle and sounded their trumpets. 34 They offered the elephants the juice of grapes and mulberries, to arouse them for battle. 35 They distributed the animals among the phalanxes; with each elephant they stationed a thousand men armed with coats of mail, and with brass helmets on their heads; and five hundred picked horsemen were assigned to each beast. 36 These took their position beforehand wherever the animal was; wherever it went, they went with it, and they never left it. 37 On the elephants^c were wooden towers, strong and covered; they were fastened on each animal by special harness, and on each were four^d armed men who fought from there, and also its Indian driver. 38 The rest of the cavalry were stationed on either side, on the two flanks of the army, to harass the enemy while being themselves protected by the phalanxes. 39 When the sun shone on the shields of gold and brass, the hills were ablaze with them and gleamed like flaming torches.

40 Now a part of the king's army was spread out on the high hills, and some troops were on the plain, and they advanced steadily and in good order. 41 All who heard the noise made by their multitude, by the marching of the multitude and the clanking of their arms, trembled, for the army was very large and strong. 42 But Judas and his army advanced to the battle, and six hundred of the king's army fell. 43 Now Eleazar, called Avaran, saw that one of the animals was equipped with royal armor. It was taller than all the others, and he supposed that the king was on it. 44 So he gave his life to

^a Gk *those over the reins*

^b Gk *they*

^c Gk *them*

^d Cn: Some authorities read *thirty*; others *thirty-two*

save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name. ⁴⁵ He courageously ran into the midst of the phalanx to reach it; he killed men right and left, and they parted before him on both sides. ⁴⁶ He got under the elephant, stabbed it from beneath, and killed it; but it fell to the ground upon him and he died. ⁴⁷ When the Jews^a saw the royal might and the fierce attack of the forces, they turned away in flight.

The Siege of the Temple

⁴⁸ The soldiers of the king's army went up to Jerusalem against them, and the king encamped in Judea and at Mount Zion. ⁴⁹ He made peace with the people of Beth-zur, and they evacuated the town because they had no provisions there to withstand a siege, since it was a sabbatical year for the land. ⁵⁰ So the king took Beth-zur and stationed a guard there to hold it. ⁵¹ Then he encamped before the sanctuary for many days. He set up siege towers, engines of war to throw fire and stones, machines to shoot arrows, and catapults. ⁵² The Jews^a also made engines of war to match theirs, and fought for many days. ⁵³ But they had no food in storage,^b because it was the seventh year; those who had found safety in Judea from the Gentiles had consumed the last of the stores. ⁵⁴ Only a few men were left in the sanctuary; the rest scattered to their own homes, for the famine proved too much for them.

Syria Offers Terms

⁵⁵ Then Lysias heard that Philip, whom King Antiochus while still living had appointed to bring up his son Antiochus to be king, ⁵⁶ had returned from Persia and Media with the forces that had gone with the king, and that he was trying to seize control of the government. ⁵⁷ So he quickly gave orders to withdraw, and said to the king, to the commanders of the forces, and to the troops, "Daily we grow weaker, our food supply is scant, the place against which we are fighting is strong, and the affairs of the kingdom press urgently on us. ⁵⁸ Now then let us come to terms with these people, and make peace with them and with all their nation. ⁵⁹ Let us agree to let them live by their laws as they did before; for it was on account of their laws that we abolished that they became angry and did all these things."

⁶⁰ The speech pleased the king and the commanders, and he sent to the Jews^c an offer of peace, and they accepted it. ⁶¹ So the king and the commanders gave them their oath. On these conditions the Jews^a evacuated the stronghold. ⁶² But when the king entered Mount Zion and saw what a strong fortress the place was, he broke the oath he had sworn and gave orders to tear down the wall all around. ⁶³ Then he set off in haste and returned to Antioch. He found Philip in control of the city, but he fought against him, and took the city by force.

Expedition of Bacchides and Alcimus

7 In the one hundred fifty-first year^d Demetrius son of Seleucus set out from Rome, sailed with a few men to a town by the sea, and there began to reign. ² As he was entering the royal palace of his ancestors, the army seized Antiochus and Lysias to bring them to him. ³ But when this act became known to him, he said, "Do not let me see their faces!" ⁴ So the army killed them, and Demetrius took his seat on the throne of his kingdom.

⁵ Then there came to him all the renegade and godless men of Israel; they were led by Alcimus, who wanted to be high priest. ⁶ They brought to the king this accusation against the people: "Judas and his brothers have destroyed all your Friends, and have driven us out

^a Gk *they*

^b Other ancient authorities read *in the sanctuary*

^c Gk *them*

^d 161 B.C.

Read 1 Maccabees 7

Demetrius, son of Seleucus, returns from Rome to Antioch and has Lysias and Antiochus V executed. He supports the anti-Maccabean Jew Alcimus as high priest and sends an army under Bacchides to subdue Jerusalem. After Judas defeats Bacchides, Demetrius sends another army, this one headed by Nicanor. He employs deceitful diplomacy and threatens to destroy the temple. Judas's prayer for victory is answered: Nicanor falls in battle and his army is routed.

Reflect: Reflect on how the desire for peace can be used as a weapon to deceive people into letting down their guard. Consider the negative consequences of personal ambition by unprincipled persons.

Pray: Pray that God will infuse our leaders with the desire to perform right actions and make wise decisions.

Act: We need to recognize that choices have consequences that we may not anticipate, and we must remain alert to the fact that not everyone has our best interests at heart.

of our land. ⁷ Now then send a man whom you trust; let him go and see all the ruin that Judas^a has brought on us and on the land of the king, and let him punish them and all who help them.”

⁸ So the king chose Bacchides, one of the king's Friends, governor of the province Beyond the River; he was a great man in the kingdom and was faithful to the king. ⁹ He sent him, and with him he sent the ungodly Alcimus, whom he made high priest; and he commanded him to take vengeance on the Israelites. ¹⁰ So they marched away and came with a large force into the land of Judah; and he sent messengers to Judas and his brothers with peaceable but treacherous words. ¹¹ But they paid no attention to their words, for they saw that they had come with a large force.

¹² Then a group of scribes appeared in a body before Alcimus and Bacchides to ask for just terms. ¹³ The Hasideans were first among the Israelites to seek peace from them, ¹⁴ for they said, “A priest of the line of Aaron has come with the army, and he will not harm us.” ¹⁵ Alcimus^b spoke peaceable words to them and swore this oath to them, “We will not seek to injure you or your friends.” ¹⁶ So they trusted him; but he seized sixty of them and killed them in one day, in accordance with the word that was written,

¹⁷ “The flesh of your faithful ones and their blood they poured out all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.”

¹⁸ Then the fear and dread of them fell on all the people, for they said, “There is no truth or justice in them, for they have violated the agreement and the oath that they swore.”

¹⁹ Then Bacchides withdrew from Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-zaiton. And he sent and seized many of the men who had deserted to him,^c and some of the people, and killed them and threw them into a great pit. ²⁰ He placed Alcimus in charge of the country and left with him a force to help him; then Bacchides went back to the king.

²¹ Alcimus struggled to maintain his high priesthood, ²² and all who were troubling their people joined him. They gained control of the land of Judah and did great damage in Israel. ²³ And Judas saw all the wrongs that Alcimus and those with him had done among the Israelites; it was more than the Gentiles had done. ²⁴ So Judas^a went out into all the surrounding parts of Judea, taking vengeance on those who had deserted and preventing those in the city^d from going out into the country. ²⁵ When Alcimus saw that Judas and those with him had grown strong, and realized that he could not with-

^a Gk *he*

^b Gk *He*

^c Or *many of his men who had deserted*

^d Gk *and they were prevented*

stand them, he returned to the king and brought malicious charges against them.

Nicanor in Judea

26 Then the king sent Nicanor, one of his honored princes, who hated and detested Israel, and he commanded him to destroy the people. 27 So Nicanor came to Jerusalem with a large force, and treacherously sent to Judas and his brothers this peaceable message, 28 "Let there be no fighting between you and me; I shall come with a few men to see you face to face in peace."

29 So he came to Judas, and they greeted one another peaceably; but the enemy were preparing to kidnap Judas. 30 It became known to Judas that Nicanor^a had come to him with treacherous intent, and he was afraid of him and would not meet him again. 31 When Nicanor learned that his plan had been disclosed, he went out to meet Judas in battle near Caphar-salama. 32 About five hundred of the army of Nicanor fell, and the rest^b fled into the city of David.

Nicanor Threatens the Temple

33 After these events Nicanor went up to Mount Zion. Some of the priests from the sanctuary and some of the elders of the people came out to greet him peaceably and to show him the burnt offering that was being offered for the king. 34 But he mocked them and derided them and defiled them and spoke arrogantly, 35 and in anger he swore this oath, "Unless Judas and his army are delivered into my hands this time, then if I return safely I will burn up this house." And he went out in great anger. 36 At this the priests went in and stood before the altar and the temple; they wept and said,

37 "You chose this house to be called by your name,

and to be for your people a house of prayer and supplication.

38 Take vengeance on this man and on his army,
and let them fall by the sword;
remember their blasphemies,
and let them live no longer."

The Death of Nicanor

39 Now Nicanor went out from Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-horon, and the Syrian army joined him. 40 Judas encamped in Adasa with three thousand men. Then Judas prayed and said, 41 "When the messengers from the king spoke blasphemy, your angel went out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians.^c 42 So also crush this army before us today; let the rest learn that Nicanor^a has spoken wickedly against the sanctuary, and judge him according to this wickedness."

43 So the armies met in battle on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. The army of Nicanor was crushed, and he himself was the first to fall in the battle. 44 When his army saw that Nicanor had fallen, they threw down their arms and fled. 45 The Jews^b pursued them a day's journey, from Adasa as far as Gazara, and as they followed they kept sounding the battle call on the trumpets. 46 People came out of all the surrounding villages of Judea, and they outflanked the enemy^d and drove them back to their pursuers,^e so that they all fell by the sword; not even one of them was left. 47 Then the Jews^b seized the spoils and the plunder; they cut off Nicanor's head and the right hand that he had so arrogantly stretched out, and brought them and displayed them just outside Jerusalem. 48 The people rejoiced greatly and celebrated that day as a day of great gladness. 49 They decreed that this day should be celebrated each year on the thirteenth day of Adar. 50 So the land of Judah had rest for a few days.

^a Gk he

^b Gk they

^c Gk of them

^d Gk them

^e Gk these

Read 1 Maccabees 8

A very flattering portrayal of the Roman republic and its support of its allies is followed by an account of the embassy sent to Rome by Judas to seek a mutual defense pact with the Romans. The terms of the treaty are recounted. The chapter ends with words of warning to Demetrius that further attacks on the Jews will bring the Romans to their defense.

Reflect: Consider the need for alliances between nations and reflect on the costs that result when a smaller nation becomes the ally of a larger, more powerful nation.

Pray: Pray for goodwill and fair dealing between nations. Pray for the wisdom that allows us to ask for help.

Act: Resolve to learn more about treaty/contract language so that, when it seems that an alliance or partnership may be necessary, you can better understand whether such an alliance or partnership is in the best interests of a nation or person.

A Eulogy of the Romans

8 Now Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were very strong and were well-disposed toward all who made an alliance with them, that they pledged friendship to those who came to them, ² and that they were very strong. He had been told of their wars and of the brave deeds that they were doing among the Gauls, how they had defeated them and forced them to pay tribute, ³ and what they had done in the land of Spain to get control of the silver and gold mines there, ⁴ and how they had gained control of the whole region by their planning and patience, even though the place was far distant from them. They also subdued the kings who came against them from the ends of the earth, until they crushed them and inflicted great disaster on them; the rest paid them tribute every year. ⁵ They had crushed in battle and conquered Philip, and King Perseus of the Macedonians,^a and the others who rose up against them. ⁶ They also had defeated Antiochus the Great, king of Asia, who went to fight against them with one hundred twenty elephants and with cavalry and chariots and a very large army. He was crushed by them; ⁷ they took him alive and decreed that he and those who would reign after him should pay a heavy tribute and give hostages and surrender some of their best provinces, ⁸ the countries of India, Media, and Lydia. These they took from him and gave to King Eumenes. ⁹ The Greeks planned to come and destroy them, ¹⁰ but this became known to them, and they sent a general against the Greeks^b and attacked them. Many of them were wounded and fell, and the Romans^c took captive their wives and children; they plundered them, conquered the land, tore down their strongholds, and enslaved them to this day. ¹¹ The remaining kingdoms and islands, as many as ever opposed them, they destroyed and enslaved; ¹² but with their friends and those who rely on them they have kept friendship. They have subdued kings far and near, and as many as have heard of their fame have feared them. ¹³ Those whom they wish to help and to make kings, they make kings, and those whom they wish they depose; and they have been greatly exalted. ¹⁴ Yet for all this not one of them has put on a crown or worn purple as a mark of pride, ¹⁵ but they have built for themselves a senate chamber, and every day three hundred twenty senators constantly deliberate concerning the people, to govern them well. ¹⁶ They trust one man each year to rule over them and to control all their land; they all heed the one man, and there is no envy or jealousy among them.

^a Or Kittim

^b Gk them

^c Gk they

An Alliance with Rome

17 So Judas chose Eupolemus son of John son of Accos, and Jason son of Eleazar, and sent them to Rome to establish friendship and alliance,¹⁸ and to free themselves from the yoke; for they saw that the kingdom of the Greeks was enslaving Israel completely.¹⁹ They went to Rome, a very long journey; and they entered the senate chamber and spoke as follows:²⁰ “Judas, who is also called Maccabeus, and his brothers and the people of the Jews have sent us to you to establish alliance and peace with you, so that we may be enrolled as your allies and friends.”²¹ The proposal pleased them,²² and this is a copy of the letter that they wrote in reply, on bronze tablets, and sent to Jerusalem to remain with them there as a memorial of peace and alliance:

23 “May all go well with the Romans and with the nation of the Jews at sea and on land forever, and may sword and enemy be far from them.²⁴ If war comes first to Rome or to any of their allies in all their dominion,²⁵ the nation of the Jews shall act as their allies wholeheartedly, as the occa-

sion may indicate to them.²⁶ To the enemy that makes war they shall not give or supply grain, arms, money, or ships, just as Rome has decided; and they shall keep their obligations without receiving any return.²⁷ In the same way, if war comes first to the nation of the Jews, the Romans shall willingly act as their allies, as the occasion may indicate to them.²⁸ And to their enemies there shall not be given grain, arms, money, or ships, just as Rome has decided; and they shall keep these obligations and do so without deceit.²⁹ Thus on these terms the Romans make a treaty with the Jewish people.³⁰ If after these terms are in effect both parties shall determine to add or delete anything, they shall do so at their discretion, and any addition or deletion that they may make shall be valid.

31 “Concerning the wrongs that King Demetrius is doing to them, we have written to him as follows, ‘Why have you made your yoke heavy on our friends and allies the Jews?’³² If now they appeal again for help against you, we will defend their rights and fight you on sea and on land.’”

Bacchides Returns to Judea

9 When Demetrius heard that Nicanor and his army had fallen in battle, he sent Bacchides and Alcimus into the land of Judah a second time, and with them the right wing of the army.² They went by the road that leads to Gilgal and encamped against Mesaloth in Arbela, and they took it and killed many people.³ In the first month of the one hundred fifty-second year^a they encamped against Jerusalem;⁴ then they marched off and went to Berea with twenty thousand foot soldiers and two thousand cavalry.

5 Now Judas was encamped in Elasa, and with him were three thousand picked men.⁶ When they saw the huge number of the enemy forces, they were greatly frightened, and many slipped away from the camp, until no more than eight hundred of them were left.

7 When Judas saw that his army had slipped away and the battle was imminent, he was crushed in spirit, for he had no time to assemble them.⁸ He became faint, but he said to those who were left, “Let us get up and go against our enemies. We may have the strength to fight them.”⁹ But they tried to dissuade him, saying, “We do not have the strength. Let us rather save our

^a 160 B.C.

Read 1 Maccabees 9:1–22

Demetrius sends another large army led by Bacchides and Alcimus against Judas's forces. After most of his army refuses to fight and flees, Judas chooses to lead his remaining eight hundred men into battle rather than lose his honor. Nearly every one of them, including Judas, is killed and all of Israel mourns for him.

Reflect: Consider whether it is worthwhile to pursue a lost cause. Reflect on the courage required to make the ultimate sacrifice for one's nation.

Pray: Pray for those who have died in defense of the nation and for their families.

Act: Work to instill a sense of honor and patriotism that ensures that leaders and their followers will not be forced to sacrifice themselves simply to set an example.

own lives now, and let us come back with our kindred and fight them; we are too few.”¹⁰ But Judas said, “Far be it from us to do such a thing as to flee from them. If our time has come, let us die bravely for our kindred, and leave no cause to question our honor.”

The Last Battle of Judas

11 Then the army of Bacchides^a marched out from the camp and took its stand for the encounter. The cavalry was divided into two companies, and the slingers and the archers went ahead of the army, as did all the chief warriors.¹² Bacchides was on the right wing. Flanked by the two companies, the phalanx advanced to the sound of the trumpets; and the men with Judas also blew their trumpets.¹³ The earth was shaken by the noise of the armies, and the battle raged from morning until evening.

14 Judas saw that Bacchides and the strength of his army were on the right; then all the stouthearted men went with him,¹⁵ and they crushed the right wing, and he pursued them as far as Mount Azotus.¹⁶ When those on the left wing saw that the right wing was crushed, they turned and followed close behind Judas and his men.¹⁷ The battle became desperate, and many on both sides were wounded and fell.¹⁸ Judas also fell, and the rest fled.

19 Then Jonathan and Simon took their brother Judas and buried him in the tomb of their ancestors at Modein,²⁰ and wept for him. All Israel made great lamentation for him; they mourned many days and said,

²¹ “How is the mighty fallen,
the savior of Israel!”

²² 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, but they were very many.

Jonathan Succeeds Judas

23 After the death of Judas, the renegades emerged in all parts of Israel; all the wrongdoers reappeared.²⁴ In those days a very great famine occurred, and the country went over to their side.²⁵ Bacchides chose the godless and put them in charge of the country.²⁶ They made inquiry and searched for the friends of Judas, and brought them to Bacchides, who took vengeance on them and made sport of them.²⁷ So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.

28 Then all the friends of Judas assembled and said to Jonathan,²⁹ “Since the death of your brother Judas there has been no one like him to go against our ene-

^a Gk lacks of Bacchides

Read 1 Maccabees 9:23–73

Jonathan succeeds his brother Judas as the leader of the Jewish liberation movement, but almost immediately he is tested by Bacchides and a force encouraged by anti-Maccabean Jews. During the next two years, Alcimus dies and Bacchides gains control of Jerusalem and builds several fortresses. Although Jonathan has some military success and, after signing a treaty with Bacchides, is able to set himself up at Michmash as the leader of the Jewish people, he is restricted in his actions by Seleucid control of most of the nation.

Reflect: Consider the fluctuations of fortune for political leaders and armies. Reflect on how taking bad advice can prove costly.

Pray: Pray for an orderly succession of leadership, as well as for stability and an end to hostilities.

Act: Support our leaders in times of crisis, but also encourage them to seek peaceful and productive solutions to the problems that have created the crisis.

mies and Bacchides, and to deal with those of our nation who hate us. ³⁰ Now therefore we have chosen you today to take his place as our ruler and leader, to fight our battle.” ³¹ So Jonathan accepted the leadership at that time in place of his brother Judas.

The Campaigns of Jonathan

32 When Bacchides learned of this, he tried to kill him. ³³ But Jonathan and his brother Simon and all who were with him heard of it, and they fled into the wilderness of Tekoa and camped by the water of the pool of Asphar. ³⁴ Bacchides found this out on the sabbath day, and he with all his army crossed the Jordan.

35 So Jonathan^a sent his brother as leader of the multitude and begged the Nabateans, who were his friends, for permission to store with them the great amount of baggage that they had. ³⁶ But the family of Jambri from Medeba came out and seized John and all that he had, and left with it.

37 After these things it was reported to Jonathan and his brother Simon, “The family of Jambri are celebrating a great wedding, and are conducting the bride, a daughter of one of the great nobles of Canaan, from Nadabath with a large escort.” ³⁸ Remembering how their brother John had been killed, they went up and hid under cover of the mountain. ³⁹ They looked out and saw a tumultuous procession with a great amount of baggage; and the bridegroom came out with his friends and his brothers to meet them with tambourines and musicians and many weapons. ⁴⁰ Then they rushed on them from the ambush and began killing them. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled to the mountain; and the Jews^b took all their goods. ⁴¹ So the wedding was turned into mourning and the voice of their musicians into a funeral dirge. ⁴² After they had fully avenged the blood of their brother, they returned to the marshes of the Jordan.

43 When Bacchides heard of this, he came with a large force on the sabbath day to the banks of the Jordan. ⁴⁴ And Jonathan said to those with him, “Let us get up now and fight for our lives, for today things are not as they were before. ⁴⁵ For look! the battle is in front of us and behind us; the water of the Jordan is on this side and on that, with marsh and thicket; there is no place to turn. ⁴⁶ Cry out now to Heaven that you may be delivered from the hands of our enemies.” ⁴⁷ So the battle began, and Jonathan stretched out his hand to strike Bacchides, but he eluded him and went to the rear. ⁴⁸ Then Jonathan and the men with him leaped into the Jordan and swam across to the other side, and the enemy^b did not cross the Jordan to attack them. ⁴⁹ And

^a Gk he

^b Gk they

about one thousand of Bacchides' men fell that day.

Bacchides Builds Fortifications

50 Then Bacchides^a returned to Jerusalem and built strong cities in Judea: the fortress in Jericho, and Emmaus, and Beth-horon, and Bethel, and Timnath, and^b Pharathon, and Tephon, with high walls and gates and bars. ⁵¹ And he placed garrisons in them to harass Israel. ⁵² He also fortified the town of Beth-zur, and Gazara, and the citadel, and in them he put troops and stores of food. ⁵³ And he took the sons of the leading men of the land as hostages and put them under guard in the citadel at Jerusalem.

54 In the one hundred and fifty-third year,^c in the second month, Alcimus gave orders to tear down the wall of the inner court of the sanctuary. He tore down the work of the prophets! ⁵⁵ But he only began to tear it down, for at that time Alcimus was stricken and his work was hindered; his mouth was stopped and he was paralyzed, so that he could no longer say a word or give commands concerning his house. ⁵⁶ And Alcimus died at that time in great agony. ⁵⁷ When Bacchides saw that Alcimus was dead, he returned to the king, and the land of Judah had rest for two years.

The End of the War

58 Then all the lawless plotted and said, "See! Jonathan and his men are living in quiet and confidence. So now let us bring Bacchides back, and he will capture them all in one night." ⁵⁹ And they went and consulted with him. ⁶⁰ He started to come with a large force, and secretly sent letters to all his allies in Judea, telling them to seize Jonathan and his men; but they were unable to do it, because their plan became

known. ⁶¹ And Jonathan's men^d seized about fifty of the men of the country who were leaders in this treachery, and killed them.

62 Then Jonathan with his men, and Simon, withdrew to Bethbasi in the wilderness; he rebuilt the parts of it that had been demolished, and they fortified it. ⁶³ When Bacchides learned of this, he assembled all his forces, and sent orders to the men of Judea. ⁶⁴ Then he came and encamped against Bethbasi; he fought against it for many days and made machines of war.

65 But Jonathan left his brother Simon in the town, while he went out into the country; and he went with only a few men. ⁶⁶ He struck down Odomera and his kindred and the people of Phasiron in their tents. ⁶⁷ Then he^e began to attack and went into battle with his forces; and Simon and his men sallied out from the town and set fire to the machines of war. ⁶⁸ They fought with Bacchides, and he was crushed by them. They pressed him very hard, for his plan and his expedition had been in vain. ⁶⁹ So he was very angry at the renegades who had counseled him to come into the country, and he killed many of them. Then he decided to go back to his own land.

70 When Jonathan learned of this, he sent ambassadors to him to make peace with him and obtain release of the captives. ⁷¹ He agreed, and did as he said; and he swore to Jonathan^f that he would not try to harm him as long as he lived. ⁷² He restored to him the captives whom he had taken previously from the land of Judah; then he turned and went back to his own land, and did not come again into their territory. ⁷³ Thus the sword ceased from Israel. Jonathan settled in Michmash and began to judge the people; and he destroyed the godless out of Israel.

Revolt of Alexander Epiphanes

10 In the one hundred sixtieth year^g Alexander Epiphanes, son of Antiochus, landed and occupied Ptolemais. They welcomed him, and there he began to reign. ² When King Demetrius heard of it, he as-

^a Gk *he*

^b Some authorities omit *and*

^c 159 B.C.

^d Gk *they*

^e Other ancient authorities read *they*

^f Gk *him*

^g 152 B.C.

Read 1 Maccabees 10

Jonathan becomes embroiled in the fighting between rival Seleucid kings, Alexander Balas and Demetrius II. Both court Jonathan with presents, tax exempt status, and the bestowing of the title of high priest, but he allies himself with Alexander. Subsequently Alexander kills Demetrius in battle and marries Cleopatra, the daughter of the Ptolemaic king of Egypt. Jonathan defeats an army lead by Apollonius and receives further honors from Alexander.

Reflect: Consider the dangers implicit when you are caught between two strong rivals. Reflect on the strategies that will prevent you from being harmed when others fight.

Pray: Pray for the ability to make wise decisions. Ask for guidance and courage in the face of dilemmas.

Act: Study both sides of an issue or an argument before making a decision to support one or the other. Accept the consequences of your decision without blaming others.

sembled a very large army and marched out to meet him in battle. ³ Demetrius sent Jonathan a letter in peaceable words to honor him; ⁴ for he said to himself, “Let us act first to make peace with him^a before he makes peace with Alexander against us, ⁵ for he will remember all the wrongs that we did to him and to his brothers and his nation.” ⁶ So Demetrius^b gave him authority to recruit troops, to equip them with arms, and to become his ally; and he commanded that the hostages in the citadel should be released to him.

⁷ Then Jonathan came to Jerusalem and read the letter in the hearing of all the people and of those in the citadel. ⁸ They were greatly alarmed when they heard that the king had given him authority to recruit troops. ⁹ But those in the citadel released the hostages to Jonathan, and he returned them to their parents.

¹⁰ And Jonathan took up residence in Jerusalem and began to rebuild and restore the city. ¹¹ He directed those who were doing the work to build the walls and encircle Mount Zion with squared stones, for better fortification; and they did so.

¹² Then the foreigners who were in the strongholds that Bacchides had built fled; ¹³ all of them left their places and went back to their own lands. ¹⁴ Only in Beth-zur did some remain who had forsaken the law and the commandments, for it served as a place of refuge.

¹⁵ Now King Alexander heard of all the promises that Demetrius had sent to Jonathan, and he heard of the battles that Jonathan^b and his brothers had fought, of the brave deeds that they had done, and of the troubles that they had endured. ¹⁶ So he said, “Shall we find another such man? Come now, we will make him our friend and ally.” ¹⁷ And he wrote a letter and sent it to him, in the following words:

Jonathan Becomes High Priest

¹⁸ “King Alexander to his brother Jonathan, greetings. ¹⁹ We have heard about you, that you are a mighty warrior and worthy to be our friend. ²⁰ And so we have appointed you today to be the high priest of your nation; you are to be called the king’s Friend and you are to take our side and keep friendship with us.” He also sent him a purple robe and a golden crown.

²¹ So Jonathan put on the sacred vestments in the seventh month of the one hundred sixtieth year,^c at the festival of booths,^d and he recruited troops and equipped them with arms in abundance. ²² When Demetrius heard of these things he was distressed and said, ²³ “What is this that we have done? Alexander has gotten ahead of us in forming a friendship with the Jews

^a Gk them

^b Gk he

^c 152 B.C.

^d Or tabernacles

to strengthen himself. ²⁴I also will write them words of encouragement and promise them honor and gifts, so that I may have their help.” ²⁵So he sent a message to them in the following words:

A Letter from Demetrius to Jonathan

“King Demetrius to the nation of the Jews, greetings. ²⁶Since you have kept your agreement with us and have continued your friendship with us, and have not sided with our enemies, we have heard of it and rejoiced. ²⁷Now continue still to keep faith with us, and we will repay you with good for what you do for us. ²⁸We will grant you many immunities and give you gifts.

²⁹“I now free you and exempt all the Jews from payment of tribute and salt tax and crown levies, ³⁰and instead of collecting the third of the grain and the half of the fruit of the trees that I should receive, I release them from this day and henceforth. I will not collect them from the land of Judah or from the three districts added to it from Samaria and Galilee, from this day and for all time. ³¹Jerusalem and its environs, its tithes and its revenues, shall be holy and free from tax. ³²I release also my control of the citadel in Jerusalem and give it to the high priest, so that he may station in it men of his own choice to guard it. ³³And everyone of the Jews taken as a captive from the land of Judah into any part of my kingdom, I set free without payment; and let all officials cancel also the taxes on their livestock.

³⁴“All the festivals and sabbaths and new moons and appointed days, and the three days before a festival and the three after a festival—let them all be days of immunity and release for all the Jews who are in my kingdom. ³⁵No one shall have authority to exact anything from them or annoy any of them about any matter.

³⁶“Let Jews be enrolled in the king’s forces to the number of thirty thousand men, and let the maintenance be given

them that is due to all the forces of the king. ³⁷Let some of them be stationed in the great strongholds of the king, and let some of them be put in positions of trust in the kingdom. Let their officers and leaders be of their own number, and let them live by their own laws, just as the king has commanded in the land of Judah.

³⁸“As for the three districts that have been added to Judea from the country of Samaria, let them be annexed to Judea so that they may be considered to be under one ruler and obey no other authority than the high priest. ³⁹Ptolemais and the land adjoining it I have given as a gift to the sanctuary in Jerusalem, to meet the necessary expenses of the sanctuary. ⁴⁰I also grant fifteen thousand shekels of silver yearly out of the king’s revenues from appropriate places. ⁴¹And all the additional funds that the government officials have not paid as they did in the first years,^a they shall give from now on for the service of the temple.^b ⁴²Moreover, the five thousand shekels of silver that my officials^c have received every year from the income of the services of the temple, this too is canceled, because it belongs to the priests who minister there. ⁴³And all who take refuge at the temple in Jerusalem, or in any of its precincts, because they owe money to the king or are in debt, let them be released and receive back all their property in my kingdom.

⁴⁴“Let the cost of rebuilding and restoring the structures of the sanctuary be paid from the revenues of the king. ⁴⁵And let the cost of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and fortifying it all around, and the cost of rebuilding the walls in Judea, also be paid from the revenues of the king.”

Death of Demetrius

⁴⁶When Jonathan and the people heard these words, they did not believe or accept them, because they remembered the great wrongs that Demetrius^d had done in Israel and how much he had oppressed

^a Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Gk *house*

^c Gk *they*

^d Gk *he*

them. ⁴⁷ They favored Alexander, because he had been the first to speak peaceable words to them, and they remained his allies all his days.

⁴⁸ Now King Alexander assembled large forces and encamped opposite Demetrius. ⁴⁹ The two kings met in battle, and the army of Demetrius fled, and Alexander^a pursued him and defeated them. ⁵⁰ He pressed the battle strongly until the sun set, and on that day Demetrius fell.

Treaty of Ptolemy and Alexander

⁵¹ Then Alexander sent ambassadors to Ptolemy king of Egypt with the following message: ⁵² “Since I have returned to my kingdom and have taken my seat on the throne of my ancestors, and established my rule—for I crushed Demetrius and gained control of our country; ⁵³ I met him in battle, and he and his army were crushed by us, and we have taken our seat on the throne of his kingdom—⁵⁴ now therefore let us establish friendship with one another; give me now your daughter as my wife, and I will become your son-in-law, and will make gifts to you and to her in keeping with your position.”

⁵⁵ Ptolemy the king replied and said, “Happy was the day on which you returned to the land of your ancestors and took your seat on the throne of their kingdom. ⁵⁶ And now I will do for you as you wrote, but meet me at Ptolemais, so that we may see one another, and I will become your father-in-law, as you have said.”

⁵⁷ So Ptolemy set out from Egypt, he and his daughter Cleopatra, and came to Ptolemais in the one hundred sixty-second year.^b ⁵⁸ King Alexander met him, and Ptolemy^c gave him his daughter Cleopatra in marriage, and celebrated her wedding at Ptolemais with great pomp, as kings do.

⁵⁹ Then King Alexander wrote to Jonathan to come and meet him. ⁶⁰ So he went with pomp to Ptolemais and met the two

kings; he gave them and their Friends silver and gold and many gifts, and found favor with them. ⁶¹ A group of malcontents from Israel, renegades, gathered together against him to accuse him; but the king paid no attention to them. ⁶² The king gave orders to take off Jonathan’s garments and to clothe him in purple, and they did so. ⁶³ The king also seated him at his side; and he said to his officers, “Go out with him into the middle of the city and proclaim that no one is to bring charges against him about any matter, and let no one annoy him for any reason.” ⁶⁴ When his accusers saw the honor that was paid him, in accord with the proclamation, and saw him clothed in purple, they all fled. ⁶⁵ Thus the king honored him and enrolled him among his chief^d Friends, and made him general and governor of the province. ⁶⁶ And Jonathan returned to Jerusalem in peace and gladness.

Apollonius Is Defeated by Jonathan

⁶⁷ In the one hundred sixty-fifth year^e Demetrius son of Demetrius came from Crete to the land of his ancestors. ⁶⁸ When King Alexander heard of it, he was greatly distressed and returned to Antioch. ⁶⁹ And Demetrius appointed Apollonius the governor of Coelesyria, and he assembled a large force and encamped against Jamnia. Then he sent the following message to the high priest Jonathan:

⁷⁰ “You are the only one to rise up against us, and I have fallen into ridicule and disgrace because of you. Why do you assume authority against us in the hill country? ⁷¹ If you now have confidence in your forces, come down to the plain to meet us, and let us match strength with each other there, for I have with me the power of the cities. ⁷² Ask and learn who I am and who the others are that are helping us. People will tell you that you cannot stand before us, for your ancestors were

^a Other ancient authorities read *Alexander fled, and Demetrius*

^b 150 B.C.

^c Gk *he*

^d Gk *first*

^e 147 B.C.

twice put to flight in their own land. ⁷³ And now you will not be able to withstand my cavalry and such an army in the plain, where there is no stone or pebble, or place to flee.”

⁷⁴ When Jonathan heard the words of Apollonius, his spirit was aroused. He chose ten thousand men and set out from Jerusalem, and his brother Simon met him to help him. ⁷⁵ He encamped before Joppa, but the people of the city closed its gates, for Apollonius had a garrison in Joppa. ⁷⁶ So they fought against it, and the people of the city became afraid and opened the gates, and Jonathan gained possession of Joppa.

⁷⁷ When Apollonius heard of it, he mustered three thousand cavalry and a large army, and went to Azotus as though he were going farther. At the same time he advanced into the plain, for he had a large troop of cavalry and put confidence in it. ⁷⁸ Jonathan^a pursued him to Azotus, and the armies engaged in battle. ⁷⁹ Now Apollonius had secretly left a thousand cavalry behind them. ⁸⁰ Jonathan learned that there was an ambush behind him, for they surrounded his army and shot arrows at his men from early morning until late after-

noon. ⁸¹ But his men stood fast, as Jonathan had commanded, and the enemy's^b horses grew tired.

⁸² Then Simon brought forward his force and engaged the phalanx in battle (for the cavalry was exhausted); they were overwhelmed by him and fled, ⁸³ and the cavalry was dispersed in the plain. They fled to Azotus and entered Beth-dagon, the temple of their idol, for safety. ⁸⁴ But Jonathan burned Azotus and the surrounding towns and plundered them; and the temple of Dagon, and those who had taken refuge in it, he burned with fire. ⁸⁵ The number of those who fell by the sword, with those burned alive, came to eight thousand.

⁸⁶ Then Jonathan left there and encamped against Askalon, and the people of the city came out to meet him with great pomp.

⁸⁷ He and those with him then returned to Jerusalem with a large amount of booty. ⁸⁸ When King Alexander heard of these things, he honored Jonathan still more; ⁸⁹ and he sent to him a golden buckle, such as it is the custom to give to the King's Kinsmen. He also gave him Ekron and all its environs as his possession.

Ptolemy Invades Syria

1 Then the king of Egypt gathered great forces, like the sand by the seashore, and many ships; and he tried to get possession of Alexander's kingdom by trickery and add it to his own kingdom. ² He set out for Syria with peaceable words, and the people of the towns opened their gates to him and went to meet him, for King Alexander had commanded them to meet him, since he was Alexander's^c father-in-law. ³ But when Ptolemy entered the towns he stationed forces as a garrison in each town.

⁴ When he^d approached Azotus, they showed him the burnt-out temple of Dagon, and Azotus and its suburbs destroyed, and the corpses lying about, and the charred bodies of those whom Jonathan^a had burned in the war, for they had piled them in heaps along his route. ⁵ They also told the king what Jonathan had done, to throw blame on him; but the king kept silent. ⁶ Jonathan met the king at Joppa with pomp, and they greeted one another and spent the night there. ⁷ And Jonathan went with the king as far

^a Gk *he*

^b Gk *their*

^c Gk *his*

^d Other ancient authorities read *they*

Read 1 Maccabees 11

The constant shifting of alliances continues. Ptolemy abandons Alexander Balas and allies himself with Demetrius II. Alexander is killed, but Ptolemy's sudden death allows Demetrius to claim the kingdom. Jonathan's soldiers save Demetrius from being overthrown in Antioch, but then Demetrius turns against Jonathan. This drives Jonathan to ally himself with Antiochus VI, who confirms Jonathan's status as high priest and his governorship of Judea. Jonathan and Simon then campaign in Gaza and in Galilee to strengthen their control of these regions.

Reflect: Consider the chaos created by untrustworthy leaders whose personal ambitions cause them to dispense with honorable behavior. Reflect on how a small state can survive in the midst of constant shifts in political alignment.

Pray: Pray for an end to political instability. Ask that God guide our leaders to make wise rather than self-serving decisions.

Act: Promote the value of honorable behavior. Become a virtuous model for others and demonstrate that much can be accomplished when there is real trust between people and nations.

as the river called Eleutherus; then he returned to Jerusalem.

8 So King Ptolemy gained control of the coastal cities as far as Seleucia by the sea, and he kept devising wicked designs against Alexander. ⁹ He sent envoys to King Demetrius, saying, "Come, let us make a covenant with each other, and I will give you in marriage my daughter who was Alexander's wife, and you shall reign over your father's kingdom. ¹⁰ I now regret that I gave him my daughter, for he has tried to kill me." ¹¹ He threw blame on Alexander^a because he coveted his kingdom. ¹² So he took his daughter away from him and gave her to Demetrius. He was estranged from Alexander, and their enmity became manifest.

13 Then Ptolemy entered Antioch and put on the crown of Asia. Thus he put two crowns on his head, the crown of Egypt and that of Asia. ¹⁴ Now King Alexander was in Cilicia at that time, because the people of that region were in revolt. ¹⁵ When Alexander heard of it, he came against him in battle. Ptolemy marched out and met him with a strong force, and put him to flight. ¹⁶ So Alexander fled into Arabia to find protection there, and King Ptolemy was triumphant. ¹⁷ Zabdiel the Arab cut off the head of Alexander and sent it to Ptolemy. ¹⁸ But King Ptolemy died three days later, and his troops in the strongholds were killed by the inhabitants of the strongholds. ¹⁹ So Demetrius became king in the one hundred sixty-seventh year.^b

Jonathan's Diplomacy

20 In those days Jonathan assembled the Judeans to attack the citadel in Jerusalem, and he built many engines of war to use against it. ²¹ But certain renegades who hated their nation went to the king and reported to him that Jonathan was besieging the citadel. ²² When he heard this he was angry, and as soon as he heard it he set out and came to Ptolemais; and he wrote Jonathan not to continue the siege, but to meet him for a conference at Ptolemais as quickly as possible.

23 When Jonathan heard this, he gave orders to continue the siege. He chose some of the elders of Israel and some of the priests, and put himself in danger, ²⁴ for he went to the king at Ptolemais, taking silver and gold and clothing and numerous other gifts. And he won his favor. ²⁵ Although certain renegades of his nation kept making complaints against him, ²⁶ the king treated him as his predecessors had treated him; he exalted him in the presence of all his Friends. ²⁷ He confirmed him in the high priesthood and in as many other honors as he had formerly had, and caused him to be reckoned among his chief^c Friends. ²⁸ Then Jonathan

^a Gk *him*

^b 145 B.C.

^c Gk *first*

asked the king to free Judea and the three districts of Samaria^a from tribute, and promised him three hundred talents. ²⁹ The king consented, and wrote a letter to Jonathan about all these things; its contents were as follows:

30 “King Demetrius to his brother Jonathan and to the nation of the Jews, greetings. ³¹ This copy of the letter that we wrote concerning you to our kinsman Lasthenes we have written to you also, so that you may know what it says. ³² ‘King Demetrius to his father Lasthenes, greetings. ³³ We have determined to do good to the nation of the Jews, who are our friends and fulfill their obligations to us, because of the goodwill they show toward us. ³⁴ We have confirmed as their possession both the territory of Judea and the three districts of Aphairema and Lydda and Rathamin; the latter, with all the region bordering them, were added to Judea from Samaria. To all those who offer sacrifice in Jerusalem we have granted release from^b the royal taxes that the king formerly received from them each year, from the crops of the land and the fruit of the trees. ³⁵ And the other payments henceforth due to us of the tithes, and the taxes due to us, and the salt pits and the crown taxes due to us—from all these we shall grant them release. ³⁶ And not one of these grants shall be canceled from this time on forever. ³⁷ Now therefore take care to make a copy of this, and let it be given to Jonathan and put up in a conspicuous place on the holy mountain.”

The Intrigue of Trypho

38 When King Demetrius saw that the land was quiet before him and that there was no opposition to him, he dismissed all his troops, all of them to their own homes, except the foreign troops that he had recruited from the islands of the nations. So all the troops who had served under his predecessors hated him. ³⁹ A certain

Trypho had formerly been one of Alexander’s supporters; he saw that all the troops were grumbling against Demetrius. So he went to Imalkue the Arab, who was bringing up Antiochus, the young son of Alexander, ⁴⁰ and insistently urged him to hand Antiochus^c over to him, to become king in place of his father. He also reported to Imalkue^c what Demetrius had done and told of the hatred that the troops of Demetrius^d had for him; and he stayed there many days.

41 Now Jonathan sent to King Demetrius the request that he remove the troops of the citadel from Jerusalem, and the troops in the strongholds; for they kept fighting against Israel. ⁴² And Demetrius sent this message back to Jonathan: “Not only will I do these things for you and your nation, but I will confer great honor on you and your nation, if I find an opportunity. ⁴³ Now then you will do well to send me men who will help me, for all my troops have revolted.” ⁴⁴ So Jonathan sent three thousand stalwart men to him at Antioch, and when they came to the king, the king rejoiced at their arrival.

45 Then the people of the city assembled within the city, to the number of a hundred and twenty thousand, and they wanted to kill the king. ⁴⁶ But the king fled into the palace. Then the people of the city seized the main streets of the city and began to fight. ⁴⁷ So the king called the Jews to his aid, and they all rallied around him and then spread out through the city; and they killed on that day about one hundred thousand. ⁴⁸ They set fire to the city and seized a large amount of spoil on that day, and saved the king. ⁴⁹ When the people of the city saw that the Jews had gained control of the city as they pleased, their courage failed and they cried out to the king with this entreaty: ⁵⁰ “Grant us peace, and make the Jews stop fighting against us and our city.” ⁵¹ And they threw down their

^a Cn: Gk the three districts and Samaria

^b Or Samaria, for all those who offer sacrifice in Jerusalem, in place of

^c Gk him

^d Gk his troops

arms and made peace. So the Jews gained glory in the sight of the king and of all the people in his kingdom, and they returned to Jerusalem with a large amount of spoil.

52 So King Demetrius sat on the throne of his kingdom, and the land was quiet before him. ⁵³ But he broke his word about all that he had promised; he became estranged from Jonathan and did not repay the favors that Jonathan^a had done him, but treated him very harshly.

Trypho Seizes Power

54 After this Trypho returned, and with him the young boy Antiochus who began to reign and put on the crown. ⁵⁵ All the troops that Demetrius had discharged gathered around him; they fought against Demetrius,^b and he fled and was routed. ⁵⁶ Trypho captured the elephants^c and gained control of Antioch. ⁵⁷ Then the young Antiochus wrote to Jonathan, saying, "I confirm you in the high priesthood and set you over the four districts and make you one of the king's Friends."^d ⁵⁸ He also sent him gold plates and a table service, and granted him the right to drink from gold cups and dress in purple and wear a gold buckle. ⁵⁹ He appointed Jonathan's^d brother Simon governor from the Ladder of Tyre to the borders of Egypt.

Campaigns of Jonathan and Simon

60 Then Jonathan set out and traveled beyond the river and among the towns, and all the army of Syria gathered to him as allies. When he came to Askalon, the people of the city met him and paid him honor. ⁶¹ From there he went to Gaza, but the people of Gaza shut him out. So he besieged it

and burned its suburbs with fire and plundered them. ⁶² Then the people of Gaza pleaded with Jonathan, and he made peace with them, and took the sons of their rulers as hostages and sent them to Jerusalem. And he passed through the country as far as Damascus.

63 Then Jonathan heard that the officers of Demetrius had come to Kadesh in Galilee with a large army, intending to remove him from office. ⁶⁴ He went to meet them, but left his brother Simon in the country. ⁶⁵ Simon encamped before Bethzur and fought against it for many days and hemmed it in. ⁶⁶ Then they asked him to grant them terms of peace, and he did so. He removed them from there, took possession of the town, and set a garrison over it.

67 Jonathan and his army encamped by the waters of Gennesaret. Early in the morning they marched to the plain of Hazor, ⁶⁸ and there in the plain the army of the foreigners met him; they had set an ambush against him in the mountains, but they themselves met him face to face. ⁶⁹ Then the men in ambush emerged from their places and joined battle. ⁷⁰ All the men with Jonathan fled; not one of them was left except Mattathias son of Absalom and Judas son of Chalphi, commanders of the forces of the army. ⁷¹ Jonathan tore his clothes, put dust on his head, and prayed. ⁷² Then he turned back to the battle against the enemy^e and routed them, and they fled. ⁷³ When his men who were fleeing saw this, they returned to him and joined him in the pursuit as far as Kadesh, to their camp, and there they encamped. ⁷⁴ As many as three thousand of the foreigners fell that day. And Jonathan returned to Jerusalem.

Alliances with Rome and Sparta

1 Now when Jonathan saw that the time was favorable for him, he chose men and sent them to Rome to confirm and renew the friendship with them. ² He also sent letters to the same effect to the Spartans and to other places. ³ So they went to Rome and entered the senate chamber and said, "The high priest Jonathan and the Jewish nation have sent us to renew the former friendship and alliance with them." ⁴ And the

^a Gk *he*

^b Gk *him*

^c Gk *animals*

^d Gk *his*

^e Gk *them*

Read 1 Maccabees 12

Jonathan continues his diplomatic efforts to forge alliances with Rome and Sparta. He and Simon wage campaigns throughout the country and Jonathan also rebuilds fortresses and the walls of Jerusalem. When Trypho, who formerly had supported Antiochus VI, makes a move to take over the Seleucid kingdom, he tricks Jonathan into coming to Ptolemais and there takes him captive.

Reflect: Reflect on the purposes of diplomatic efforts and alliances as a hedge against enemy nations. Consider how easy it can be to trick people who choose to place their trust in those who are untrustworthy.

Pray: Pray for fair dealings between nations.

Act: Set an example of the importance of keeping one's word and acting in an honorable manner.

Romans^a gave them letters to the people in every place, asking them to provide for the envoys^b safe conduct to the land of Judah.

5 This is a copy of the letter that Jonathan wrote to the Spartans: ⁶ “The high priest Jonathan, the senate of the nation, the priests, and the rest of the Jewish people to their brothers the Spartans, greetings. ⁷ Already in time past a letter was sent to the high priest Onias from Arius,^c who was king among you, stating that you are our brothers, as the appended copy shows. ⁸ Onias welcomed the envoy with honor, and received the letter, which contained a clear declaration of alliance and friendship. ⁹ Therefore, though we have no need of these things, since we have as encouragement the holy books that are in our hands, ¹⁰ we have undertaken to send to renew our family ties and friendship with you, so that we may not become estranged from you, for considerable time has passed since you sent your letter to us. ¹¹ We therefore remember you constantly on every occasion, both at our festivals and on other appropriate days, at the sacrifices that we offer and in our prayers, as it is right and proper to remember brothers. ¹² And we rejoice in your glory. ¹³ But as for ourselves, many trials and many wars have encircled us; the kings around us have waged war against us. ¹⁴ We were unwilling to annoy you and our other allies and friends with these wars, ¹⁵ for we have the help that comes from Heaven for our aid, and so we were delivered from our enemies, and our enemies were humbled. ¹⁶ We therefore have chosen Numenius son of Antiochus and Antipater son of Jason, and have sent them to Rome to renew our former friendship and alliance with them. ¹⁷ We have commanded them to go also to you and greet you and deliver to you this letter from us concerning the renewal of our family ties. ¹⁸ And now please send us a reply to this.”

19 This is a copy of the letter that they sent to Onias: ²⁰ “King Arius of the Spartans, to the high priest Onias, greetings. ²¹ It has been found in writing concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and are of the family of Abraham. ²² And now that we have learned this, please write us concerning your welfare; ²³ we on our part write to you that your livestock and your property belong to us, and ours belong to you. We therefore command that our envoys^a report to you accordingly.”

Further Campaigns of Jonathan and Simon

24 Now Jonathan heard that the commanders of Demetrius had returned, with a larger force than before, to wage war against him. ²⁵ So he marched away from

^a Gk they

^b Gk them

^c Vg Compare verse 20: Gk Darius

Jerusalem and met them in the region of Hamath, for he gave them no opportunity to invade his own country. ²⁶ He sent spies to their camp, and they returned and reported to him that the enemy^a were being drawn up in formation to attack the Jews^b by night. ²⁷ So when the sun had set, Jonathan commanded his troops to be alert and to keep their arms at hand so as to be ready all night for battle, and he stationed outposts around the camp. ²⁸ When the enemy heard that Jonathan and his troops were prepared for battle, they were afraid and were terrified at heart; so they kindled fires in their camp and withdrew.^c ²⁹ But Jonathan and his troops did not know it until morning, for they saw the fires burning. ³⁰ Then Jonathan pursued them, but he did not overtake them, for they had crossed the Eleutherus river. ³¹ So Jonathan turned aside against the Arabs who are called Zabadeans, and he crushed them and plundered them. ³² Then he broke camp and went to Damascus, and marched through all that region.

³³ Simon also went out and marched through the country as far as Askalon and the neighboring strongholds. He turned aside to Joppa and took it by surprise, ³⁴ for he had heard that they were ready to hand over the stronghold to those whom Demetrius had sent. And he stationed a garrison there to guard it.

³⁵ When Jonathan returned he convened the elders of the people and planned with them to build strongholds in Judea, ³⁶ to build the walls of Jerusalem still higher, and to erect a high barrier between the citadel and the city to separate it from the city, in order to isolate it so that its garrison^a could neither buy nor sell. ³⁷ So they gathered together to rebuild the city; part of the wall on the valley to the east had fallen, and he repaired the section called Chaphenatha. ³⁸ Simon also built Adida in the Shephelah; he fortified it and installed gates with bolts.

Trypho Captures Jonathan

³⁹ Then Trypho attempted to become king in Asia and put on the crown, and to raise his hand against King Antiochus. ⁴⁰ He feared that Jonathan might not permit him to do so, but might make war on him, so he kept seeking to seize and kill him, and he marched out and came to Beth-shan. ⁴¹ Jonathan went out to meet him with forty thousand picked warriors, and he came to Beth-shan. ⁴² When Trypho saw that he had come with a large army, he was afraid to raise his hand against him. ⁴³ So he received him with honor and commended him to all his Friends, and he gave him gifts and commanded his Friends and his troops to obey him as they would himself. ⁴⁴ Then he said to Jonathan, "Why have you put all these people to so much trouble when we are not at war?" ⁴⁵ Dismiss them now to their homes and choose for yourself a few men to stay with you, and come with me to Ptolemais. I will hand it over to you as well as the other strongholds and the remaining troops and all the officials, and will turn around and go home. For that is why I am here."

⁴⁶ Jonathan^d trusted him and did as he said; he sent away the troops, and they returned to the land of Judah. ⁴⁷ He kept with himself three thousand men, two thousand of whom he left in Galilee, while one thousand accompanied him. ⁴⁸ But when Jonathan entered Ptolemais, the people of Ptolemais closed the gates and seized him, and they killed with the sword all who had entered with him.

⁴⁹ Then Trypho sent troops and cavalry into Galilee and the Great Plain to destroy all Jonathan's soldiers. ⁵⁰ But they realized that Jonathan had been seized and had perished along with his men, and they encouraged one another and kept marching in close formation, ready for battle. ⁵¹ When their pursuers saw that they would fight for their lives, they turned back. ⁵² So they all reached the land of Judah safely,

^a Gk they
^b Gk them

^c Other ancient authorities omit *and withdrew*
^d Gk he

Read 1 Maccabees 13

When Trypho realizes that Simon has rallied the Jewish people, he kills Jonathan and then, after murdering Antiochus VI, he turns his attention to taking the throne of Asia. Simon receives recognition as high priest and governor from Demetrius II and this marks the beginning of the Jewish nation's independence from the Seleucids. Simon also builds a tomb for his brother Jonathan at Modein, captures Gazara, and finally forces the occupants of the Citadel in Jerusalem to surrender.

Reflect: Reflect on the possibilities for gain in the midst of chaos when a people have a strong leader. Consider the important events that mark turning points in the history of the nation.

Pray: Pray for peacemakers and their efforts to bring an end to hostilities.

Act: Honor the memory of those who have died in the defense of the nation or of our principles. Strive to create a stable community and teach the importance of making every effort to achieve peace.

and they mourned for Jonathan and his companions and were in great fear; and all Israel mourned deeply.⁵³ All the nations around them tried to destroy them, for they said, "They have no leader or helper. Now therefore let us make war on them and blot out the memory of them from humankind."

Simon Takes Command

13 Simon heard that Trypho had assembled a large army to invade the land of Judah and destroy it,² and he saw that the people were trembling with fear. So he went up to Jerusalem, and gathering the people together³ he encouraged them, saying to them, "You yourselves know what great things my brothers and I and the house of my father have done for the laws and the sanctuary; you know also the wars and the difficulties that my brothers and I have seen.⁴ By reason of this all my brothers have perished for the sake of Israel, and I alone am left.⁵ And now, far be it from me to spare my life in any time of distress, for I am not better than my brothers.⁶ 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."

⁷ The spirit of the people was rekindled when they heard these words,⁸ and they answered in a loud voice, "You are our leader in place of Judas and your brother Jonathan.⁹ Fight our battles, and all that you say to us we will do."¹⁰ So he assembled all the warriors and hurried to complete the walls of Jerusalem, and he fortified it on every side.¹¹ He sent Jonathan son of Absalom to Joppa, and with him a considerable army; he drove out its occupants and remained there.

Deceit and Treachery of Trypho

¹² Then Trypho left Ptolemais with a large army to invade the land of Judah, and Jonathan was with him under guard.¹³ Simon encamped in Adida, facing the plain.¹⁴ Trypho learned that Simon had risen up in place of his brother Jonathan, and that he was about to join battle with him, so he sent envoys to him and said,¹⁵ "It is for the money that your brother Jonathan owed the royal treasury, in connection with the offices he held, that we are detaining him.¹⁶ Send now one hundred talents of silver and two of his sons as hostages, so that when released he will not revolt against us, and we will release him."

¹⁷ Simon knew that they were speaking deceitfully to him, but he sent to get the money and the sons, so that he would not arouse great hostility among the people, who might say,¹⁸ "It was because Simon^a did not

^a Gk I

send him the money and the sons, that Jonathan^a perished.”¹⁹ So he sent the sons and the hundred talents, but Trypho^a broke his word and did not release Jonathan.

20 After this Trypho came to invade the country and destroy it, and he circled around by the way to Adora. But Simon and his army kept marching along opposite him to every place he went.²¹ Now the men in the citadel kept sending envoys to Trypho urging him to come to them by way of the wilderness and to send them food.²² So Trypho got all his cavalry ready to go, but that night a very heavy snow fell, and he did not go because of the snow. He marched off and went into the land of Gilead.²³ When he approached Baskama, he killed Jonathan, and he was buried there.²⁴ Then Trypho turned and went back to his own land.

Jonathan's Tomb

25 Simon sent and took the bones of his brother Jonathan, and buried him in Modein, the city of his ancestors.²⁶ All Israel bewailed him with great lamentation, and mourned for him many days.²⁷ And Simon built a monument over the tomb of his father and his brothers; he made it high so that it might be seen, with polished stone at the front and back.²⁸ He also erected seven pyramids, opposite one another, for his father and mother and four brothers.²⁹ For the pyramids^b he devised an elaborate setting, erecting about them great columns, and on the columns he put suits of armor for a permanent memorial, and beside the suits of armor he carved ships, so that they could be seen by all who sail the sea.³⁰ This is the tomb that he built in Modein; it remains to this day.

Judea Gains Independence

31 Trypho dealt treacherously with the young King Antiochus; he killed him³² and became king in his place, putting on the

crown of Asia; and he brought great calamity on the land.³³ But Simon built up the strongholds of Judea and walled them all around, with high towers and great walls and gates and bolts, and he stored food in the strongholds.³⁴ Simon also chose emissaries and sent them to King Demetrius with a request to grant relief to the country, for all that Trypho did was to plunder.³⁵ King Demetrius sent him a favorable reply to this request, and wrote him a letter as follows,³⁶ “King Demetrius to Simon, the high priest and friend of kings, and to the elders and nation of the Jews, greetings.³⁷ We have received the gold crown and the palm branch that you^c sent, and we are ready to make a general peace with you and to write to our officials to grant you release from tribute.³⁸ All the grants that we have made to you remain valid, and let the strongholds that you have built be your possession.³⁹ We pardon any errors and offenses committed to this day, and cancel the crown tax that you owe; and whatever other tax has been collected in Jerusalem shall be collected no longer.⁴⁰ And if any of you are qualified to be enrolled in our bodyguard,^d let them be enrolled, and let there be peace between us.”

41 In the one hundred seventieth year^e the yoke of the Gentiles was removed from Israel,⁴² and the people began to write in their documents and contracts, “In the first year of Simon the great high priest and commander and leader of the Jews.”

The Capture of Gazara by Simon

43 In those days Simon^a encamped against Gazara^f and surrounded it with troops. He made a siege engine, brought it up to the city, and battered and captured one tower.⁴⁴ The men in the siege engine leaped out into the city, and a great tumult arose in the city.⁴⁵ The men in the city, with their wives and children, went up on the wall with their clothes torn, and they

^a Gk *he*

^b Gk *For these*

^c The word *you* in verses 37-40 is plural

^d Or *court*

^e 142 B.C.

^f Cn: Gk *Gaza*

cried out with a loud voice, asking Simon to make peace with them; ⁴⁶ they said, “Do not treat us according to our wicked acts but according to your mercy.” ⁴⁷ So Simon reached an agreement with them and stopped fighting against them. But he expelled them from the city and cleansed the houses in which the idols were located, and then entered it with hymns and praise. ⁴⁸ He removed all uncleanness from it, and settled in it those who observed the law. He also strengthened its fortifications and built in it a house for himself.

Simon Regains the Citadel at Jerusalem

⁴⁹ Those who were in the citadel at Jerusalem were prevented from going in and out to buy and sell in the country. So they were very hungry, and many of them

perished from famine. ⁵⁰ Then they cried to Simon to make peace with them, and he did so. But he expelled them from there and cleansed the citadel from its pollutions. ⁵¹ On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred seventy-first year,^a the Jews^b entered it with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel. ⁵² Simon^c decreed that every year they should celebrate this day with rejoicing. He strengthened the fortifications of the temple hill alongside the citadel, and he and his men lived there. ⁵³ Simon saw that his son John had reached manhood, and so he made him commander of all the forces; and he lived at Gazara.

Capture of Demetrius

14 In the one hundred seventy-second year^d King Demetrius assembled his forces and marched into Media to obtain help, so that he could make war against Trypho. ² When King Arsaces of Persia and Media heard that Demetrius had invaded his territory, he sent one of his generals to take him alive. ³ The general^e went and defeated the army of Demetrius, and seized him and took him to Arsaces, who put him under guard.

Eulogy of Simon

- ⁴ The land^e had rest all the days of Simon.
He sought the good of his nation;
his rule was pleasing to them,
as was the honor shown him, all his days.
- ⁵ To crown all his honors he took Joppa for a harbor,
and opened a way to the isles of the sea.
- ⁶ He extended the borders of his nation,
and gained full control of the country.
- ⁷ He gathered a host of captives;
he ruled over Gazara and Beth-zur and the
citadel,
and he removed its uncleanness from it;
and there was none to oppose him.
- ⁸ They tilled their land in peace;
the ground gave its increase,
and the trees of the plains their fruit.
- ⁹ Old men sat in the streets;
they all talked together of good things,
and the youths put on splendid military attire.

^a 141 B.C.

^b Gk they

^c Gk He

^d 140 B.C.

^e Other ancient authorities add *of Judah*

Read 1 Maccabees 14

While Demetrius II becomes a prisoner of the Parthian king, Simon's high priesthood and rule over the Jewish nation is confirmed by Rome and Sparta. A decree extolling his many accomplishments and virtues is proclaimed to the people. It grants Simon full powers to rule, conduct business and diplomacy for the nation, and serve as high priest and guardian of the worship in the temple.

Reflect: Consider the building blocks of national identity when a new government is formed. Reflect on the powers we grant to our national leaders and the branches of our government.

Pray: Pray for justice and the wise administration of our government.

Act: Examine the important documents that define the powers and responsibilities of our leaders. Become an active and educated citizen. Recognize that leaders must be held to a standard higher than that of their own political rhetoric.

- 10 He supplied the towns with food, and furnished them with the means of defense, until his renown spread to the ends of the earth.
- 11 He established peace in the land, and Israel rejoiced with great joy.
- 12 All the people sat under their own vines and fig trees, and there was none to make them afraid.
- 13 No one was left in the land to fight them, and the kings were crushed in those days.
- 14 He gave help to all the humble among his people; he sought out the law, and did away with all the renegades and outlaws.
- 15 He made the sanctuary glorious, and added to the vessels of the sanctuary.

Diplomacy with Rome and Sparta

16 It was heard in Rome, and as far away as Sparta, that Jonathan had died, and they were deeply grieved. 17 When they heard that his brother Simon had become high priest in his stead, and that he was ruling over the country and the towns in it, 18 they wrote to him on bronze tablets to renew with him the friendship and alliance that they had established with his brothers Judas and Jonathan. 19 And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem.

20 This is a copy of the letter that the Spartans sent: "The rulers and the city of the Spartans to the high priest Simon and to the elders and the priests and the rest of the Jewish people, our brothers, greetings. 21 The envoys who were sent to our people have told us about your glory and honor, and we rejoiced at their coming. 22 We have recorded what they said in our public decrees, as follows, 'Numenius son of Antiochus and Antipater son of Jason, envoys of the Jews, have come to us to renew their friendship with us. 23 It has pleased our people to receive these men with honor and to put a copy of their words in the public archives, so that the people of the Spartans may have a record of them. And they have sent a copy of this to the high priest Simon.'"

24 After this Simon sent Numenius to Rome with a large gold shield weighing one thousand minas, to confirm the alliance with the Romans.^a

Official Honors for Simon

25 When the people heard these things they said, "How shall we thank Simon and his sons? 26 For he and his brothers and the house of his father have stood firm; they have fought and repulsed Israel's enemies and established its freedom." 27 So they made a record on bronze tablets and put it on pillars on Mount Zion.

This is a copy of what they wrote: "On the eigh-

^a Gk them

teenth day of Elul, in the one hundred seventy-second year,^a which is the third year of the great high priest Simon,²⁸ in Asaramel,^b in the great assembly of the priests and the people and the rulers of the nation and the elders of the country, the following was proclaimed to us:

29 "Since wars often occurred in the country, Simon son of Mattathias, a priest of the sons^c of Joarib, and his brothers, exposed themselves to danger and resisted the enemies of their nation, in order that their sanctuary and the law might be preserved; and they brought great glory to their nation.³⁰ Jonathan rallied the^d nation, became their high priest, and was gathered to his people.³¹ When their enemies decided to invade their country and lay hands on their sanctuary,³² then Simon rose up and fought for his nation. He spent great sums of his own money; he armed the soldiers of his nation and paid them wages.³³ He fortified the towns of Judea, and Beth-zur on the borders of Judea, where formerly the arms of the enemy had been stored, and he placed there a garrison of Jews.³⁴ He also fortified Joppa, which is by the sea, and Gazara, which is on the borders of Azotus, where the enemy formerly lived. He settled Jews there, and provided in those towns^e whatever was necessary for their restoration.

35 "The people saw Simon's faithfulness^f and the glory that he had resolved to win for his nation, and they made him their leader and high priest, because he had done all these things and because of the justice and loyalty that he had maintained toward his nation. He sought in every way to exalt his people.³⁶ In his days things prospered in his hands, so that the Gentiles were put out of the^d country, as were also those in the city of David in Jerusalem, who had built themselves a citadel from which they used to sally forth and defile the environs of the sanctuary, doing great

damage to its purity.³⁷ He settled Jews in it and fortified it for the safety of the country and of the city, and built the walls of Jerusalem higher.

38 "In view of these things King Demetrius confirmed him in the high priesthood,³⁹ made him one of his Friends, and paid him high honors.⁴⁰ For he had heard that the Jews were addressed by the Romans as friends and allies and brothers, and that the Romans^g had received the envoys of Simon with honor.

41 "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise,⁴² and that he should be governor over them and that he should take charge of the sanctuary and appoint officials over its tasks and over the country and the weapons and the strongholds, and that he should take charge of the sanctuary,⁴³ and that he should be obeyed by all, and that all contracts in the country should be written in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold.

44 "None of the people or priests shall be permitted to nullify any of these decisions or to oppose what he says, or to convene an assembly in the country without his permission, or to be clothed in purple or put on a gold buckle.⁴⁵ Whoever acts contrary to these decisions or rejects any of them shall be liable to punishment."

46 All the people agreed to grant Simon the right to act in accordance with these decisions.⁴⁷ So Simon accepted and agreed to be high priest, to be commander and ethnarch of the Jews and priests, and to be protector of them all.^h⁴⁸ And they gave orders to inscribe this decree on bronze tablets, to put them up in a conspicuous place in the precincts of the sanctuary,⁴⁹ and to deposit copies of them in the treasury, so that Simon and his sons might have them.

^a 140 B.C.

^b This word resembles the Hebrew words for the *court of the people of God* or the *prince of the people of God*

^c Meaning of Gk uncertain

^d Gk *their*

^e Gk *them*

^f Other ancient authorities read *conduct*

^g Gk *they*

^h Or *to preside over them all*

Read 1 Maccabees 15

Antiochus VII, son of Demetrius I, first offers to ally with Simon, but after driving the usurper Trypho from Dor, he turns against Simon and demands huge tribute payments for the taking of Gazara and Joppa. Perhaps relying on Rome's promised support, Simon refuses to pay and Antiochus sends his general Cendebeus to invade Judea and drive out Simon from Jerusalem.

Reflect: Consider the strategies of leaders and would-be leaders who feel free to make offers until they have the upper hand and then refuse to honor their promises.

Pray: Pray that our leaders may be wise and worthy of trust in times of trouble.

Act: Become expert in interpersonal dealings, no matter what your profession or situation. Do not give in to bullies.

Letter of Antiochus VII

15 Antiochus, son of King Demetrius, sent a letter from the islands of the sea to Simon, the priest and ethnarch of the Jews, and to all the nation; ² its contents were as follows: “King Antiochus to Simon the high priest and ethnarch and to the nation of the Jews, greetings. ³ Whereas certain scoundrels have gained control of the kingdom of our ancestors, and I intend to lay claim to the kingdom so that I may restore it as it formerly was, and have recruited a host of mercenary troops and have equipped warships, ⁴ and intend to make a landing in the country so that I may proceed against those who have destroyed our country and those who have devastated many cities in my kingdom, ⁵ now therefore I confirm to you all the tax remissions that the kings before me have granted you, and a release from all the other payments from which they have released you. ⁶ I permit you to mint your own coinage as money for your country, ⁷ and I grant freedom to Jerusalem and the sanctuary. All the weapons that you have prepared and the strongholds that you have built and now hold shall remain yours. ⁸ Every debt you owe to the royal treasury and any such future debts shall be canceled for you from henceforth and for all time. ⁹ When we gain control of our kingdom, we will bestow great honor on you and your nation and the temple, so that your glory will become manifest in all the earth.”

¹⁰ In the one hundred seventy-fourth year^a Antiochus set out and invaded the land of his ancestors. All the troops rallied to him, so that there were only a few with Trypho. ¹¹ Antiochus pursued him, and Trypho^b came in his flight to Dor, which is by the sea; ¹² for he knew that troubles had converged on him, and his troops had deserted him. ¹³ So Antiochus encamped against Dor, and with him were one hundred twenty thousand warriors and eight thousand cavalry. ¹⁴ He surrounded the town, and the ships joined battle from the sea; he pressed the town hard from land and sea, and permitted no one to leave or enter it.

Rome Supports the Jews

¹⁵ Then Numenius and his companions arrived from Rome, with letters to the kings and countries, in which the following was written: ¹⁶ “Lucius, consul of the Romans, to King Ptolemy, greetings. ¹⁷ The envoys of the Jews have come to us as our friends and allies to renew our ancient friendship and alliance. They had been sent by the high priest Simon and by the Jewish people ¹⁸ and have brought a gold shield weighing one thousand minas. ¹⁹ We therefore have decided to write to the kings and countries that they should not seek their

^a 138 B.C.

^b Gk *he*

harm or make war against them and their cities and their country, or make alliance with those who war against them. ²⁰ And it has seemed good to us to accept the shield from them. ²¹ Therefore if any scoundrels have fled to you from their country, hand them over to the high priest Simon, so that he may punish them according to their law.”

²² The consul^a wrote the same thing to King Demetrius and to Attalus and Ariarathes and Arsaces, ²³ and to all the countries, and to Sampsames,^b and to the Spartans, and to Delos, and to Myndos, and to Sicyon, and to Caria, and to Samos, and to Pamphylia, and to Lycia, and to Halicarnassus, and to Rhodes, and to Phaselis, and to Cos, and to Side, and to Aradus and Gortyna and Cnidus and Cyprus and Cyrene. ²⁴ They also sent a copy of these things to the high priest Simon.

Antiochus VII Threatens Simon

²⁵ King Antiochus besieged Dor for the second time, continually throwing his forces against it and making engines of war; and he shut Trypho up and kept him from going out or in. ²⁶ And Simon sent to Antiochus^c two thousand picked troops, to fight for him, and silver and gold and a large amount of military equipment. ²⁷ But he refused to receive them, and broke all the agreements he formerly had made with Simon, and became estranged from him. ²⁸ He sent to him Athenobius, one of his Friends, to confer with him, saying, “You hold control of Joppa and Gazara and the citadel in Jerusalem; they are cities of my kingdom. ²⁹ You have devastated their territory, you have done great damage in the land, and you have taken possession of many places in my kingdom. ³⁰ Now then, hand over the cities that you have seized and the tribute money of the places that you have conquered outside the borders of

Judea; ³¹ or else pay me five hundred talents of silver for the destruction that you have caused and five hundred talents more for the tribute money of the cities. Otherwise we will come and make war on you.”

³² So Athenobius, the king’s Friend, came to Jerusalem, and when he saw the splendor of Simon, and the sideboard with its gold and silver plate, and his great magnificence, he was amazed. When he reported to him the king’s message, ³³ Simon said to him in reply: “We have neither taken foreign land nor seized foreign property, but only the inheritance of our ancestors, which at one time had been unjustly taken by our enemies. ³⁴ Now that we have the opportunity, we are firmly holding the inheritance of our ancestors. ³⁵ As for Joppa and Gazara, which you demand, they were causing great damage among the people and to our land; for them we will give you one hundred talents.”

Athenobius^a did not answer him a word, ³⁶ but returned in wrath to the king and reported to him these words, and also the splendor of Simon and all that he had seen. And the king was very angry.

Victory over Cendebeus

³⁷ Meanwhile Trypho embarked on a ship and escaped to Orthosia. ³⁸ Then the king made Cendebeus commander-in-chief of the coastal country, and gave him troops of infantry and cavalry. ³⁹ He commanded him to encamp against Judea, to build up Kedron and fortify its gates, and to make war on the people; but the king pursued Trypho. ⁴⁰ So Cendebeus came to Jamnia and began to provoke the people and invade Judea and take the people captive and kill them. ⁴¹ He built up Kedron and stationed horsemen and troops there, so that they might go out and make raids along the highways of Judea, as the king had ordered him.

16 John went up from Gazara and reported to his father Simon what Cendebeus had done. ² And Simon called in his two eldest sons Judas and John, and said to them: “My brothers and I and my father’s

^a Gk *He*

^b The name is uncertain

^c Gk *him*

Read 1 Maccabees 16

Simon's son, John Hyrcanus, demonstrates his leadership and military skills by defeating Cendebeus. Ptolemy, an ambitious governor of the Jericho plain, murders Simon and two of his sons at a banquet and attempts to rally support for his rise to rule over Judea. John Hyrcanus eliminates this threat and succeeds his father as high priest and leader of the nation.

Reflect: Reflect on the evil that can occur when personal ambition replaces honesty and honor. Consider how close we can come to political chaos when a leader is assassinated.

Pray: Pray for those who protect our leaders from harm.

Act: Learn to recognize the threat posed by demagogues and overly ambitious persons. Place the welfare of the nation and the community over personal gain.

house have fought the wars of Israel from our youth until this day, and things have prospered in our hands so that we have delivered Israel many times. ³ But now I have grown old, and you by Heaven's^a mercy are mature in years. Take my place and my brother's, and go out and fight for our nation, and may the help that comes from Heaven be with you."

⁴ So John^b chose out of the country twenty thousand warriors and cavalry, and they marched against Cendebeus and camped for the night in Modein. ⁵ Early in the morning they started out and marched into the plain, where a large force of infantry and cavalry was coming to meet them; and a stream lay between them. ⁶ Then he and his army lined up against them. He saw that the soldiers were afraid to cross the stream, so he crossed over first; and when his troops saw him, they crossed over after him. ⁷ Then he divided the army and placed the cavalry in the center of the infantry, for the cavalry of the enemy were very numerous. ⁸ They sounded the trumpets, and Cendebeus and his army were put to flight; many of them fell wounded and the rest fled into the stronghold. ⁹ At that time Judas the brother of John was wounded, but John pursued them until Cendebeus^c reached Kedron, which he had built. ¹⁰ They also fled into the towers that were in the fields of Azotus, and John^c burned it with fire, and about two thousand of them fell. He then returned to Judea safely.

Murder of Simon and His Sons

¹¹ Now Ptolemy son of Abubus had been appointed governor over the plain of Jericho; he had a large store of silver and gold, ¹² for he was son-in-law of the high priest. ¹³ His heart was lifted up; he determined to get control of the country, and made treacherous plans against Simon and his sons, to do away with them. ¹⁴ Now Simon was visiting the towns of the country and attending to their needs, and he went down to Jericho with his sons Mattathias and Judas, in the one hundred seventy-seventh year,^d in the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat. ¹⁵ The son of Abubus received them treacherously in the little stronghold called Dok, which he had built; he gave them a great banquet, and hid men there. ¹⁶ When Simon and his sons were drunk, Ptolemy and his men rose up, took their weapons, rushed in against Simon in the banquet hall and killed him and his two sons, as well as some of his servants. ¹⁷ So he committed an act of great treachery and returned evil for good.

John Succeeds Simon

¹⁸ Then Ptolemy wrote a report about these things

^a Gk *his*

^b Other ancient authorities read *he*

^c Gk *he*

^d 134 B.C.

and sent it to the king, asking him to send troops to aid him and to turn over to him the towns and the country. ¹⁹ He sent other troops to Gazara to do away with John; he sent letters to the captains asking them to come to him so that he might give them silver and gold and gifts; ²⁰ and he sent other troops to take possession of Jerusalem and the temple hill. ²¹ But someone ran ahead and reported to John at Gazara that his father and brothers had perished, and that

“he has sent men to kill you also.” ²² When he heard this, he was greatly shocked; he seized the men who came to destroy him and killed them, for he had found out that they were seeking to destroy him.

²³ The rest of the acts of John and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and the building of the walls that he completed, and his achievements, ²⁴ are written in the annals of his high priesthood, from the time that he became high priest after his father.

2 MACCABEES

Read 2 Maccabees 1:1—2:18

Two letters to the Jewish community in Egypt serve as a preface to this book. Both are concerned with the celebration of Chanukah, the feast of the purification of the temple in Jerusalem. Among the events described are the death of Antiochus IV in the temple of Nanea in Persia, the discovery by Nehemiah of a miraculous liquid that rekindled the sacred flame, as well as a tradition about Jeremiah transporting the ark, tent of meeting, and incense altar to a secret cave on Mt. Nebo for safekeeping.

Reflect: Consider the desire of the Jewish community in Jerusalem to communicate with the Jews living in Egypt and in particular to remind them to celebrate the feast of Chanukah.

Pray: Pray for the worldwide church as it collectively engages in prayers and the liturgy.

Act: Study the liturgy and the history behind the major feast days of the church. Recognize the importance of the unifying character of a common liturgy and a common heritage.

A Letter to the Jews in Egypt

1 The Jews in Jerusalem and those in the land of Judea,
To their Jewish kindred in Egypt,
Greetings and true peace.

2 May God do good to you, and may he remember his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, his faithful servants. 3 May he give you all a heart to worship him and to do his will with a strong heart and a willing spirit. 4 May he open your heart to his law and his commandments, and may he bring peace. 5 May he hear your prayers and be reconciled to you, and may he not forsake you in time of evil. 6 We are now praying for you here.

7 In the reign of Demetrius, in the one hundred sixty-ninth year,^a we Jews wrote to you, in the critical distress that came upon us in those years after Jason and his company revolted from the holy land and the kingdom⁸ and burned the gate and shed innocent blood. We prayed to the Lord and were heard, and we offered sacrifice and grain offering, and we lit the lamps and set out the loaves.⁹ And now see that you keep the festival of booths in the month of Chislew, in the one hundred eighty-eighth year.^b

A Letter to Aristobulus

10 The people of Jerusalem and of Judea and the senate and Judas,

To Aristobulus, who is of the family of the anointed priests, teacher of King Ptolemy, and to the Jews in Egypt,
Greetings and good health.

11 Having been saved by God out of grave dangers we thank him greatly for taking our side against the king,^c 12 for he drove out those who fought against the holy city. 13 When the leader reached Persia with a force that seemed irresistible, they were cut to pieces in the temple of Nanea by a deception employed by the priests of the goddess^d Nanea. 14 On the pretext of intending to marry her, Antiochus came to the place together with his Friends, to secure most of its treasures as a dowry. 15 When the priests of the temple of Nanea had set out the treasures and Antiochus had come with a few men inside the wall of the sacred precinct, they closed the temple as soon as he entered it. 16 Opening a secret door in the ceiling, they threw stones and

^a 143 B.C.

^b 124 B.C.

^c Cn: Gk as *those who array themselves against a king*

^d Gk lacks *the goddess*

struck down the leader and his men; they dismembered them and cut off their heads and threw them to the people outside. ¹⁷Blessed in every way be our God, who has brought judgment on those who have behaved impiously.

Fire Consumes Nehemiah's Sacrifice

¹⁸ Since on the twenty-fifth day of Chislew we shall celebrate the purification of the temple, we thought it necessary to notify you, in order that you also may celebrate the festival of booths and the festival of the fire given when Nehemiah, who built the temple and the altar, offered sacrifices.

¹⁹ For when our ancestors were being led captive to Persia, the pious priests of that time took some of the fire of the altar and secretly hid it in the hollow of a dry cistern, where they took such precautions that the place was unknown to anyone. ²⁰ But after many years had passed, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having been commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to get it. And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but only a thick liquid, he ordered them to dip it out and bring it. ²¹ When the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and on the things laid upon it. ²² When this had been done and some time had passed, and when the sun, which had been clouded over, shone out, a great fire blazed up, so that all marveled. ²³ And while the sacrifice was being consumed, the priests offered prayer—the priests and everyone. Jonathan led, and the rest re-

sponded, as did Nehemiah. ²⁴ The prayer was to this effect:

“O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, you alone are king and are kind, ²⁵ you alone are bountiful, you alone are just and almighty and eternal. You rescue Israel from every evil; you chose the ancestors and consecrated them. ²⁶ Accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel and preserve your portion and make it holy. ²⁷ Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look on those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that you are our God. ²⁸ Punish those who oppress and are insolent with pride. ²⁹ Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses promised.”

³⁰ Then the priests sang the hymns. ³¹ After the materials of the sacrifice had been consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the liquid that was left should be poured on large stones. ³² When this was done, a flame blazed up; but when the light from the altar shone back, it went out. ³³ When this matter became known, and it was reported to the king of the Persians that, in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire, the liquid had appeared with which Nehemiah and his associates had burned the materials of the sacrifice, ³⁴ the king investigated the matter, and enclosed the place and made it sacred. ³⁵ And with those persons whom the king favored he exchanged many excellent gifts. ³⁶ Nehemiah and his associates called this “nephthar,” which means purification, but by most people it is called naphtha.^a

Jeremiah Hides the Tent, Ark, and Altar

2 One finds in the records that the prophet Jeremiah ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned, ² and that the prophet, after giving them the law, instructed those who were being deported not to forget the commandments of the Lord, or to be led astray in their thoughts on seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornment. ³ And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts.

^a Gk *nephthai*

Read 2 Maccabees 2:19–32

The editors of this book describe their adaptation and abridgement of the five books of Jason of Cyrene. Their justification for the editing process is to make the story more readable and more accessible to the average reader.

Reflect: Reflect on the two levels of readership and interpretation represented by the historian and the layperson. Consider how a popular work can spark further study.

Pray: Pray for those who strive to make biblical traditions and historical information relevant to the modern generation.

Act: Take seriously the responsibility to learn about your sacred traditions. Ask questions and seek to learn all that you can.

4 It was also in the same document that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. ⁵ Jeremiah came and found a cave-dwelling, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense; then he sealed up the entrance. ⁶ Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. ⁷ When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: “The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. ⁸ Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated.”

9 It was also made clear that being possessed of wisdom Solomon^a offered sacrifice for the dedication and completion of the temple. ¹⁰ Just as Moses prayed to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, so also Solomon prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the whole burnt offerings. ¹¹ And Moses said, “They were consumed because the sin offering had not been eaten.” ¹² Likewise Solomon also kept the eight days.

13 The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings. ¹⁴ In the same way Judas also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war that had come upon us, and they are in our possession. ¹⁵ So if you have need of them, send people to get them for you.

16 Since, therefore, we are about to celebrate the purification, we write to you. Will you therefore please keep the days? ¹⁷ It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, ¹⁸ as he promised through the law. We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils and has purified the place.

The Compiler’s Preface

19 The story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, ²⁰ and further the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator, ²¹ and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism, so that though few in number they

^a Gk *he*

seized the whole land and pursued the barbarian hordes, ²² and regained possession of the temple famous throughout the world, and liberated the city, and re-established the laws that were about to be abolished, while the Lord with great kindness became gracious to them—²³ all this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book. ²⁴ For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material, ²⁵ we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers. ²⁶ For us who have undertaken the toil of abbreviating, it is no light matter but calls for sweat and loss of sleep, ²⁷ just as it is not easy for one who prepares a banquet and seeks the benefit of others. Nevertheless, to

secure the gratitude of many we will gladly endure the uncomfortable toil, ²⁸ leaving the responsibility for exact details to the compiler, while devoting our effort to arriving at the outlines of the condensation. ²⁹ For as the master builder of a new house must be concerned with the whole construction, while the one who undertakes its painting and decoration has to consider only what is suitable for its adornment, such in my judgment is the case with us. ³⁰ It is the duty of the original historian to occupy the ground, to discuss matters from every side, and to take trouble with details, ³¹ but the one who recasts the narrative should be allowed to strive for brevity of expression and to forego exhaustive treatment. ³² At this point therefore let us begin our narrative, without adding any more to what has already been said; for it would be foolish to lengthen the preface while cutting short the history itself.

Arrival of Heliodorus in Jerusalem

3 While the holy city was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were strictly observed because of the piety of the high priest Onias and his hatred of wickedness, ² it came about that the kings themselves honored the place and glorified the temple with the finest presents, ³ even to the extent that King Seleucus of Asia defrayed from his own revenues all the expenses connected with the service of the sacrifices.

⁴ But a man named Simon, of the tribe of Benjamin, who had been made captain of the temple, had a disagreement with the high priest about the administration of the city market. ⁵ Since he could not prevail over Onias, he went to Apollonius of Tarsus,^a who at that time was governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, ⁶ and reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices, but that it was possible for them to fall under the control of the king. ⁷ When Apollonius met the king, he told him of the money about which he had been informed. The king^b chose Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, and sent him with commands to effect the removal of the reported wealth. ⁸ Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, ostensibly to make a tour of inspection of the cities of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, but in fact to carry out the king's purpose.

^a Gk Apollonius son of Tharseas

^b Gk He

Read 2 Maccabees 3

An argument between the High Priest Onias III and Simon, the captain of the temple, leads to Seleucus IV Philopator sending his chief minister Heliodorus to Jerusalem to inspect the temple treasury and confiscate its wealth. Faced with the profanation of the temple and a breach in the security of its held assets, the entire population raises supplications to God. The divine response is an apparition of three beings who frighten Heliodorus's entourage and scourge him. Heliodorus's life is saved when Onias offers sacrifice for him and Heliodorus reports to Antiochus that the temple is protected by a mighty God.

Reflect: Consider how God has mercy on an enemy when intercession is made.

Pray: Pray for the willingness to place your concerns in God's hands. Pray for the courage of conviction to proclaim God's power.

Act: Be willing to join with others in making supplication to God for a common cause.

9 When he had arrived at Jerusalem and had been kindly welcomed by the high priest of^a the city, he told about the disclosure that had been made and stated why he had come, and he inquired whether this really was the situation. ¹⁰ The high priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans, ¹¹ and also some money of Hyrcanus son of Tobias, a man of very prominent position, and that it totaled in all four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold. To such an extent the impious Simon had misrepresented the facts. ¹² And he said that it was utterly impossible that wrong should be done to those people who had trusted in the holiness of the place and in the sanctity and inviolability of the temple that is honored throughout the whole world.

Heliodorus Plans to Rob the Temple

13 But Heliodorus, because of the orders he had from the king, said that this money must in any case be confiscated for the king's treasury. ¹⁴ So he set a day and went in to direct the inspection of these funds.

There was no little distress throughout the whole city. ¹⁵ The priests prostrated themselves before the altar in their priestly vestments and called toward heaven upon him who had given the law about deposits, that he should keep them safe for those who had deposited them. ¹⁶ To see the appearance of the high priest was to be wounded at heart, for his face and the change in his color disclosed the anguish of his soul. ¹⁷ For terror and bodily trembling had come over the man, which plainly showed to those who looked at him the pain lodged in his heart. ¹⁸ People also hurried out of their houses in crowds to make a general supplication because the holy place was about to be brought into dishonor. ¹⁹ Women, girded with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. Some of the young women who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of the windows. ²⁰ And holding up their hands to heaven, they all made supplication. ²¹ There was something pitiable in the prostration of the whole populace and the anxiety of the high priest in his great anguish.

The Lord Protects His Temple

22 While they were calling upon the Almighty Lord that he would keep what had been entrusted safe and secure for those who had entrusted it, ²³ Heliodorus went on with what had been decided. ²⁴ But when he arrived at the treasury with his bodyguard, then and there the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused so great a manifestation that all who had been so bold as

^a Other ancient authorities read *and*

to accompany him were astounded by the power of God, and became faint with terror. ²⁵ For there appeared to them a magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien; it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold. ²⁶ Two young men also appeared to him, remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed, who stood on either side of him and flogged him continuously, inflicting many blows on him. ²⁷ When he suddenly fell to the ground and deep darkness came over him, his men took him up, put him on a stretcher, ²⁸ and carried him away—this man who had just entered the aforesaid treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard but was now unable to help himself. They recognized clearly the sovereign power of God.

Onias Prays for Heliodorus

²⁹ While he lay prostrate, speechless because of the divine intervention and deprived of any hope of recovery, ³⁰ they praised the Lord who had acted marvelously for his own place. And the temple, which a little while before was full of fear and disturbance, was filled with joy and gladness, now that the Almighty Lord had appeared.

³¹ Some of Heliodorus's friends quickly begged Onias to call upon the Most High to grant life to one who was lying quite at his last breath. ³² So the high priest, fearing that the king might get the notion that

some foul play had been perpetrated by the Jews with regard to Heliodorus, offered sacrifice for the man's recovery. ³³ While the high priest was making an atonement, the same young men appeared again to Heliodorus dressed in the same clothing, and they stood and said, "Be very grateful to the high priest Onias, since for his sake the Lord has granted you your life. ³⁴ And see that you, who have been flogged by heaven, report to all people the majestic power of God." Having said this they vanished.

The Conversion of Heliodorus

³⁵ Then Heliodorus offered sacrifice to the Lord and made very great vows to the Savior of his life, and having bidden Onias farewell, he marched off with his forces to the king. ³⁶ He bore testimony to all concerning the deeds of the supreme God, which he had seen with his own eyes. ³⁷ When the king asked Heliodorus what sort of person would be suitable to send on another mission to Jerusalem, he replied, ³⁸ "If you have any enemy or plotter against your government, send him there, for you will get him back thoroughly flogged, if he survives at all; for there is certainly some power of God about the place. ³⁹ For he who has his dwelling in heaven watches over that place himself and brings it aid, and he strikes and destroys those who come to do it injury." ⁴⁰ This was the outcome of the episode of Heliodorus and the protection of the treasury.

Simon Accuses Onias

4 The previously mentioned Simon, who had informed about the money against^a his own country, slandered Onias, saying that it was he who had incited Heliodorus and had been the real cause of the misfortune. ² He dared to designate as a plotter against the government the man who was the benefactor of the city, the protector of his compatriots, and a zealot for the laws. ³ When his hatred progressed to such a degree that even murders were committed by one of Simon's approved agents, ⁴ Onias recognized that the rivalry was serious and that Apollonius son of Menestheus,^b and governor of Coele Syria and Phoenicia, was intensi-

^a Gk and

^b Vg Compare verse 21: Meaning of Gk uncertain

Read 2 Maccabees 4

After Antiochus IV becomes king, the schemes of the Hellenists, led by Onias's brother Jason, result in the high priesthood going up for auction to the highest bidder. Greek customs are adopted by many in Jerusalem, and this leads to great to dissension and unrest. Jason is outbid for the high priesthood by Menelaus and the result is a theft of most of the sacred golden vessels from the temple by his brother Lysimachus to pay for bribes. Onias is murdered and Menelaus is acquitted of his crimes through bribery and influence peddling among Antiochus's officials.

Reflect: Consider how stability and law can be disrupted by personal ambition and ruthlessness. Reflect on ways to cope with social and political unrest.

Pray: Pray for those who work diligently for the good of society in the face of unjust criticism.

Act: Be vigilant of those who build a following through extravagance. Recognize how easily a society can be harmed when the rule of law is set aside.

fying the malice of Simon. ⁵ So he appealed to the king, not accusing his compatriots but having in view the welfare, both public and private, of all the people. ⁶ For he saw that without the king's attention public affairs could not again reach a peaceful settlement, and that Simon would not stop his folly.

Jason's Reforms

7 When Seleucus died and Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the kingdom, Jason the brother of Onias obtained the high priesthood by corruption, ⁸ promising the king at an interview^a three hundred sixty talents of silver, and from another source of revenue eighty talents. ⁹ In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it, and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. ¹⁰ When the king assented and Jason^b came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life.

11 He set aside the existing royal concessions to the Jews, secured through John the father of Eupolemus, who went on the mission to establish friendship and alliance with the Romans; and he destroyed the lawful ways of living and introduced new customs contrary to the law. ¹² He took delight in establishing a gymnasium right under the citadel, and he induced the noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat. ¹³ There was such an extreme of Hellenization and increase in the adoption of foreign ways because of the surpassing wickedness of Jason, who was ungodly and no true^c high priest, ¹⁴ that the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar. Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hurried to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena after the signal for the discus-throwing, ¹⁵ disdainful of the honors prized by their ancestors and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of prestige. ¹⁶ For this reason heavy disaster overtook them, and those whose ways of living they admired and wished to imitate completely became their enemies and punished them. ¹⁷ It is no light thing to show irreverence to the divine laws—a fact that later events will make clear.

Jason Introduces Greek Customs

18 When the quadrennial games were being held at Tyre and the king was present, ¹⁹ the vile Jason sent envoys, chosen as being Antiochian citizens from Jerusalem, to carry three hundred silver drachmas for the sacrifice to Hercules. Those who carried the money, however, thought best not to use it for sacrifice, be-

^a Or by a petition

^b Gk he

^c Gk lacks true

cause that was inappropriate, but to expend it for another purpose.²⁰ So this money was intended by the sender for the sacrifice to Hercules, but by the decision of its carriers it was applied to the construction of triremes.

21 When Apollonius son of Menestheus was sent to Egypt for the coronation^a of Philometor as king, Antiochus learned that Philometor^b had become hostile to his government, and he took measures for his own security. Therefore upon arriving at Joppa he proceeded to Jerusalem.²² He was welcomed magnificently by Jason and the city, and ushered in with a blaze of torches and with shouts. Then he marched his army into Phoenicia.

Menelaus Becomes High Priest

23 After a period of three years Jason sent Menelaus, the brother of the previously mentioned Simon, to carry the money to the king and to complete the records of essential business.²⁴ But he, when presented to the king, extolled him with an air of authority, and secured the high priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver.²⁵ After receiving the king's orders he returned, possessing no qualification for the high priesthood, but having the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage wild beast.²⁶ So Jason, who after supplanting his own brother was supplanted by another man, was driven as a fugitive into the land of Ammon.²⁷ Although Menelaus continued to hold the office, he did not pay regularly any of the money promised to the king.²⁸ When Sostratus the captain of the citadel kept requesting payment—for the collection of the revenue was his responsibility—the two of them were summoned by the king on account of this issue.²⁹ Menelaus left his own brother Lysimachus as deputy in the high priesthood, while Sostratus left Crates, the commander of the Cyprian troops.

The Murder of Onias

30 While such was the state of affairs, it happened that the people of Tarsus and of Mallus revolted because their cities had been given as a present to Antiochis, the king's concubine.³¹ So the king went hurriedly to settle the trouble, leaving Andronicus, a man of high rank, to act as his deputy.³² But Menelaus, thinking he had obtained a suitable opportunity, stole some of the gold vessels of the temple and gave them to Andronicus; other vessels, as it happened, he had sold to Tyre and the neighboring cities.³³ When Onias became fully aware of these acts, he publicly exposed them, having first withdrawn to a place of sanctuary at Daphne near Antioch.³⁴ Therefore Menelaus, taking Andronicus aside, urged him to kill Onias. Andronicus^c came to Onias, and resorting to treachery, offered him sworn pledges and gave him his right hand; he persuaded him, though still suspicious, to come out from the place of sanctuary; then, with no regard for justice, he immediately put him out of the way.

Andronicus Is Punished

35 For this reason not only Jews, but many also of other nations, were grieved and displeased at the unjust murder of the man.³⁶ When the king returned from the region of Cilicia, the Jews in the city^d appealed to him with regard to the unreasonable murder of Onias, and the Greeks shared their hatred of the crime.³⁷ Therefore Antiochus was grieved at heart and filled with pity, and wept because of the moderation and good conduct of the deceased.³⁸ Inflamed with anger, he immediately stripped off the purple robe from Andronicus, tore off his clothes, and led him around the whole city to that very place where he had committed the outrage against Onias, and there he dispatched the bloodthirsty fellow. The Lord thus repaid him with the punishment he deserved.

^a Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Gk *he*

^c Gk *He*

^d Or *in each city*

Unpopularity of Lysimachus and Menelaus

39 When many acts of sacrilege had been committed in the city by Lysimachus with the connivance of Menelaus, and when report of them had spread abroad, the populace gathered against Lysimachus, because many of the gold vessels had already been stolen. ⁴⁰ Since the crowds were becoming aroused and filled with anger, Lysimachus armed about three thousand men and launched an unjust attack, under the leadership of a certain Auranus, a man advanced in years and no less advanced in folly. ⁴¹ But when the Jews^a became aware that Lysimachus was attacking them, some picked up stones, some blocks of wood, and others took handfuls of the ashes that were lying around, and threw them in wild confusion at Lysimachus and his men. ⁴² As a result, they wounded many of them, and killed some, and put all the rest to flight; the temple robber himself they killed close by the treasury.

43 Charges were brought against Mene-

laus about this incident. ⁴⁴ When the king came to Tyre, three men sent by the senate presented the case before him. ⁴⁵ But Menelaus, already as good as beaten, promised a substantial bribe to Ptolemy son of Dorymenes to win over the king. ⁴⁶ Therefore Ptolemy, taking the king aside into a colonnade as if for refreshment, induced the king to change his mind. ⁴⁷ Menelaus, the cause of all the trouble, he acquitted of the charges against him, while he sentenced to death those unfortunate men, who would have been freed uncondemned if they had pleaded even before Scythians. ⁴⁸ And so those who had spoken for the city and the villages^b and the holy vessels quickly suffered the unjust penalty. ⁴⁹ Therefore even the Tyrians, showing their hatred of the crime, provided magnificently for their funeral. ⁵⁰ But Menelaus, because of the greed of those in power, remained in office, growing in wickedness, having become the chief plotter against his compatriots.

Jason Tries to Regain Control

5 About this time Antiochus made his second invasion of Egypt. ² And it happened that, for almost forty days, there appeared over all the city golden-clad cavalry charging through the air, in companies fully armed with lances and drawn swords—³ troops of cavalry drawn up, attacks and counterattacks made on this side and on that, brandishing of shields, massing of spears, hurling of missiles, the flash of golden trappings, and armor of all kinds. ⁴ Therefore everyone prayed that the apparition might prove to have been a good omen.

⁵ When a false rumor arose that Antiochus was dead, Jason took no fewer than a thousand men and suddenly made an assault on the city. When the troops on the wall had been forced back and at last the city was being taken, Menelaus took refuge in the citadel. ⁶ But Jason kept relentlessly slaughtering his compatriots, not realizing that success at the cost of one's kindred is the greatest misfortune, but imagining that he was setting up trophies of victory over enemies and not over compatriots. ⁷ He did not, however, gain control of the government; in the end he got only disgrace from his conspiracy, and fled again into the country of the Ammonites. ⁸ Finally he met a miserable end. Accused^c

^a Gk *they*

^b Other ancient authorities read *the people*

^c Cn: Gk *Imprisoned*

Read 2 Maccabees 5

After an abortive attempt to capture the city of Jerusalem, Jason dies in exile. Fearing a revolt in Judea, Antiochus IV attacks Jerusalem and allows a general massacre of the population. God permits Antiochus to plunder the temple because of the sins of the people. When the king sent Apollonius to once again ravage the people, Judas Maccabeus and his followers escaped to the wilderness.

Reflect: Consider the rationalization for Antiochus's profaning of the temple and robbing of its treasury. Reflect on the promise that when God was once again reconciled with the nation their fortunes and the temple would be restored.

Pray: Pray for a just end to conflicts in society. Ask for a contrite heart, open to repenting for sins and seeking reconciliation with God.

Act: Work for justice and peace in your community and in the world. Support those who fight for the rights of people and the maintenance of law and order.

before Aretas the ruler of the Arabs, fleeing from city to city, pursued by everyone, hated as a rebel against the laws, and abhorred as the executioner of his country and his compatriots, he was cast ashore in Egypt.⁹ There he who had driven many from their own country into exile died in exile, having embarked to go to the Lacedaemonians in hope of finding protection because of their kinship.¹⁰ He who had cast out many to lie unburied had no one to mourn for him; he had no funeral of any sort and no place in the tomb of his ancestors.

11 When news of what had happened reached the king, he took it to mean that Judea was in revolt. So, raging inwardly, he left Egypt and took the city by storm.¹² He commanded his soldiers to cut down relentlessly everyone they met and to kill those who went into their houses.¹³ Then there was massacre of young and old, destruction of boys, women, and children, and slaughter of young girls and infants.¹⁴ Within the total of three days eighty thousand were destroyed, forty thousand in hand-to-hand fighting, and as many were sold into slavery as were killed.

Pillage of the Temple

15 Not content with this, Antiochus^a dared to enter the most holy temple in all the world, guided by Menelaus, who had become a traitor both to the laws and to his country.¹⁶ He took the holy vessels with his polluted hands, and swept away with profane hands the votive offerings that other kings had made to enhance the glory and honor of the place.¹⁷ Antiochus was elated in spirit, and did not perceive that the Lord was angered for a little while because of the sins of those who lived in the city, and that this was the reason he was disregarding the holy place.¹⁸ But if it had not happened that they were involved in many sins, this man would have been flogged and turned back from his rash act as soon as he came forward, just as Heliodorus had been, whom King Seleucus sent to inspect the treasury.¹⁹ But the Lord did not choose the nation for the sake of the holy place, but the place for the sake of the nation.²⁰ Therefore the place itself shared in the misfortunes that befell the nation and afterward participated in its benefits; and what was forsaken in the wrath of the Almighty was restored again in all its glory when the great Lord became reconciled.

21 So Antiochus carried off eighteen hundred talents from the temple, and hurried away to Antioch, thinking in his arrogance that he could sail on the land and walk on the sea, because his mind was elated.²² He left governors to oppress the people: at Jerusalem, Philip, by birth a Phrygian and in character more barbarous than

^a Gk *he*

the man who appointed him; ²³ and at Gerizim, Andronicus; and besides these Mene-la-us, who lorded it over his compatriots worse than the others did. In his malice toward the Jewish citizens,^a ²⁴ Antiochus^b sent Apollonius, the captain of the Mysians, with an army of twenty-two thousand, and commanded him to kill all the grown men and to sell the women and boys as slaves. ²⁵ When this man arrived in Jerusalem, he pretended to be peaceably disposed and waited until the holy sabbath day; then,

finding the Jews not at work, he ordered his troops to parade under arms. ²⁶ He put to the sword all those who came out to see them, then rushed into the city with his armed warriors and killed great numbers of people.

²⁷ But Judas Maccabeus, with about nine others, got away to the wilderness, and kept himself and his companions alive in the mountains as wild animals do; they continued to live on what grew wild, so that they might not share in the defilement.

The Suppression of Judaism

6 Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian^c senator^d to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God; ² also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as did the people who lived in that place.

³ Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. ⁴ For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. ⁵ The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. ⁶ People could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.

⁷ On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews^e were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when a festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and to walk in the procession in honor of Dionysus. ⁸ At the suggestion of the people of Ptolemais^f a decree was issued to the neighboring Greek cities that they should adopt the same policy toward the Jews and make them partake of the sacrifices, ⁹ and should kill those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them. ¹⁰ For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. They publicly paraded them around the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then hurled them down headlong from the wall. ¹¹ Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day.

^a Or worse than the others did in his malice toward the Jewish citizens

^b Gk he

^c Other ancient authorities read *Antiochian*

^d Or *Geron an Athenian*

^e Gk *they*

^f Cn: Gk suggestion of the Ptolemies (or of Ptolemy)

Read 2 Maccabees 6–7

Antiochus attempts to impose Greek customs and forms of worship on the Jews while banning circumcision, the keeping of the sabbath, and the maintenance of ritual purity in the temple. Eleazar, an aged scribe, provides an example as a virtuous martyr by refusing to eat pork sacrificed to a foreign god. A second martyr story is also recounted. This story honors the courage of a mother and her seven sons who also refuse to eat pork or renounce their faith and who praise God in their suffering, stating their assurance in a never-failing life after death under the covenant.

Reflect: Reflect on the idea of God inflicting quick punishment as a mercy rather than waiting until our sins have reached “full measure.” Consider the ability of some to face torture and death rather than renounce the law or dishonor God.

Pray: Pray for the courage to defend your beliefs and values in the face of ridicule and persecution.

Act: Diligently study the elements of the faith so that it becomes a central part of your thinking. Refuse the temptation to compromise your faith.

Providential Significance of the Persecution

12 Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. ¹³ In fact, it is a sign of great kindness not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately. ¹⁴ For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, ¹⁵ in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height. ¹⁶ Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people. ¹⁷ Let what we have said serve as a reminder; we must go on briefly with the story.

The Martyrdom of Eleazar

18 Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine’s flesh. ¹⁹ But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, ²⁰ as all ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.

21 Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, ²² so that by doing this he might be saved from death, and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them. ²³ But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the gray hairs that he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades.

24 “Such pretense is not worthy of our time of life,” he said, “for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion, ²⁵ and through my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age. ²⁶ Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty. ²⁷ Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age ²⁸ and leave to the young a noble example of how to die

a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.”

When he had said this, he went^a at once to the rack. ²⁹ Those who a little before had acted toward him with goodwill now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness.^b ³⁰ When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: “It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him.”

³¹ So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation.

The Martyrdom of Seven Brothers

7 It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine’s flesh. ² One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, “What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.”

³ The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. ⁴ These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. ⁵ When he was utterly helpless, the king^c ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers^d and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, ⁶ “The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the

people to their faces, when he said, ‘And he will have compassion on his servants.’”^e

⁷ After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, “Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?” ⁸ He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, “No.” Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. ⁹ And when he was at his last breath, he said, “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.”

¹⁰ After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, ¹¹ and said nobly, “I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.” ¹² As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man’s spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

¹³ After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. ¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!”

¹⁵ Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. ¹⁶ But he looked at the king,^f and said, “Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. ¹⁷ Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!”

¹⁸ After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, “Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our

^a Other ancient authorities read *was dragged*

^b Meaning of Gk uncertain

^c Gk *he*

^d Gk *they*

^e Gk *slaves*

^f Gk *at him*

own God. Therefore^a astounding things have happened. ¹⁹ But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!”

²⁰ The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. ²¹ She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman’s reasoning with a man’s courage, and said to them, ²² “I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. ²³ Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.”

²⁴ Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus^b not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs. ²⁵ Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. ²⁶ After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. ²⁷ But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native language as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: “My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you.^c ²⁸ I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in

them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed.^d And in the same way the human race came into being. ²⁹ Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.”

³⁰ While she was still speaking, the young man said, “What are you^e waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through Moses. ³¹ But you,^f who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. ³² For we are suffering because of our own sins. ³³ And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.^g ³⁴ But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. ³⁵ You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. ³⁶ For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk^h of ever-flowing life, under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. ³⁷ I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, ³⁸ and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.”

³⁹ The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. ⁴⁰ So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

⁴¹ Last of all, the mother died, after her sons.

⁴² Let this be enough, then, about the eating of sacrifices and the extreme tortures.

^a Lat: Other ancient authorities lack *Therefore*

^b Gk *he*

^c Or *have borne the burden of your education*

^d Or *God made them out of things that did not exist*

^e The Gk here for *you* is plural

^f The Gk here for *you* is singular

^g Gk *slaves*

^h Cn: Gk *fallen*

Read 2 Maccabees 8

The emergence of Judas Maccabeus as the leader of the Jewish resistance movement is detailed. His victories over Nicanor, Timothy, and Bacchides parallel the accounts in 1 Maccabees, but a greater emphasis is put here on Judas's invocation of God's support as well as on Judas's charge to his outnumbered army to trust in God while the enemy trusts only in their numbers and their weapons. Reverence for the sabbath and the distribution of a portion of the spoils to widows and orphans help provide popular support for Judas's army.

Reflect: Consider the various ways in which participants and historians interpret events. Reflect on the strength provided to those who take up the role of protectors of the faith and the faithful.

Pray: Pray for those who are willing to take on leadership roles. Ask God to provide leaders with both courage and wisdom.

Act: Step forward to defend your faith. Learn the personal and societal benefits of championing social justice and piety.

The Revolt of Judas Maccabeus

8 Meanwhile Judas, who was also called Maccabeus, and his companions secretly entered the villages and summoned their kindred and enlisted those who had continued in the Jewish faith, and so they gathered about six thousand. ² They implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all; and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the godless; ³ to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground; to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; ⁴ to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name; and to show his hatred of evil.

⁵ As soon as Maccabeus got his army organized, the Gentiles could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy. ⁶ Coming without warning, he would set fire to towns and villages. He captured strategic positions and put to flight not a few of the enemy. ⁷ He found the nights most advantageous for such attacks. And talk of his valor spread everywhere.

⁸ When Philip saw that the man was gaining ground little by little, and that he was pushing ahead with more frequent successes, he wrote to Ptolemy, the governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, to come to the aid of the king's government. ⁹ Then Ptolemy^a promptly appointed Nicanor son of Patroclus, one of the king's chief^b Friends, and sent him, in command of no fewer than twenty thousand Gentiles of all nations, to wipe out the whole race of Judea. He associated with him Gorgias, a general and a man of experience in military service. ¹⁰ Nicanor determined to make up for the king the tribute due to the Romans, two thousand talents, by selling the captured Jews into slavery. ¹¹ So he immediately sent to the towns on the seacoast, inviting them to buy Jewish slaves and promising to hand over ninety slaves for a talent, not expecting the judgment from the Almighty that was about to overtake him.

Preparation for Battle

¹² Word came to Judas concerning Nicanor's invasion; and when he told his companions of the arrival of the army, ¹³ those who were cowardly and distrustful of God's justice ran off and got away. ¹⁴ Others sold all their remaining property, and at the same time implored the Lord to rescue those who had been sold by the ungodly Nicanor before he ever met them, ¹⁵ if not for their own sake, then for the sake of the covenants made with their ancestors, and because he had called them by his holy and glorious name. ¹⁶ But Maccabeus gathered his forces together, to the number six thousand, and ex-

^a Gk *he*

^b Gk *one of the first*

horted them not to be frightened by the enemy and not to fear the great multitude of Gentiles who were wickedly coming against them, but to fight nobly, ¹⁷ keeping before their eyes the lawless outrage that the Gentiles^a had committed against the holy place, and the torture of the derided city, and besides, the overthrow of their ancestral way of life. ¹⁸ “For they trust to arms and acts of daring,” he said, “but we trust in the Almighty God, who is able with a single nod to strike down those who are coming against us, and even, if necessary, the whole world.”

¹⁹ Moreover, he told them of the occasions when help came to their ancestors; how, in the time of Sennacherib, when one hundred eighty-five thousand perished, ²⁰ and the time of the battle against the Galatians that took place in Babylonia, when eight thousand Jews^b fought along with four thousand Macedonians; yet when the Macedonians were hard pressed, the eight thousand, by the help that came to them from heaven, destroyed one hundred twenty thousand Galatians^c and took a great amount of booty.

Judas Defeats Nicanor

²¹ With these words he filled them with courage and made them ready to die for their laws and their country; then he divided his army into four parts. ²² He appointed his brothers also, Simon and Joseph and Jonathan, each to command a division, putting fifteen hundred men under each. ²³ Besides, he appointed Eleazar to read aloud^d from the holy book, and gave the watchword, “The help of God”; then, leading the first division himself, he joined battle with Nicanor.

²⁴ With the Almighty as their ally, they killed more than nine thousand of the enemy, and wounded and disabled most of Nicanor’s army, and forced them all to flee. ²⁵ They captured the money of those who

had come to buy them as slaves. After pursuing them for some distance, they were obliged to return because the hour was late. ²⁶ It was the day before the sabbath, and for that reason they did not continue their pursuit. ²⁷ When they had collected the arms of the enemy and stripped them of their spoils, they kept the sabbath, giving great praise and thanks to the Lord, who had preserved them for that day and allotted it to them as the beginning of mercy. ²⁸ After the sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and distributed the rest among themselves and their children. ²⁹ When they had done this, they made common supplication and implored the merciful Lord to be wholly reconciled with his servants.^e

Judas Defeats Timothy and Bacchides

³⁰ In encounters with the forces of Timothy and Bacchides they killed more than twenty thousand of them and got possession of some exceedingly high strongholds, and they divided a very large amount of plunder, giving to those who had been tortured and to the orphans and widows, and also to the aged, shares equal to their own. ³¹ They collected the arms of the enemy,^f and carefully stored all of them in strategic places; the rest of the spoils they carried to Jerusalem. ³² They killed the commander of Timothy’s forces, a most wicked man, and one who had greatly troubled the Jews. ³³ While they were celebrating the victory in the city of their ancestors, they burned those who had set fire to the sacred gates, Callisthenes and some others, who had fled into one little house; so these received the proper reward for their impiety.^d

³⁴ The thrice-cursed Nicanor, who had brought the thousand merchants to buy the Jews, ³⁵ having been humbled with the help of the Lord by opponents whom he

^a Gk *they*

^b Gk lacks *Jews*

^c Gk lacks *Galatians*

^d Meaning of Gk uncertain

^e Gk *slaves*

^f Gk *their arms*

regarded as of the least account, took off his splendid uniform and made his way alone like a runaway slave across the country until he reached Antioch, having succeeded chiefly in the destruction of his own army!³⁶ So he who had undertaken to

secure tribute for the Romans by the capture of the people of Jerusalem proclaimed that the Jews had a Defender, and that therefore the Jews were invulnerable, because they followed the laws ordained by him.

Read 2 Maccabees 9

Antiochus IV's anger over his inability to conquer and plunder Persia and over Judas's defeat of Nicanor drives him to a manic effort to return to Judea to punish the Jews. On the way, God inflicts a horrible illness on the king. Antiochus attempts to assuage God's wrath but is forced to send a letter naming his son as his successor just before his death.

Reflect: Reflect on those who believe they can achieve all of their ambitions without regard for the rights of others.

Pray: Pray for the ability to avoid unwise and selfish decisions. Pray for the ill, that they may find relief from their suffering.

Act: Make appropriate plans for the disposition of your estate to save your heirs and caregivers from unnecessary burdens. Find a way to take stock of trying situations and seek reasoned solutions.

The Last Campaign of Antiochus Epiphanes

9 About that time, as it happened, Antiochus had retreated in disorder from the region of Persia.² He had entered the city called Persepolis and attempted to rob the temples and control the city. Therefore the people rushed to the rescue with arms, and Antiochus and his army were defeated,^a with the result that Antiochus was put to flight by the inhabitants and beat a shameful retreat.³ While he was in Ecbatana, news came to him of what had happened to Nicanor and the forces of Timothy.⁴ Transported with rage, he conceived the idea of turning upon the Jews the injury done by those who had put him to flight; so he ordered his charioteer to drive without stopping until he completed the journey. But the judgment of heaven rode with him! For in his arrogance he said, "When I get there I will make Jerusalem a cemetery of Jews."

5 But the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him with an incurable and invisible blow. As soon as he stopped speaking he was seized with a pain in his bowels, for which there was no relief, and with sharp internal tortures—⁶ and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions.⁷ Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to drive even faster. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body.⁸ Thus he who only a little while before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea, and had imagined that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance, was brought down to earth and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all.⁹ And so the ungodly man's body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of the stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.¹⁰ Because of his intolerable stench no one was able to carry the man who a little while before had thought that he could touch the stars of heaven.¹¹ Then it was that, broken in spirit, he began to lose much of his arrogance and to come to his senses under the scourge of God, for he was tortured

^a Gk they were defeated

with pain every moment. ¹² And when he could not endure his own stench, he uttered these words, "It is right to be subject to God; mortals should not think that they are equal to God."^a

Antiochus Makes a Promise to God

¹³ Then the abominable fellow made a vow to the Lord, who would no longer have mercy on him, stating ¹⁴ that the holy city, which he was hurrying to level to the ground and to make a cemetery, he was now declaring to be free; ¹⁵ and the Jews, whom he had not considered worth burying but had planned to throw out with their children for the wild animals and for the birds to eat, he would make, all of them, equal to citizens of Athens; ¹⁶ and the holy sanctuary, which he had formerly plundered, he would adorn with the finest offerings; and all the holy vessels he would give back, many times over; and the expenses incurred for the sacrifices he would provide from his own revenues; ¹⁷ and in addition to all this he also would become a Jew and would visit every inhabited place to proclaim the power of God. ¹⁸ But when his sufferings did not in any way abate, for the judgment of God had justly come upon him, he gave up all hope for himself and wrote to the Jews the following letter, in the form of a supplication. This was its content:

Antiochus's Letter and Death

¹⁹ "To his worthy Jewish citizens, Antiochus their king and general sends hearty greetings and good wishes for their health and prosperity. ²⁰ If you and your children are well and your affairs are as you wish, I

am glad. As my hope is in heaven, ²¹ I remember with affection your esteem and goodwill. On my way back from the region of Persia I suffered an annoying illness, and I have deemed it necessary to take thought for the general security of all. ²² I do not despair of my condition, for I have good hope of recovering from my illness, ²³ but I observed that my father, on the occasions when he made expeditions into the upper country, appointed his successor, ²⁴ so that, if anything unexpected happened or any unwelcome news came, the people throughout the realm would not be troubled, for they would know to whom the government was left. ²⁵ Moreover, I understand how the princes along the borders and the neighbors of my kingdom keep watching for opportunities and waiting to see what will happen. So I have appointed my son Antiochus to be king, whom I have often entrusted and commended to most of you when I hurried off to the upper provinces; and I have written to him what is written here. ²⁶ I therefore urge and beg you to remember the public and private services rendered to you and to maintain your present goodwill, each of you, toward me and my son. ²⁷ For I am sure that he will follow my policy and will treat you with moderation and kindness."

²⁸ So the murderer and blasphemer, having endured the more intense suffering, such as he had inflicted on others, came to the end of his life by a most pitiable fate, among the mountains in a strange land. ²⁹ And Philip, one of his courtiers, took his body home; then, fearing the son of Antiochus, he withdrew to Ptolemy Philometor in Egypt.

Purification of the Temple

10 Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; ² they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. ³ They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out

^a Or not think thoughts proper only to God

Read 2 Maccabees 10:1–8

Judas Maccabeus organizes the purification of the Jerusalem temple and the restoration of proper ritual. An eight-day festival is organized to celebrate the event that subsequently will be the festival of Chanukah (compare 1 Macc 4:36–59).

Reflect: Consider how sacred space can be profaned and then, after purification, be rededicated to the service of God.

Pray: Pray that all may respect the sanctity of holy places while recognizing that God is not tied to any particular place.

Act: Become familiar with the rituals of the church in order to understand how they bring us closer to God.

the bread of the Presence. ⁴ When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. ⁵ It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. ⁶ They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. ⁷ Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. ⁸ They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.

⁹ Such then was the end of Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes.

Accession of Antiochus Eupator

¹⁰ Now we will tell what took place under Antiochus Eupator, who was the son of that ungodly man, and will give a brief summary of the principal calamities of the wars. ¹¹ This man, when he succeeded to the kingdom, appointed one Lysias to have charge of the government and to be chief governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia. ¹² Ptolemy, who was called Macron, took the lead in showing justice to the Jews because of the wrong that had been done to them, and attempted to maintain peaceful relations with them. ¹³ As a result he was accused before Eupator by the king's Friends. He heard himself called a traitor at every turn, because he had abandoned Cyprus, which Philometor had entrusted to him, and had gone over to Antiochus Epiphanes. Unable to command the respect due his office,^a he took poison and ended his life.

Campaign in Idumea

¹⁴ When Gorgias became governor of the region, he maintained a force of mercenaries, and at every turn kept attacking the Jews. ¹⁵ Besides this, the Idumeans, who had control of important strongholds, were harassing the Jews; they received those who were banished from Jerusalem, and endeavored to keep up the war. ¹⁶ But Maccabeus and his forces, after making solemn supplication and imploring God to fight on their side, rushed to the strongholds of the Idumeans. ¹⁷ Attacking

^a Cn: Meaning of Gk uncertain

Read 2 Maccabees 10:9–38

Various political events and military campaigns that take place during the early reign of Antiochus V are recounted. Judas gains victories over the Idumeans (see 1 Macc 5:1–3) as well as over a massive army led by Timothy. During one battle a divine apparition of five horsemen supports the Jewish forces in their victory.

Reflect: Consider how greed can undermine both military and civilian efforts. Reflect on the ways in which pious indignation and fervor can drive some to incredible acts of courage and daring.

Pray: Pray for God's assistance and guidance in times of great trial.

Act: Study history in order to better understand how religious differences and regional concerns can spark conflict between peoples.

them vigorously, they gained possession of the places, and beat off all who fought upon the wall, and slaughtered those whom they encountered, killing no fewer than twenty thousand.

18 When at least nine thousand took refuge in two very strong towers well equipped to withstand a siege, ¹⁹ Maccabeus left Simon and Joseph, and also Zacchaeus and his troops, a force sufficient to besiege them; and he himself set off for places where he was more urgently needed. ²⁰ But those with Simon, who were money-hungry, were bribed by some of those who were in the towers, and on receiving seventy thousand drachmas let some of them slip away. ²¹ When word of what had happened came to Maccabeus, he gathered the leaders of the people, and accused these men of having sold their kindred for money by setting their enemies free to fight against them. ²² Then he killed these men who had turned traitor, and immediately captured the two towers. ²³ Having success at arms in everything he undertook, he destroyed more than twenty thousand in the two strongholds.

Judas Defeats Timothy

24 Now Timothy, who had been defeated by the Jews before, gathered a tremendous force of mercenaries and collected the cavalry from Asia in no small number. He came on, intending to take Judea by storm. ²⁵ As he drew near, Maccabeus and his men sprinkled dust on their heads and girded their loins with sackcloth, in supplication to God. ²⁶ Falling upon the steps before the altar, they implored him to be gracious to them and to be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries, as the law declares. ²⁷ And rising from their prayer they took up their arms and advanced a considerable distance from the city; and when they came near the enemy they halted. ²⁸ Just as dawn was breaking, the two armies joined battle, the one having as pledge of success and victory not only their valor but also their reliance on the Lord, while the other made rage their leader in the fight.

29 When the battle became fierce, there appeared to the enemy from heaven five resplendent men on horses with golden bridles, and they were leading the Jews. ³⁰ Two of them took Maccabeus between them, and shielding him with their own armor and weapons, they kept him from being wounded. They showered arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy, so that, confused and blinded, they were thrown into disorder and cut to pieces. ³¹ Twenty thousand five hundred were slaughtered, besides six hundred cavalry.

32 Timothy himself fled to a stronghold called Gaza-

ra, especially well garrisoned, where Chae-reas was commander. ³³ Then Maccabeus and his men were glad, and they besieged the fort for four days. ³⁴ The men within, relying on the strength of the place, kept blaspheming terribly and uttering wicked words. ³⁵ But at dawn of the fifth day, twenty young men in the army of Maccabeus, fired with anger because of the blasphemies, bravely stormed the wall and with savage fury cut down everyone they met. ³⁶ Others who came up in the same way

wheeled around against the defenders and set fire to the towers; they kindled fires and burned the blasphemers alive. Others broke open the gates and let in the rest of the force, and they occupied the city. ³⁷ They killed Timothy, who was hiding in a cistern, and his brother Chaereas, and Apollophanes. ³⁸ When they had accomplished these things, with hymns and thanksgivings they blessed the Lord who shows great kindness to Israel and gives them the victory.

Read 2 Maccabees 11

In the face of Lysias' invasion of Judea at the head of a massive army, Judas's forces are encouraged by the appearance of an angel clothed in golden armor. Lysias' army is defeated at Beth-zur and subsequent negotiations result in a letter from Antiochus V assuring the Jews of their rights to religious expression. A Roman letter also pledges support for the Jews.

Reflect: Consider how a determined resistance can force concessions or lead to fruitful negotiations. Reflect on the political complexity involved when an empire must deal with its various regions.

Pray: Thank God for listening to our prayers. Ask for continued guidance and support.

Act: Learn how governments operate internally and in their dealings with other countries. Recognize the ways in which political rhetoric is used by leaders who wish to save face.

Lysias Besieges Beth-zur

11 Very soon after this, Lysias, the king's guardian and kinsman, who was in charge of the government, being vexed at what had happened, ² gathered about eighty thousand infantry and all his cavalry and came against the Jews. He intended to make the city a home for Greeks, ³ and to levy tribute on the temple as he did on the sacred places of the other nations, and to put up the high priesthood for sale every year. ⁴ He took no account whatever of the power of God, but was elated with his ten thousands of infantry, and his thousands of cavalry, and his eighty elephants. ⁵ Invading Judea, he approached Beth-zur, which was a fortified place about five stadia^a from Jerusalem, and pressed it hard.

⁶ When Maccabeus and his men got word that Lysias^b was besieging the strongholds, they and all the people, with lamentations and tears, prayed the Lord to send a good angel to save Israel. ⁷ Maccabeus himself was the first to take up arms, and he urged the others to risk their lives with him to aid their kindred. Then they eagerly rushed off together. ⁸ And there, while they were still near Jerusalem, a horseman appeared at their head, clothed in white and brandishing weapons of gold. ⁹ And together they all praised the merciful God, and were strengthened in heart, ready to assail not only humans but the wildest animals or walls of iron. ¹⁰ They advanced in battle order, having their heavenly ally, for the Lord had mercy on them. ¹¹ They hurled themselves like lions against the enemy, and laid low eleven thousand of them and sixteen hundred cavalry, and forced all the rest to flee. ¹² Most of them got away stripped and wounded, and Lysias himself escaped by disgraceful flight.

Lysias Makes Peace with the Jews

¹³ As he was not without intelligence, he pondered over the defeat that had befallen him, and realized that

^a Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Gk *he*

the Hebrews were invincible because the mighty God fought on their side. So he sent to them ¹⁴ and persuaded them to settle everything on just terms, promising that he would persuade the king, constraining him to be their friend.^a ¹⁵ Maccabeus, having regard for the common good, agreed to all that Lysias urged. For the king granted every request in behalf of the Jews which Maccabeus delivered to Lysias in writing.

¹⁶ The letter written to the Jews by Lysias was to this effect:

“Lysias to the people of the Jews, greetings. ¹⁷ John and Absalom, who were sent by you, have delivered your signed communication and have asked about the matters indicated in it. ¹⁸ I have informed the king of everything that needed to be brought before him, and he has agreed to what was possible. ¹⁹ If you will maintain your goodwill toward the government, I will endeavor in the future to help promote your welfare. ²⁰ And concerning such matters and their details, I have ordered these men and my representatives to confer with you. ²¹ Farewell. The one hundred forty-eighth year,^b Dioscorinthius twenty-fourth.”

²² The king’s letter ran thus:

“King Antiochus to his brother Lysias, greetings. ²³ Now that our father has gone on to the gods, we desire that the subjects of the kingdom be undisturbed in caring for their own affairs. ²⁴ We have heard that the Jews do not consent to our father’s change to Greek customs, but prefer their own way of living and ask that their own customs be allowed them. ²⁵ Accordingly, since we choose that this nation also should be free from disturbance, our decision is that their temple be restored to them

and that they shall live according to the customs of their ancestors. ²⁶ You will do well, therefore, to send word to them and give them pledges of friendship, so that they may know our policy and be of good cheer and go on happily in the conduct of their own affairs.”

²⁷ To the nation the king’s letter was as follows:

“King Antiochus to the senate of the Jews and to the other Jews, greetings. ²⁸ If you are well, it is as we desire. We also are in good health. ²⁹ Menelaus has informed us that you wish to return home and look after your own affairs. ³⁰ Therefore those who go home by the thirtieth of Xanthicus will have our pledge of friendship and full permission ³¹ for the Jews to enjoy their own food and laws, just as formerly, and none of them shall be molested in any way for what may have been done in ignorance. ³² And I have also sent Menelaus to encourage you. ³³ Farewell. The one hundred forty-eighth year,^b Xanthicus fifteenth.”

³⁴ The Romans also sent them a letter, which read thus:

“Quintus Memmius and Titus Manius, envoys of the Romans, to the people of the Jews, greetings. ³⁵ With regard to what Lysias the kinsman of the king has granted you, we also give consent. ³⁶ But as to the matters that he decided are to be referred to the king, as soon as you have considered them, send some one promptly so that we may make proposals appropriate for you. For we are on our way to Antioch. ³⁷ Therefore make haste and send messengers so that we may have your judgment. ³⁸ Farewell. The one hundred forty-eighth year,^b Xanthicus fifteenth.”

Incidents at Joppa and Jamnia

12 When this agreement had been reached, Lysias returned to the king, and the Jews went about their farming.

² But some of the governors in various places, Timothy and Apollonius son of Gennaesus, as well as Hieronymus and Demophon, and in addition to these Nicanor the governor of Cyprus, would not let them live quietly and in peace. ³ And the people of Joppa did so ungod-

^a Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b 164 B.C.

Read 2 Maccabees 12

Trouble breaks out again when the people of Joppa and Jamnia attempt to eliminate their Jewish population. Judas responds with fierce attacks on the cities, and he also gains a victory over an army of Arabians. Further campaigns are waged against Timothy, Gorgias, and Lysias, with Judas's army gaining impressive victories. While gathering the bodies of the slain Jews, Judas discovers they are wearing idolatrous amulets and he takes up a collection to pay for an expiatory sacrifice to cleanse these men of their sins and thus allow them to have a blessed afterlife.

Reflect: Consider the principle espoused here of military victories provided by God and men slain in battle because of their sins.

Pray: Pray for the souls of those who sacrifice their lives in defense of their country. Pray for those whose profession it is to care for the bodies of the dead.

Act: Find ways to end civil strife and misunderstanding between people.

ly a deed as this: they invited the Jews who lived among them to embark, with their wives and children, on boats that they had provided, as though there were no ill will to the Jews;^a ⁴ and this was done by public vote of the city. When they accepted, because they wished to live peaceably and suspected nothing, the people of Joppa^b took them out to sea and drowned them, at least two hundred. ⁵ When Judas heard of the cruelty visited on his compatriots, he gave orders to his men ⁶ and, calling upon God, the righteous judge, attacked the murderers of his kindred. He set fire to the harbor by night, burned the boats, and massacred those who had taken refuge there. ⁷ Then, because the city's gates were closed, he withdrew, intending to come again and root out the whole community of Joppa. ⁸ But learning that the people in Jamnia meant in the same way to wipe out the Jews who were living among them, ⁹ he attacked the Jamnites by night and set fire to the harbor and the fleet, so that the glow of the light was seen in Jerusalem, thirty miles^c distant.

The Campaign in Gilead

10 When they had gone more than a mile^d from there, on their march against Timothy, at least five thousand Arabs with five hundred cavalry attacked them. ¹¹ After a hard fight, Judas and his companions, with God's help, were victorious. The defeated nomads begged Judas to grant them pledges of friendship, promising to give him livestock and to help his people^e in all other ways. ¹² Judas, realizing that they might indeed be useful in many ways, agreed to make peace with them; and after receiving his pledges they went back to their tents.

13 He also attacked a certain town that was strongly fortified with earthworks^f and walls, and inhabited by all sorts of Gentiles. Its name was Caspin. ¹⁴ Those who were within, relying on the strength of the walls and on their supply of provisions, behaved most insolently toward Judas and his men, railing at them and even blaspheming and saying unholy things. ¹⁵ But Judas and his men, calling upon the great Sovereign of the world, who without battering rams or engines of war overthrew Jericho in the days of Joshua, rushed furiously upon the walls. ¹⁶ They took the town by the will of God, and slaughtered untold numbers, so that the adjoining lake, a quarter of a mile^g wide, appeared to be running over with blood.

Judas Defeats Timothy's Army

17 When they had gone ninety-five miles^h from there, they came to Charax, to the Jews who are called

^a Gk to them

^b Gk they

^c Gk two hundred forty stadia

^d Gk nine stadia

^e Gk them

^f Meaning of Gk uncertain

^g Gk two stadia

^h Gk seven hundred fifty stadia

Toubiani. ¹⁸ They did not find Timothy in that region, for he had by then left there without accomplishing anything, though in one place he had left a very strong garrison. ¹⁹ Dositheus and Sosipater, who were captains under Maccabeus, marched out and destroyed those whom Timothy had left in the stronghold, more than ten thousand men. ²⁰ But Maccabeus arranged his army in divisions, set men^a in command of the divisions, and hurried after Timothy, who had with him one hundred twenty thousand infantry and two thousand five hundred cavalry. ²¹ When Timothy learned of the approach of Judas, he sent off the women and the children and also the baggage to a place called Carnaim; for that place was hard to besiege and difficult of access because of the narrowness of all the approaches. ²² But when Judas's first division appeared, terror and fear came over the enemy at the manifestation to them of him who sees all things. In their flight they rushed headlong in every direction, so that often they were injured by their own men and pierced by the points of their own swords. ²³ Judas pressed the pursuit with the utmost vigor, putting the sinners to the sword, and destroyed as many as thirty thousand.

²⁴ Timothy himself fell into the hands of Dositheus and Sosipater and their men. With great guile he begged them to let him go in safety, because he held the parents of most of them, and the brothers of some, to whom no consideration would be shown. ²⁵ And when with many words he had confirmed his solemn promise to restore them unharmed, they let him go, for the sake of saving their kindred.

Judas Wins Other Victories

²⁶ Then Judas^b marched against Carnaim and the temple of Atargatis, and slaughtered twenty-five thousand people. ²⁷ After the rout and destruction of these,

he marched also against Ephron, a fortified town where Lysias lived with multitudes of people of all nationalities.^c Stalwart young men took their stand before the walls and made a vigorous defense; and great stores of war engines and missiles were there. ²⁸ But the Jews^d called upon the Sovereign who with power shatters the might of his enemies, and they got the town into their hands, and killed as many as twenty-five thousand of those who were in it.

²⁹ Setting out from there, they hastened to Scythopolis, which is seventy-five miles^e from Jerusalem. ³⁰ But when the Jews who lived there bore witness to the goodwill that the people of Scythopolis had shown them and their kind treatment of them in times of misfortune, ³¹ they thanked them and exhorted them to be well disposed to their race in the future also. Then they went up to Jerusalem, as the festival of weeks was close at hand.

Judas Defeats Gorgias

³² After the festival called Pentecost, they hurried against Gorgias, the governor of Idumea, ³³ who came out with three thousand infantry and four hundred cavalry. ³⁴ When they joined battle, it happened that a few of the Jews fell. ³⁵ But a certain Dositheus, one of Bacenor's men, who was on horseback and was a strong man, caught hold of Gorgias, and grasping his cloak was dragging him off by main strength, wishing to take the accursed man alive, when one of the Thracian cavalry bore down on him and cut off his arm; so Gorgias escaped and reached Marisa.

³⁶ As Esdris and his men had been fighting for a long time and were weary, Judas called upon the Lord to show himself their ally and leader in the battle. ³⁷ In the language of their ancestors he raised the battle cry, with hymns; then he charged against Gorgias's troops when they were not expecting it, and put them to flight.

^a Gk *them*

^b Gk *he*

^c Meaning of Gk uncertain

^d Gk *they*

^e Gk *six hundred stadia*

Prayers for Those Killed in Battle

38 Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and kept the sabbath there.

39 On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the sepulchres of their ancestors. ⁴⁰ Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. ⁴¹ So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; ⁴² and they turned to supplication,

praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen. ⁴³ He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. ⁴⁴ For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. ⁴⁵ But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

Read 2 Maccabees 13

Menelaus, whose ambitions to become high priest had caused much trouble, is executed at Antiochus V's orders. After suffering defeats at Modein and Beth-zur, Antiochus is forced to withdraw from Judea and negotiate a treaty with Judas.

Reflect: Consider how ill-conceived plans can easily fail. Reflect on how boldness and the courage of one's convictions can win the day.

Pray: Pray for a speedy end to conflict and a just resolution of the differences that perpetuate hatreds.

Act: Encourage every community to find peaceful ways to deal with their problems. Do not listen to those who attempt to stir up trouble for their own gain.

Menelaus Is Put to Death

13 In the one hundred forty-ninth year^a word came to Judas and his men that Antiochus Eupator was coming with a great army against Judea, ² and with him Lysias, his guardian, who had charge of the government. Each of them had a Greek force of one hundred ten thousand infantry, five thousand three hundred cavalry, twenty-two elephants, and three hundred chariots armed with scythes.

3 Menelaus also joined them and with utter hypocrisy urged Antiochus on, not for the sake of his country's welfare, but because he thought that he would be established in office. ⁴ But the King of kings aroused the anger of Antiochus against the scoundrel; and when Lysias informed him that this man was to blame for all the trouble, he ordered them to take him to Beroea and to put him to death by the method that is customary in that place. ⁵ For there is a tower there, fifty cubits high, full of ashes, and it has a rim running around it that on all sides inclines precipitously into the ashes. ⁶ There they all push to destruction anyone guilty of sacrilege or notorious for other crimes. ⁷ By such a fate it came about that Menelaus the lawbreaker died, without even burial in the earth. ⁸ And this was eminently just; because he had committed many sins against the altar whose fire and ashes were holy, he met his death in ashes.

^a 163 B.C.

A Battle Near the City of Modein

9 The king with barbarous arrogance was coming to show the Jews things far worse than those that had been done^a in his father's time. ¹⁰ But when Judas heard of this, he ordered the people to call upon the Lord day and night, now if ever to help those who were on the point of being deprived of the law and their country and the holy temple, ¹¹ and not to let the people who had just begun to revive fall into the hands of the blasphemous Gentiles. ¹² When they had all joined in the same petition and had implored the merciful Lord with weeping and fasting and lying prostrate for three days without ceasing, Judas exhorted them and ordered them to stand ready.

¹³ After consulting privately with the elders, he determined to march out and decide the matter by the help of God before the king's army could enter Judea and get possession of the city. ¹⁴ So, committing the decision to the Creator of the world and exhorting his troops to fight bravely to the death for the laws, temple, city, country, and commonwealth, he pitched his camp near Modein. ¹⁵ He gave his troops the watchword, "God's victory," and with a picked force of the bravest young men, he attacked the king's pavilion at night and killed as many as two thousand men in the camp. He stabbed^b the leading elephant and its rider. ¹⁶ In the end they filled the camp with terror and confusion and withdrew in triumph. ¹⁷ This happened, just as

day was dawning, because the Lord's help protected him.

Antiochus Makes a Treaty with the Jews

¹⁸ The king, having had a taste of the daring of the Jews, tried strategy in attacking their positions. ¹⁹ He advanced against Beth-zur, a strong fortress of the Jews, was turned back, attacked again,^c and was defeated. ²⁰ Judas sent in to the garrison whatever was necessary. ²¹ But Rhodocus, a man from the ranks of the Jews, gave secret information to the enemy; he was sought for, caught, and put in prison. ²² The king negotiated a second time with the people in Beth-zur, gave pledges, received theirs, withdrew, attacked Judas and his men, was defeated; ²³ he got word that Philip, who had been left in charge of the government, had revolted in Antioch; he was dismayed, called in the Jews, yielded and swore to observe all their rights, settled with them and offered sacrifice, honored the sanctuary and showed generosity to the holy place. ²⁴ He received Maccabeus, left Hegemonides as governor from Ptolemais to Gerar, ²⁵ and went to Ptolemais. The people of Ptolemais were indignant over the treaty; in fact they were so angry that they wanted to annul its terms.^b ²⁶ Lysias took the public platform, made the best possible defense, convinced them, appeased them, gained their goodwill, and set out for Antioch. This is how the king's attack and withdrawal turned out.

Alcimus Speaks against Judas

14 Three years later, word came to Judas and his men that Demetrius son of Seleucus had sailed into the harbor of Tripolis with a strong army and a fleet, ² and had taken possession of the country, having made away with Antiochus and his guardian Lysias.

³ Now a certain Alcimus, who had formerly been high priest but had willfully defiled himself in the times of separation,^d realized that there was no way for him to be safe or to have access again to the holy altar, ⁴ and went to King Demetrius in about the one hundred fifty-first year,^e presenting to him a crown of gold and a palm, and besides these some of the customary olive branches from the temple. During that day he kept qui-

^a Or the worst of the things that had been done

^b Meaning of Gk uncertain

^c Or faltered

^d Other ancient authorities read of mixing

^e 161 B.C.

Read 2 Maccabees 14

After Demetrius I comes to the throne, he is convinced by Alcimus, an ambitious claimant to the high priesthood, to send Nicanor to destroy Judas's army. Instead Nicanor negotiates a treaty with Judas. Alcimus once again stirs up the king's anger and he orders Nicanor to arrest Judas. Unable to capture him, Nicanor threatens to destroy the temple. Another leader of the Jews, Razis, commits suicide rather than fall into Nicanor's hands.

Reflect: Consider how the ambition and hatred of one man can cause an immense amount of trouble for others. Reflect on the hard choice of whether to save one's position and status or to protect one's honor.

Pray: Pray for the courage to make the honorable choice when faced with a dilemma.

Act: Celebrate the examples set by those who have had the courage to be role models for good in our society.

et. ⁵ But he found an opportunity that furthered his mad purpose when he was invited by Demetrius to a meeting of the council and was asked about the attitude and intentions of the Jews. He answered:

6 "Those of the Jews who are called Hasideans, whose leader is Judas Maccabeus, are keeping up war and stirring up sedition, and will not let the kingdom attain tranquility. ⁷ Therefore I have laid aside my ancestral glory—I mean the high priesthood—and have now come here, ⁸ first because I am genuinely concerned for the interests of the king, and second because I have regard also for my compatriots. For through the folly of those whom I have mentioned our whole nation is now in no small misfortune. ⁹ Since you are acquainted, O king, with the details of this matter, may it please you to take thought for our country and our hard-pressed nation with the gracious kindness that you show to all. ¹⁰ For as long as Judas lives, it is impossible for the government to find peace." ¹¹ When he had said this, the rest of the king's Friends,^a who were hostile to Judas, quickly inflamed Demetrius still more. ¹² He immediately chose Nicanor, who had been in command of the elephants, appointed him governor of Judea, and sent him off ¹³ with orders to kill Judas and scatter his troops, and to install Alcimus as high priest of the great^b temple. ¹⁴ And the Gentiles throughout Judea, who had fled before^c Judas, flocked to join Nicanor, thinking that the misfortunes and calamities of the Jews would mean prosperity for themselves.

Nicanor Makes Friends with Judas

15 When the Jews^d heard of Nicanor's coming and the gathering of the Gentiles, they sprinkled dust on their heads and prayed to him who established his own people forever and always upholds his own heritage by manifesting himself. ¹⁶ At the command of the leader, they^e set out from there immediately and engaged them in battle at a village called Dessau.^c ¹⁷ Simon, the brother of Judas, had encountered Nicanor, but had been temporarily^f checked because of the sudden consternation created by the enemy.

18 Nevertheless Nicanor, hearing of the valor of Judas and his troops and their courage in battle for their country, shrank from deciding the issue by bloodshed. ¹⁹ Therefore he sent Posidonius, Theodotus, and Mattathias to give and receive pledges of friendship. ²⁰ When the terms had been fully considered, and the leader had informed the people, and it had appeared that they were of one mind, they agreed to the covenant. ²¹ The leaders^g set a day on which to meet by themselves. A chariot came forward from each army; seats of honor were

^a Gk of the Friends

^b Gk greatest

^c Meaning of Gk uncertain

^d Gk they

^e Gk he

^f Other ancient authorities read slowly

^g Gk They

set in place; ²² Judas posted armed men in readiness at key places to prevent sudden treachery on the part of the enemy; so they duly held the consultation.

²³ Nicanor stayed on in Jerusalem and did nothing out of the way, but dismissed the flocks of people that had gathered. ²⁴ And he kept Judas always in his presence; he was warmly attached to the man. ²⁵ He urged him to marry and have children; so Judas^a married, settled down, and shared the common life.

Nicanor Turns against Judas

²⁶ But when Alcimus noticed their goodwill for one another, he took the covenant that had been made and went to Demetrius. He told him that Nicanor was disloyal to the government, since he had appointed that conspirator against the kingdom, Judas, to be his successor. ²⁷ The king became excited and, provoked by the false accusations of that depraved man, wrote to Nicanor, stating that he was displeased with the covenant and commanding him to send Maccabeus to Antioch as a prisoner without delay.

²⁸ When this message came to Nicanor, he was troubled and grieved that he had to annul their agreement when the man had done no wrong. ²⁹ Since it was not possible to oppose the king, he watched for an opportunity to accomplish this by a stratagem. ³⁰ But Maccabeus, noticing that Nicanor was more austere in his dealings with him and was meeting him more rudely than had been his custom, concluded that this austerity did not spring from the best motives. So he gathered not a few of his men, and went into hiding from Nicanor. ³¹ When the latter became aware that he had been cleverly outwitted by the man, he went to the great^b and holy temple while the priests were offering the customary sacrifices, and commanded them to hand the man over. ³² When they declared on oath that they did not know where the man was whom he

wanted, ³³ he stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary, and swore this oath: "If you do not hand Judas over to me as a prisoner, I will level this shrine of God to the ground and tear down the altar, and build here a splendid temple to Dionysus."

³⁴ Having said this, he went away. Then the priests stretched out their hands toward heaven and called upon the constant Defender of our nation, in these words: ³⁵ "O Lord of all, though you have need of nothing, you were pleased that there should be a temple for your habitation among us; ³⁶ so now, O holy One, Lord of all holiness, keep undefiled forever this house that has been so recently purified."

Razis Dies for His Country

³⁷ A certain Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem, was denounced to Nicanor as a man who loved his compatriots and was very well thought of and for his goodwill was called father of the Jews. ³⁸ In former times, when there was no mingling with the Gentiles, he had been accused of Judaism, and he had most zealously risked body and life for Judaism. ³⁹ Nicanor, wishing to exhibit the enmity that he had for the Jews, sent more than five hundred soldiers to arrest him; ⁴⁰ for he thought that by arresting^c him he would do them an injury. ⁴¹ When the troops were about to capture the tower and were forcing the door of the courtyard, they ordered that fire be brought and the doors burned. Being surrounded, Razis^a fell upon his own sword, ⁴² preferring to die nobly rather than to fall into the hands of sinners and suffer outrages unworthy of his noble birth. ⁴³ But in the heat of the struggle he did not hit exactly, and the crowd was now rushing in through the doors. He courageously ran up on the wall, and bravely threw himself down into the crowd. ⁴⁴ But as they quickly drew back, a space opened and he fell in the middle of the empty space. ⁴⁵ Still alive and aflame with anger, he rose, and though his blood gushed forth

^a Gk he

^b Gk greatest

^c Meaning of Gk uncertain

and his wounds were severe he ran through the crowd; and standing upon a steep rock, ⁴⁶with his blood now completely drained from him, he tore out his entrails, took

them in both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again. This was the manner of his death.

Read 2 Maccabees 15

Faced with continued attacks by Nicanor, Judas exhorts his followers to remain faithful and tells them of his dream of the prophet Jeremiah, who presents him with a golden sword to slay the enemy. In the subsequent battle, Nicanor is slain and Judas dismembers his body in order to publicly display the hand that had been raised against the temple. The victory over enemies is then to be celebrated as part of the festival of Purim.

Reflect: Consider the contrast of one army advancing to the sound of “trumpets and battle songs” while the other goes to meet the enemy “with invocations to God and prayers.”

Pray: Pray that we may always remember the struggles that have taken place to preserve and protect the faith.

Act: Celebrate the major festivals as a way of honoring those who have served the community faithfully. Learn and teach the story of our community through every generation.

Nicanor’s Arrogance

15 When Nicanor heard that Judas and his troops were in the region of Samaria, he made plans to attack them with complete safety on the day of rest. ²When the Jews who were compelled to follow him said, “Do not destroy so savagely and barbarously, but show respect for the day that he who sees all things has honored and hallowed above other days,” ³the thrice-accursed wretch asked if there were a sovereign in heaven who had commanded the keeping of the sabbath day. ⁴When they declared, “It is the living Lord himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who ordered us to observe the seventh day,” ⁵he replied, “But I am a sovereign also, on earth, and I command you to take up arms and finish the king’s business.” Nevertheless, he did not succeed in carrying out his abominable design.

Judas Prepares the Jews for Battle

⁶This Nicanor in his utter boastfulness and arrogance had determined to erect a public monument of victory over Judas and his forces. ⁷But Maccabeus did not cease to trust with all confidence that he would get help from the Lord. ⁸He exhorted his troops not to fear the attack of the Gentiles, but to keep in mind the former times when help had come to them from heaven, and so to look for the victory that the Almighty would give them. ⁹Encouraging them from the law and the prophets, and reminding them also of the struggles they had won, he made them the more eager. ¹⁰When he had aroused their courage, he issued his orders, at the same time pointing out the perfidy of the Gentiles and their violation of oaths. ¹¹He armed each of them not so much with confidence in shields and spears as with the inspiration of brave words, and he cheered them all by relating a dream, a sort of vision,^a which was worthy of belief.

¹²What he saw was this: Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence, was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews. ¹³Then in the same fashion another appeared, distinguished by his gray hair and dignity, and of marvelous majesty and authority. ¹⁴And Onias spoke, saying, “This is a man who loves the

^a Meaning of Gk uncertain

family of Israel and prays much for the people and the holy city—Jeremiah, the prophet of God.”¹⁵ Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judas a golden sword, and as he gave it he addressed him thus:¹⁶ “Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries.”

17 Encouraged by the words of Judas, so noble and so effective in arousing valor and awaking courage in the souls of the young, they determined not to carry on a campaign^a but to attack bravely, and to decide the matter by fighting hand to hand with all courage, because the city and the sanctuary and the temple were in danger.¹⁸ Their concern for wives and children, and also for brothers and sisters^b and relatives, lay upon them less heavily; their greatest and first fear was for the consecrated sanctuary.¹⁹ And those who had to remain in the city were in no little distress, being anxious over the encounter in the open country.

The Defeat and Death of Nicanor

20 When all were now looking forward to the coming issue, and the enemy was already close at hand with their army drawn up for battle, the elephants^c strategically stationed and the cavalry deployed on the flanks,²¹ Maccabeus, observing the masses that were in front of him and the varied supply of arms and the savagery of the elephants, stretched out his hands toward heaven and called upon the Lord who works wonders; for he knew that it is not by arms, but as the Lord^d decides, that he gains the victory for those who deserve it.²² He called upon him in these words: “O Lord, you sent your angel in the time of King Hezekiah of Judea, and he killed fully one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of Sennacherib.²³ So now, O Sovereign of the heavens, send a good angel to spread terror and trembling before us.²⁴ By

the might of your arm may these blasphemers who come against your holy people be struck down.” With these words he ended his prayer.

25 Nicanor and his troops advanced with trumpets and battle songs,²⁶ but Judas and his troops met the enemy in battle with invocations to God and prayers.²⁷ So, fighting with their hands and praying to God in their hearts, they laid low at least thirty-five thousand, and were greatly gladdened by God’s manifestation.

28 When the action was over and they were returning with joy, they recognized Nicanor, lying dead, in full armor.²⁹ Then there was shouting and tumult, and they blessed the Sovereign Lord in the language of their ancestors.³⁰ Then the man who was ever in body and soul the defender of his people, the man who maintained his youthful goodwill toward his compatriots, ordered them to cut off Nicanor’s head and arm and carry them to Jerusalem.³¹ When he arrived there and had called his compatriots together and stationed the priests before the altar, he sent for those who were in the citadel.³² He showed them the vile Nicanor’s head and that profane man’s arm, which had been boastfully stretched out against the holy house of the Almighty.³³ He cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor and said that he would feed it piecemeal to the birds and would hang up these rewards of his folly opposite the sanctuary.³⁴ And they all, looking to heaven, blessed the Lord who had manifested himself, saying, “Blessed is he who has kept his own place undefiled!”³⁵ Judas^e hung Nicanor’s head from the citadel, a clear and conspicuous sign to everyone of the help of the Lord.³⁶ And they all decreed by public vote never to let this day go unobserved, but to celebrate the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—which is called Adar in the Aramaic language—the day before Mordecai’s day.

^a Or to remain in camp

^b Gk for brothers

^c Gk animals

^d Gk he

^e Gk He

37 This, then, is how matters turned out with Nicanor, and from that time the city has been in the possession of the Hebrews. So I will here end my story.

The Compiler's Epilogue

38 If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done

and mediocre, that was the best I could do. ³⁹For just as it is harmful to drink wine alone, or, again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment, so also the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work. And here will be the end.

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