

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE ORIGIN STORY OF JESUS

RLJ-1895

JOHN S. TORELL

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PART 94: THE UNSTOPPABLE GOD

THE FIRE IS LIT

The fire started in the small city of Modin, located 22 miles southeast of modern-day Tel Aviv and 19 miles west of Jerusalem. The year was 167 B.C., when a Seleucid military detachment entered Modin to make the people comply with the decrees of King Antiochus IV.

The city was home to the priestly Hasmonean family. Mattathias was the head of the clan with five sons: Simon, Eliezer, Judah, Johanan, and Jonathan. Mattathias was not a young man, but probably in his 70's.

The Jews in Modin knew that it was just a matter of time before a Seleucid military detachment arrived to enforce the new religious laws. Everyone was ordered to assemble in the city square as Seleucid soldiers built an altar and prepared to sacrifice a pig.

Once the altar was ready, the captain in charge ordered Mattathias to slaughter the pig, sprinkle its blood on the altar, light a fire, and then offer a prayer to Jupiter. Thousands of Jews stood in silence as Mattathias refused to officiate at the altar having already considered the consequences.

If he complied with the order and officiated the sacrifice, the pig would be roasted on the altar and then all the assembled Jews would be told to eat of the unclean animal. Any refusal would be punished by immediate death.

In the crowd was a young Jewish man dressed in Greek clothing who belonged to the Hellenistic party. He walked up to the altar and said that he would be glad to kill the pig and perform the sacrifice. For a moment there was total silence at the square.

The elderly Mattathias stood close by the Seleucid captain, and the moment the apostate Jew was going to kill the pig, Mattathias lunged at the captain and took the sword from his hand. The elderly man quickly rammed the sword into his belly, drew it out and then swiftly thrust the sword through the apostate Jew. Mattathias' five sons joined their father and fell upon the Seleucid soldiers to disarm them.

The Seleucid soldiers had not anticipated any resistance and this revolt was unexpected. When the townspeople saw what was happening, they too rushed into the fight and every Seleucid soldier was killed and the newly erected altar torn down. Mattathias cried with a loud voice, "*Whoever is for God, let him come unto me!*"¹

¹ A HISTORY OF THE JEWS, Solomon Grayzel, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948, pp.57-59



A NATIONWIDE REBELLION

The event in Modin spread like wildfire in Judea. The people of Modin knew they could not remain in the city since a large Seleucid army would surely come to extract revenge. As a result, they left their homes and fled into the wilderness areas, where the remnant of the Hasidim was hiding. Jews from all over Judah fled to the wilderness area, and in a short time, Mattathias had a strong fighting force under his command. But by the end of the year Mattathias died as he exhausted himself.

Judah, the oldest son of Mattathias, took command of the Jewish freedom fighters. The family name was Hasmonean, but for some unknown reason, Judah took the surname of Maccabee. Judah informed his soldiers that they would be different from the Hasidim and fight on all days, including the Sabbath.

Judah was a born military leader and Jewish historians compare him to King David. He was deeply anchored in the Torah and his men were known for praising God as they engaged the Seleucids in battle.

JEWISH SUCCESSES

There is no doubt in my mind that God was with the Maccabean soldiers. Judah's small army repeatedly defeated the enemy. The commanding Seleucid officer in charge of the occupation of Judah enlisted Hellenized Jews and volunteers from other people groups outside the geographical area. But every time the Seleucid army engaged in battle with the insubordinate Jews, they were badly beaten and suffered many losses. With every engagement, Judah and his men acquired more weapons from the enemy.

The Maccabees refused to start a battle until they prayed, fasted, and sought God's favor. As they racked up more and more victories, news spread among the Seleucids as well as the Jewish population. More and more of the Jews were encouraged by the success of the insurrection and Judah's army continued to grow in number.

THE BATTLE OF EMMAUS

Emmaus was the small town to which Jesus walked with two of His disciples after the resurrection. It is located in the hillsides about eight miles northwest of Jerusalem.

After the many Seleucid losses in Judah, Antiochus IV realized that he was facing a full-scale uprising in Judah and decided to deal with it accordingly. Parthia (western Iran) had been subdued by the Seleucid kingdom in 224 B.C. but they rebelled just as he was about to lead a huge army into Judah.

Antiochus IV viewed the Parthian uprising as more dangerous and took a sizeable portion of his army east to suppress them. He appointed one of his generals, Lysias, to take a small Seleucid army and defeat the Jews. Antiochus IV did not know if he would survive the fight against the Parthians and Lysias was named guardian of the young Seleucid crown prince who would become Antiochus V Eupator.

Lysias was misled by his intelligence service and underestimated the Maccabean forces. Instead of leading his army to fight the Jews, he appointed Nicanor and Gorgias to lead a portion of the Seleucid army into Judah. It was augmented by Hellenized Jews and men from conquered areas such as Samaria and Idumea.

Merchants from Samaria and Idumea believed the Jews would be defeated and the survivors would be sold as slaves. Thus, they followed the Seleucid army with large sums of money so they could immediately purchase slaves in the aftermath of the battle.

It is obvious that God was watching over the Maccabean army and Judah attacked the Seleucids during the night in 165 B.C. since they were knowledgeable about the hillsides. It was a total slaughter of the Seleucid army. The Jews gained much in the way of weapons, food supplies, and horses. They also confiscated the considerable wealth of the merchants.

General Lysias realized he had miscalculated the strength of the Maccabean army, and in order to save his own life from the wrath of Antiochus IV, he rallied the remaining troops and met the Maccabees outside the city of Beth Zur, which is just north of Hebron and 18 miles south of Jerusalem. The battle took place in October of 164 B.C. and the Seleucids were defeated again.

Antiochus IV was successful in quelling the Parthians, but he died of a disease in 164 B.C. The news of his death became known in Judah the day after the battle of Beth Zur. When Lysias heard the news, he returned with his defeated army to Antioch to be part of the power struggle in the Seleucid kingdom. The road to Jerusalem was wide open for Maccabees eighteen miles away.

ENTERING JERUSALEM

Judah Maccabee led his army north to Jerusalem, a city which had been under Seleucid control for some three years. His soldiers were jubilant and as they marched north, singing and praising God, shouting “Hallelu-Yah” over and over again.

When Menelaus the high priest and the Hellenized Jews fled from Jerusalem, the pagans in the city also left with them. The Seleucids had built a fortress (Acra) located close to the temple grounds in Jerusalem. Judah ordered the fortress surrounded, but they did not try to storm it, and the enemy was locked up for the time being.

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

The Maccabees had been fighting for their faith, Jerusalem, Judah, and for the temple. They put away their weapons of war and began to cleanse the temple. They removed anything remotely pagan. The altar was dismantled and the stones removed from the temple ground. A new altar was built on the 25th day of Kislev in 165 B.C.² The dedication feast lasted for eight days and was named Hanukkah (dedicate).

Hannukah has become an important feast for Jews, particularly in the United States, as it is observed close to Christmas, eventually becoming like Christmas for the Jews.

THE PEACE THAT WAS NOT

Jews had relocated from Judah and lived in pagan cities along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea. The pagans did not like Jews, and in previous battles, had sent men to fight for the Seleucid army. Once the Maccabees took control of Jerusalem, 200

² The Jewish month of Kislev fluctuates against the Gregorian calendar and floats from the end of November into December. It occurred on Sunday, December 18, 2022

Jews were drowned by a mob in the pagan city of Jaffa. The hatred spread to many cities and Jews outside of Judah lived in constant fear of being murdered.

Once Judah and his men had cleansed the temple, he sent armed forces to attack and punish the cities which had persecuted their countrymen. Many cities were afraid of the Maccabean soldiers and made peace with Judah, promising to treat Jews living within their cities fairly. Judah had no intention of expanding his territory and invited his displaced countrymen to return home.

In 162 B.C. the Maccabean army started to besiege the Acra fortress in Jerusalem. General Lysias, acting as regent for nine-year-old Antiochus V, put together an army and marched into Judah to relieve the Seleucid forces of the Acra fortress. Lysias followed the coastline of the Mediterranean and then went inland to the city of Beth-Zur, which was not defended by the Maccabees.

Judah tried to stop the Seleucids at the city of Beth Zechariah, 5.6 miles west of Bethlehem. The Seleucids had war elephants with them, and Eliezer, a brother of Judah, thought the boy king was riding one of the elephants. He fought his way to the elephant but was subsequently stomped to death. Lysias' army was able to defeat the Maccabees, who fled north to Jerusalem and took up positions behind the newly erected walls of the city.

The Seleucid army surrounded Jerusalem and began a siege. During this time there had been a drought in the land and both armies were short of food supplies. Lysias got word from Antioch that a revolt was brewing against him and Antiochus V, and he started to negotiate with Judah Maccabee. Lysias offered to rescind the decree of Antiochus IV forbidding the Jewish religion. The Seleucid's would not meddle between the rivalry of the Hasidim and the Hellenized Jews. In return, the walls around Jerusalem were to be taken down.

To sweeten the deal, Lysias ordered the execution of the Menelaus, the former high priest. He also offered to appoint Jakim, better known under his Greek name of Alcimus to be the new high priest. As a Levite, Jakim allowed the Hellenization of Judah, but did not actively push it, but nevertheless, he was a Seleucid governor over Judah.

A fierce debate broke out among the Jews. Judah and his officers rejected the offer and pointed out that sooner or later the Seleucids would return and their word could not be trusted. The Jewish council, dominated by Hasidim Jews, voted to accept the peace offer. Judah and some of his men left Jerusalem in disgust. Before the Seleucid army left, they tore the walls of Jerusalem down.

THE BETRAYAL

Alcimus used the office of high priest to disarm the remaining Maccabean soldiers and then arrested a number of Hasidim leaders and ordered them executed. This is exactly what Judah had warned the council about and Alcimus proved him correct. Thousands of Jews left Jerusalem and rejoined Judah Maccabee. A civil war was looming.

Alcimus began to feel insecure and requested the Seleucid army to return and guard Jerusalem. Judah felt his military force was too weak to engage the Seleucid's.

A NEW SELEUCID KING

When Lysias returned to Antioch, he discovered that a former personal aid to Antiochus IV, Philip, had returned from Mesopotamia with the other part of the Seleucid army. Lysias and Philip used the soldiers of the Seleucid army to fight each other and Philip was defeated and eliminated.

In 161 B.C., Demetrius I (son of Seleucid IV Philopator) escaped from Rome where he had lived as a hostage. His arrival in Antioch was greeted enthusiastically by the army and Greek aristocrats who wanted him as their king. It did not take Demetrius long to assemble support and take the throne. He ordered the deaths of Lysias and his cousin, Antiochus V Eupator. He then proclaimed himself king and became Demetrius I Soter.

Demetrius I Soter, as he now called himself, broke the peace treaty with the Jews and he sent General Nicanor to be the new military governor of Judah. Nicanor and his army fought the Maccabees during the winter of 161 B.C. at the battle of Adasa. This ended in his death and the Seleucid army fled.

Hellenistic Jews and moderate Hasidim leaders agreed that it was better to accept Seleucid occupation of Judah as long as the Jews had freedom to worship. Judah Maccabee realized that he was betrayed by these two groups, and even though he only had 800 men left in his army, he decided to engage the enemy. Seleucid General Bacchides fielded 20,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry. The ensuing battle at Elasa in 160 B.C. saw the Maccabean army badly beaten and Judah was killed.

The remnant Maccabees gathered around Jonathan, a brother of Judah. They had lost control of the cities in Judah, but they still controlled the countryside. There were effectively two Jewish governments in Judah – one in Jerusalem and a Maccabean government in the countryside. Jonathan made the city of Michmash in the highlands north of Jerusalem his capital and set up a court for judging the people under his control.

Jonathan made it a point to avoid attacking the Seleucids from 160-153 B.C., but he did harass the countrymen that cooperated with the government in Jerusalem and killed many Hellenistic Jews.

SELEUCID CIVIL WAR

A power struggle broke out in the Seleucid kingdom around 151 B.C. There is no love in politics just like there is no love in the Kingdom of Satan. Heracleides was the finance minister to Antiochus IV and he did not like Demetrius I. He contacted the rulers of Egypt, Cappadocia and Pergamon for help in overthrowing Demetrius I.

He proposed that Alexander Balas be the new king of the Seleucid kingdom. Heracleides claimed that Alexander was the son of Antiochus VI, which made him the legal successor to the throne. Alexander and his sister were brought to Rome by Heracleides and presented to the Roman Senate, which recognized him as the legitimate successor to the Seleucid throne.

It is obvious that different governments in the region financed this operation and Alexander was able to recruit mercenaries to build up an army. He and his forces

landed on the beaches of what is today Lebanon, which at the time was part of the Seleucid kingdom.

Demetrius I recognized it was life or death for himself and sent emissaries to Jonathan, offering to withdraw Seleucid troops from Judah with the exception of Jerusalem and Beth-Zur, and all prisoners were to be released.

Jonathan accepted the deal, but when he was approached by emissaries from Alexander Balas, he betrayed Demetrius I because Alexander had offered him the office of high priest in Jerusalem and to be the region's military commander. In return, Jonathan and his Maccabean army were to join with the mercenaries of Alexander. Demetrius I was later killed in battle.

Judah became a vassal state of the Seleucid kingdom from 152-141 B.C. with Jonathan as the de facto leader. He served in this capacity until the last two years when he was invited to a conference in 143 B.C. by Seleucid regent Diodotus Tryphon. Unfortunately, it was a trap and he was executed. With the death of his brother, Simon Maccabee took over the leadership in Judah.³

SUMMARY

In our quest for the Origin Story of Jesus, we have covered the time period from 167 to 143 B.C., leaving us just 143 years from the incarnation of Jesus in Bethlehem.

This was a significant time for the Jewish people. They did not know that the Messiah would arrive soon and there needed to be a temple in Jerusalem staffed by Levitical priests. It is clear that Lucifer was doing all that he could to destroy the Jewish people, their temple, and to utterly wipe out the worship of God in Judah.

My personal belief is that God raised up Mattathias and his Hasmonean family for this particular time and for the express purpose of halting Satan's destruction of Abraham's seed that in due time would provide a physical body to Jesus. Pagan kings came and went, but faith in God and the temple endured. **Isaiah 55:8-11**

King David's words are still true. **Psalms 2:1-12**

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?

³ A HISTORY OF THE JEWS, Solomon Grayzel, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948, pp.57-71.

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