

The Life of Jesus Christ, Part 8

Setting the Stage, Part 7

The Maccabees, Part 1

Antiochus III (the Great) (223-187 BC)

- 200 BC: Defeated Ptolemies in Fifth Syrian War; Palestine became part of Seleucid empire
- Allowed Jews to worship according to their law
- Lowered taxes, helped repair temple
- 190s BC: Tried to push westward into Greece with the help of Hannibal (Carthaginian general who crossed the alps in ~218 BC with his war elephants, and defeated the Romans for a time)
- 190 BC: Defeated by the Romans at Magnesia in Asia Minor; forced to pay 15,000 talents over 12 years and lost much of Asia Minor
- 187 BC: Killed while trying to attempting a temple in Persia, trying to get tribute money

Followed by son Seleucus IV (187-175 BC): assassinated

Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) (175-164 BC)

- Son of Antiochus III
- Was political hostage in Rome for a year or so following the loss of his father to the Romans
- Took name “Theos Epiphanes” = “God manifest”
- Was given nickname “Epimanes” = “the mad one” due to his eccentricities
 - Polybius, a Greek historian of this time, said of him: “Whenever he heard that any of the young men were at an entertainment, he would come in quite unceremoniously with a wife and a procession of musicians, so that most of the guests got up and left in astonishment.”
 - “[A]ll respectable men were entirely puzzled about him, some looking upon him as a plain simple man and others as a madman.”
- Antiochus IV came into conflict with the Jews because of Hellenization; Some Jews wanted to remain loyal to the law, others wanted to become more Greek and compromise to varying degrees with those who ruled over them
- The high priest when Antiochus came to power was Onias, a pious traditionalist
- Jason, brother of Onias, offered Antiochus 440 talents if he would be given the high priesthood
- Onias was deposed and Joshua put into his place
- Jason pushed Hellenization
- 172 BC: Menelaus outbid Jason for high priesthood; some say Menelaus was the brother of Jason and Onias, others that he was a Benjamite (probably the latter)

Look at some of this history from 1 Maccabees, not part of the Scriptures, yet seen by historians to be largely accurate; recommend reading it

1 Maccabees 1:10-15

¹⁰From 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.

¹¹In 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.”

¹²This proposal pleased them,

¹³and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles.

¹⁴So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom,

¹⁵and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

1 Maccabees 1:20-24

²⁰After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year [169 BC]. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force.

²¹He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils.

²²He 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.

²³He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found.

²⁴Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance.

1 Maccabees 1:29-64

²⁹Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force.

³⁰Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel.

³¹He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls.

³²They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock.

³³Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel.

³⁴They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position;

³⁵they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace,

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

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

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

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

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

⁴¹Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people,

⁴²and that all should give up their particular customs.

⁴³All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.

⁴⁴And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land,

⁴⁵to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals,

⁴⁶to defile the sanctuary and the priests,

⁴⁷to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals,

⁴⁸and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane,
⁴⁹so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances.
⁵⁰He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."
⁵¹In 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.
⁵²Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land;
⁵³they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.
⁵⁴Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah,
⁵⁵and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets.
⁵⁶The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire.
⁵⁷Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king.
⁵⁸They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns.
⁵⁹On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering.
⁶⁰According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised,
⁶¹and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.
⁶²But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food.
⁶³They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.
⁶⁴Very great wrath came upon Israel.

Daniel 8:9-14

- Refers to Antiochus IV: he had success fighting the Egyptians and rebellions in the east
- v. 10: "host of heaven"? possibly the destruction of faithful Jews
- v. 11: magnified himself to be equal with God: December, 168 BC: an altar to Zeus in the temple, offerings of swine flesh
- vv. 13-14: 2300 evenings and mornings (or days): about 3 years or 6 years

Daniel 8:23-25

- v. 25: Differing accounts of his death, but seems to have died of an illness, not in battle or of old age

Daniel 11:21ff.

- v. 21: Antiochus IV was not in line for rule; his brother had been assassinated, so his nephew should have taken the throne
- vv. 22-30: Describe struggle between Antiochus and Egypt; confrontation between Antiochus and Roman general in Egypt: "line in the sand"; Antiochus went home

Daniel 11:31-35

- Angered at being turned back from Egypt, he spent his wrath nearer to home