

I MACCABEES 3-9

THE WAR : JUDAS & JONATHAN

In praise of Judas

¹Then his son Judas, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. ²All his brothers and all who had joined his father supported him; they gladly carried on the fight for Israel.

**³He enhanced the glory of his people.
Like a giant he put on his breastplate;
he girded himself with the armour of war
and waged battles,
protecting the camp by his sword.**

**⁴He was like a lion in his exploits,
like a lion's cub roaring for prey.**

**⁵He searched out and pursued the lawless;
he blasted those who troubled his people.**

**⁶Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him;
all evildoers were confounded.
The cause of freedom prospered
by his hand.**

**⁷He embittered many kings,
but he made Jacob glad by his deeds;
his memory is blessed forever.**

**⁸He went through the cities of Judah;
he destroyed the ungodly out of the land;
thus he turned away wrath from Israel.**

**⁹He was renowned to the ends of the earth;
he rallied a people who were perishing.**

¹⁰Apollonius now gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. ¹¹When 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. ¹²Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle the rest of his life.

Here begins the account of the heroic career of Judas Maccabaeus. We are in the year 166BC.

We might compare verses 3-9 with words praising Joshua in Ecclesiasticus:

Joshua son of Nun was
mighty in war,
the successor of Moses
in the prophetic office.
He became, as his name
implies, a great saviour
of God's elect,
to take vengeance on the
enemies that rose against them,
so that he might give Israel
its inheritance.
How glorious he was
when he lifted his hands
and brandished his sword
against the cities!
Who before him ever stood
so firm?
For he waged the wars
of the Lord.

– Ecclesiasticus 46:1-3

'The lawless' (verse 5) are the Jews who abandoned the law (the Torah) to embrace the culture of their overlords.

Jason of Cyrene also recognises the role played by Judas (see 2Maccabees 8:2-7). However, his stress is on God who made Judas invincible because of the heroism of the martyrs and the blasphemies uttered by the enemies of the Jews.

Apollonius (see 1:29) was the Syrian governor of the Samaria region. His army contained Samaritans and Gentiles from the city-states bordering the Mediterranean. Verse 12 reminds us of David taking Goliath's sword (see 1Samuel 17:51).

Seron (verse 13) was an officer in the Syrian army. Since the main Syrian army was elsewhere engaged, the bulk of his force in this engagement consisted of the 'godless men' who belonged to the renegade Jews who favoured Hellenization.

'Beth-horon' (verse 16) is about 18ks north-west of Jerusalem (see map page 37). It controls the road from Modein and the coastal plain to Jerusalem.

Judas's reply to his troops in verse 18 echoes the words of Jonathan when he faced the Philistines:

Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that YHWH will act for us; for nothing can hinder YHWH from saving by many or by few.

– 1Samuel 14:6

Compare Gideon in Judges 7.

By referring to the coastal region as 'Philistia' (verse 24), the author is linking this struggle with the ancient struggle of the ancestors against the people that once dominated the region.

¹³When Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large force, including a body of faithful soldiers who stayed with him and went out to battle, ¹⁴he said, "I will make a name for myself and win honour in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command."

¹⁵Once again a strong army of renegade Jews went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the Israelites.

¹⁶When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company.

¹⁷But 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? Besides we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today." ¹⁸Judas 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. ¹⁹It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends. Strength comes from Heaven. ²⁰They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and take our wives and our children as spoil; ²¹but we fight for our lives and our laws. ²²He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them."

²³When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. ²⁴They pursued them down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled to Philistia.

²⁵Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell on the Gentiles all around them. ²⁶His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas. ²⁷When King Antiochus heard these reports, he was greatly angered; and he sent and gathered all the forces of his kingdom, a very strong army. ²⁸He opened his coffers and gave a year's pay to his forces, and ordered them to be ready for any need. ²⁹Then 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. ³⁰He feared that he might not have such funds as he had before for his expenses and for the gifts that he used to give more lavishly than preceding kings. ³¹He was greatly perplexed; then he determined to go to Persia and collect the revenues from those regions and raise a large fund.

³²He left Lysias, a distinguished man of royal lineage, in charge of the king's affairs from the river Euphrates to the borders of Egypt. ³³Lysias was also to take care of his son Antiochus until he returned. ³⁴And he turned over to Lysias 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, ³⁵Lysias 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, ³⁶settle aliens in all their territory, and distribute their land by lot.

³⁷Then the king took the remaining half of his forces and left Antioch his capital in the one hundred and forty-seventh year. He crossed the Euphrates river and went through the upper provinces.

Verses 25-26 refer to the appeal to the royal government from Philip, the governor of Jerusalem, who needed help against Judas (see 2Maccabees 8:8).

Antiochus mustered 'all the forces of his kingdom, a very strong army' (verse 27) at Tahpanes in north-eastern Egypt. This was probably to make an impression after the failure of his campaign in Egypt two years earlier. When Antiochus headed east, he had more urgent matters on his mind than a guerrilla uprising in Judea. He needed to assert his power in his eastern provinces. He was also short of money because of the tribute to Rome and the expense of the Egyptian campaign.

He appointed his nine-year old son, Antiochus V Eupator, as coregent over the area that was formerly the Trans-Euphrates satrapy under the Persians (see Ezra 5:6), and covered all Syria and Palestine. Lysias was his guardian and chief minister.

The Assyrians had settled foreigners in Israel (hence the mixed-race Samaritans). Antiochus's father, Antiochus III, had settled Jews in Lydia and Phrygia. Now Antiochus is determined to take away the base from Judean rebellion by giving the land to foreign settlers.

In spring 165 (147 years since the beginning of the reign of Seleucus I), Antiochus set out from Antioch on the Orontes River in Syria for Armenia, Babylon and Persia.

Ptolemy, governor of the province of Coele-syria (Palestine and Phoenicia), responds to Philip's appeal by sending a strong force under Nicanor and Gorgias. Their army encamped at Emmaus, about 13ks south of Modein and 35ks west of Jerusalem (see map page 37). The merchants are from the pro-Syrian coastal region.

Verses 38-41 (see 2Maccabees 8:8-11).

Judas and his followers are completely outnumbered but are determined to rely on God and to 'fight for our people and the sanctuary'(verse 43).

Verse 45 is a lament.

It was at Mizpah, 13ks north of Jerusalem (see map page 37), that the ancient Israelites gathered to prepare for battle against the Philistines (see 1Samuel 7:5-6).

Verse 48 echoes the following when Judah was preparing to defend itself against an invasion:

Judah assembled to seek help from YHWH; from all the towns of Judah they came to seek YHWH.

– 2Chronicles 20:4

For Jason of Cyrene's account of the preparation for this first major battle see 2Maccabees 8:12-20.

³⁸Lysias chose Ptolemy son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor and Gorgias, able men among the Friends of the king, ³⁹and 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. ⁴⁰So they set out with their entire force, and when they arrived they encamped near Emmaus in the plain. ⁴¹When the traders of the region heard what was said to them, they took silver and gold in immense amounts, and fetters, and went to the camp to get the Israelites for slaves. Forces from Syria and the land of the Philistines joined with them.

⁴²Now 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.

⁴³But they said to one another, "Let us restore the ruins of our people, and fight for our people and the sanctuary." ⁴⁴So the congregation assembled to be ready for battle, and to pray and ask for mercy and compassion.

⁴⁵Jerusalem was deserted 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 banished from Jacob; the flute and the harp ceased to play.

⁴⁶Then they gathered together and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah.

⁴⁷They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their clothes. ⁴⁸And they opened the book of the law seeking the guidance which the Gentiles seek from the images of their gods.

Preparations for battle

⁴⁹They also brought the vestments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they presented the Nazirites who had completed their vows; ⁵⁰and they cried aloud to Heaven, saying, "What shall we do with these? Where shall we take them? ⁵¹Your sanctuary is trampled down and profaned, and your priests mourn in humiliation. ⁵²Here the Gentiles are assembled against us to destroy us; you know what they plot against us. ⁵³How will we be able to withstand them, if you do not help us?"

⁵⁴Then they sounded the trumpets and gave a loud shout. ⁵⁵After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, in charge of thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens. ⁵⁶Those 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. ⁵⁷Then the army marched out and encamped to the south of Emmaus. ⁵⁸And 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. ⁵⁹It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and of the sanctuary. ⁶⁰But as his will in heaven may be, so shall he do."

Verse 49 focuses on the temple. Verse 50 underlines the fact that the temple is not functioning. They must fight to restore the sanctuary and the cult, and their only hope for success lies in their God (verse 53).

The sounding of the trumpets is a summons to battle.

Judas organises his forces on the pattern of Deuteronomy 1:15 (compare 2Maccabees 8:21-23). He sends home those who are exempt according to the law (see Deuteronomy 20:5-8). He only wants soldiers who are courageous because of their trust in YHWH.

The attempt by Gorgias to surprise Judas meant that his army was divided. This enabled Judas to attack those left behind in the camp at Emmaus. They still numbered some 35,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry.

Judas's words to his troops (verses 9-10) recall the miraculous escape of their ancestors from Egypt, and the covenant made by God to the patriarchs when he promised them possession of the land (see Genesis 17:6-8). They are to put their trust in YHWH, Israel's only redeemer and saviour (verse 11).

Judas is victorious and he pursues the foreign army to Gezer (Gazara), Ashdod (Azotus) and Jabneh (Jamnia), three towns formerly part of Philistia (see map page 37). There is a briefer account of the battle in 2Maccabees 8:24-29. In 2Maccabees 8:34-36 we find Nicanor sneaking home from the battle like a runaway slave.

¹Gorgias took five thousand infantry and one thousand picked cavalry, and this division moved out by night ²to fall upon the camp of the Jews and attack them suddenly. Men from the citadel were his guides. ³But Judas heard of it, and he and his warriors moved out to attack the king's force in Emmaus ⁴while the division was still absent from the camp. ⁵When Gorgias entered the camp of Judas by night, he found no one there, so he looked for them in the hills, because he thought, "These men are running away from us."

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

¹²When the foreigners looked up and saw them coming against them, ¹³they went out from their camp to battle. Then the men with Judas blew their trumpets ¹⁴and engaged in battle. The Gentiles were crushed, and fled into the plain, ¹⁵and 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.

¹⁶Then Judas and his force turned back from pursuing them, ¹⁷and he said to the people, “Do not be greedy for plunder, for there is a battle before us; ¹⁸Gorgias and his force are near us in the hills. But stand now against our enemies and fight them, and afterward seize the plunder boldly.”

¹⁹Just as Judas was finishing this speech, a detachment appeared, coming out of the hills. ²⁰They saw that their army had been put to flight, and that the Jews were burning the camp, for the smoke that was seen showed what had happened. ²¹When they perceived this, they were greatly frightened, and when they also saw the army of Judas drawn up in the plain for battle, ²²they all fled into Philistia.

²³Then Judas returned to plunder the camp, and they seized a great amount of gold and silver, and cloth dyed marine blue and purple, and great riches. ²⁴On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven—“For he is good, for his mercy endures forever.” ²⁵Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day.

²⁶Those of the foreigners who escaped went and reported to Lysias all that had happened. ²⁷When 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.

When a detachment of Gorgias’s troops returned to the camp, they saw that their army had fled and that Judas and his troops were ‘drawn up in the plain for battle’(verse 21). They turned and fled to the coastal plain.

Judas and his men then ransacked the camp, praising God for their victory, with a psalm on their lips:

O give thanks to YHWH, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

– Psalm 136:1

Lysias cannot understand how a much smaller band could defeat his superior forces.

Early in 164BC, Lysias himself, with a much larger army (Gorgias had five thousand infantry and one thousand cavalry; see 4:1) determined to crush the revolt. Judas's army has grown from 'three thousand' (verse 6) to ten thousand. Lysias is approaching from the south. Beth-zur is 28ks south of Jerusalem (see map page 37).

In his prayer Judas recalls God's intervention which brought about earlier victories of Israel over the Philistines (see 1Samuel 13-14).

Notice the assumption in verse 33 that the enemies of the Jews are the enemies of God.

Once again Judas and his troops are victorious.

2Maccabees 11:14-38 describes negotiations between parties in Judea and Lysias at this time.

²⁸The next year he mustered sixty thousand picked infantry and five thousand cavalry to subdue them.

²⁹They came into Idumea and encamped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men.

³⁰When Judas saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, "Blessed are you, O Saviour 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 armour.

³¹Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. ³²Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. ³³Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns."

³⁴Then both sides attacked, and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men; they fell in action.

³⁵When 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.

³⁶Then Judas and his brothers said, "See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it."

³⁷So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸There 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. ³⁹Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes ⁴⁰and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

⁴¹Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. ⁴²He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, ⁴³and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. ⁴⁴They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. ⁴⁵And 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, ⁴⁶and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ⁴⁷Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. ⁴⁹They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. ⁵⁰Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. ⁵¹They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

The building of the new altar and the cleansing of the temple took place in December 164BC. This is about the time that Antiochus IV died, though the news of his death probably reached Jerusalem some time after the cleansing.

Mount Zion (verse 37) is a name given to the city of David (see 2Samuel 5:7) as the place where God has chosen to dwell.

The temple had been damaged by Jason and the Hellenizers (see 2Maccabees 1:8 and 8:33), and altered to function as a Syrian sanctuary.

The citadel, north-west of the temple mount, was garrisoned by government forces (see 1:33).

Judas chose priests who had not favoured the Hellenizers (see 2Maccabees 4:14-17). Among the 'defiled stones' (verse 43) would have been the 'desolating sacrilege' (see 1:54; 2Maccabees 10:3). They decided to await divine guidance as to what to do with the altar that had been desecrated. In its place they built a new altar according to the requirements of the law (verse 47; see Exodus 20:25).

The 'bread' (verse 51) is the Bread of the Presence, offered to God every sabbath, and eaten by the priests (see Leviticus 24:5-9).

In December (Kislev) 164BC (148 years since the beginning of the reign of Seleucus I), and 'a year, two years, and half a year' (Daniel 7:25) after the decree of Antiochus outlawing observance of the law (see 1:41-53), sacrifice was offered in the cleansed and rededicated temple.

The details of the celebration (verse 56) recall the purification of the temple by King Hezekiah (see 2Chronicles 29). The burnt offerings were totally consumed by fire. In the communion sacrifice, some of the animal was consumed by the worshippers.

The Jews decided to make the eight-day celebration an annual observance. The festivities celebrating the rededication of the temple continued into the time of Jesus (see John 10:32). Today they are referred to as Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.

The citadel was held by government forces till 140. Judas had the temple mount fortified against the citadel, and Beth-zur in the south (see verse 29) to protect the southern border of Judea.

⁵²Early on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, ⁵³they offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built.

⁵⁴At 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. ⁵⁵All the people fell on their faces and worshipped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them.

⁵⁶So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a communion sacrifice and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷They 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. ⁵⁸There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

⁵⁹Then 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.

⁶⁰At 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.

⁶¹Judas 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.

¹When the Gentiles all around heard that the altar had been rebuilt and the sanctuary dedicated as it was before, they were furious, ²and they determined to destroy the descendants of Jacob who lived among them. So they began to massacre the people, to exterminate them.

³Judas 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. ⁴He also remembered the wickedness of the Baeonites, who were a trap and a snare to the people and ambushed them on the high-ways. ⁵They were shut up by him in their towers; and he encamped against them, vowed their complete destruction, and set fire to their towers and burned all who were in them.

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

There was a long history of Jews in Egypt. There were communities of Jews in Syria and Mesopotamia since the deportation in 721 by the Assyrians (see 2Kings 17), and in Babylon since the deportations of 597 and 587. By the second century trade had enticed groups of Jews to move all over the Middle East. In verses 1-2 we hear that these communities were being persecuted.

It was probably in the spring of 163 that Judas went to their rescue in Idumea (verse 3; also 5:65 and 2Maccabees 10:14-23) and Ammon (verse 6; also 2Maccabees 8:31-33). 'Akrabattene' (verse 3) may refer to the district around 'the ascent of Akrabbim' (Numbers 34:4) near the south-west end of the Dead Sea (see map opposite). The 'Baeonites' (verse 4) must have been in the same area.

Rabbah, the capital of Ammon (2Samuel 12:26) was called Philadelphia after Ptolemy II Philadelphus (see map opposite). It was one of the towns in the Decapolis (see Mark 7:31). Timothy was either a local leader or the Syrian commander in Transjordan. Jazer (verse 8) was located between Rabbah (Amman, Philadelphia) and the Jordan.



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

¹⁴While the letter was still being read, other messengers, with their garments torn, came from Galilee and made a similar report; ¹⁵they said that the people of Ptolemais and Tyre and Sidon, and all Galilee of the Gentiles, had gathered together against them "to annihilate us."

¹⁶When 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. ¹⁷Then 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." ¹⁸But he left Joseph, son of Zechariah, and Azariah, a leader of the people, with the rest of the forces, in Judea to guard it; ¹⁹and he gave them this command, "Take charge of this people, but do not engage in battle with the Gentiles until we return." ²⁰Then three thousand men were assigned to Simon to go to Galilee, and eight thousand to Judas for Gilead.

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

Dathema is on the Yarmuk River in Bashan (see map page 37). The Jewish community appeals to Judas for help.

The Jews in Galilee were also in danger of being exterminated. Ptolemais, Tyre and Sidon were Greek city-states on the Phoenician coast (see map page 37).

Judas sends his brother Simon to Galilee, while he and his other brother, Jonathan, went to Gilead. He left Joseph and Azariah in Judea with strict instructions not to attempt to engage the enemy until he had returned from Gilead.

Simon routs the Gentile forces in Galilee.

For another account of this campaign see 2Maccabees 12:10-31.

The Nabatean Arabs had their main city in Petra (see map page 37). Their caravans went to Damascus in the north, to Gaza in the west, and south into the Arabian peninsula.

Bozrah is 110ks south of Damascus on the caravan route to Amman. The other towns mentioned are in the same area.

With the information gained from the Nabatean merchants, Judas attacks and captures Bozrah, then marches in darkness to Dathema, just in time to mount a successful attack on the troops besieging the town.

Judas, Jonathan, and their army captured the other towns in northern Gilead

²⁴Meanwhile Judas Maccabeus and his brother Jonathan crossed the Jordan and made three days' journey across the wilderness. ²⁵They encountered some Nabateans, who met them peaceably and told them all that had happened to their fellow-Jews in Gilead: ²⁶"Many of them have been shut up in Bozrah and Bosor, in Alema and Chaspho, Maked and Carnaim" – all large fortified towns; ²⁷"some have been shut up in the other towns of Gilead; the enemy are getting ready to attack the strongholds tomorrow and capture and destroy all these people in a single day."

²⁸Then 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. ²⁹He left the place at night, and they went all the way to the stronghold of Dathema. ³⁰At 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 attack the Jews within. ³¹Judas saw that the battle had begun and that the cry of the town went up to Heaven, with trumpets and loud shouts, ³²and he said to the men of his forces, "Fight today for your kindred!" ³³Then he came up behind them in three companies, who sounded their trumpets and cried aloud in prayer. ³⁴And 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.

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

³⁷After these events Timothy gathered another army and encamped opposite Raphon, on the other side of the ravine. ³⁸Judas 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. ³⁹They also have hired Arabs to help them, and they are encamped across the ravine, ready to come and fight against you." And Judas went to meet them.

⁴⁰Now as Judas and his army drew near to the flooded ravine, 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. ⁴¹But if he shows fear and camps on the other side of the river, we will cross over to him and defeat him."

⁴²When Judas reached the ravine, he stationed the officers of the army on its bank and gave them this command, "Permit no one to encamp, but make them all enter the battle."

⁴³Then he crossed over against the enemy 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. ⁴⁴But he took the town and set fire to the sacred precincts, burning all who were in them. Thus Carnaim was conquered; they could stand before Judas no longer.

Timothy (verse 37) is the commander of the Syrian forces in Transjordan (see verses 6-8).

The logic of Timothy's words is not apparent. In any case he appears to have lost the battle because Judas took the initiative.

Timothy's forces fled to the sanctuary at Carnaim, hoping to find asylum. Seeking asylum from gods other than YHWH meant nothing to Judas.

Judas gathered all the Jews from the area and escorted them out of Gilead, and into the relative safety of Judea.

The campaign is described in ways that recall campaigns in Israel's heroic past (see also 2Maccabees 12:27-31).

Ephron (verse 46) is in Gilead opposite Beth-shan (verse 52; see map page 37).

⁴⁵Then 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 escort them to Judea. ⁴⁶So 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. ⁴⁷But the people of the town shut them out and blocked up the gates with stones.

⁴⁸Judas 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. ⁴⁹Then Judas ordered proclamation to be made to the army that all should encamp where they were.

⁵⁰The 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.

⁵¹He 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.

⁵²Then they crossed the Jordan into the large plain before Beth-shan.

⁵³Judas kept rallying the laggards and encouraging the people all the way until he came to the land of Judah. ⁵⁴So 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.

According to 2Maccabees 12:31 they reached Jerusalem in time to celebrate Pentecost in 163BC.

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

⁵⁹Gorgias and his men came out of the town to meet them in battle. ⁶⁰Joseph 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. ⁶¹Thus the people suffered a great rout because, thinking to do a brave deed, they did not listen to Judas and his brothers. ⁶²They did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel.

⁶³Judas and his brothers were greatly honoured in all Israel and among all the Gentiles. Wherever their name was heard, ⁶⁴people gathered to them and praised them.

⁶⁵Then 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. ⁶⁶Then he marched off to go into the land of the Philistines, and passed through Marisa. ⁶⁷On that day some priests, who wished to do a brave deed, fell in battle, for they went out to battle unwisely. ⁶⁸But 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.

In verses 55-62 we hear of the first setback in the fight for independence. This is not mentioned in 2Maccabees.

The two commanders who had been left in charge in Judea during Judas's absence, acting against Judas's orders (see verse 19), foolishly left Judea and headed west to Jamnia to attack the Syrian army. They were defeated, with the loss of two thousand men. The author notes that 'deliverance' (verse 62) is something 'given to Israel' by God, and God has willed to bring it about through Mattathias and his sons, not through others who want to 'make a name' for themselves (verse 57).

On his return, Judas heads south to Hebron to confront the Idumeans. He then turns west, passing through the Hellenistic town of Marisa, where a military defeat is blamed upon some impetuous priests (verse 67). Judas went on to Azotus (Ashdod; see map page 37). Having torn down the pagan altars and plundered the towns in the area, he returned to Judea.

The last campaign of Antiochus

¹King Antiochus was going through the upper provinces when he heard that in Persia there was a city, Elymais, famed for its wealth in silver and gold. ²Its 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. ³So he came and tried to take the city and plunder it, but he could not because his plan had become known to the citizens ⁴and they withstood him in battle. So he fled and in great disappointment left there to return to Babylon.

In 3:37 we were told that in the spring of 165BC Antiochus ‘left Antioch ... crossed the Euphrates river and went through the upper provinces.’ Here in verse 1 we are told that he marched to Elymais (a district just north of the Persian Gulf, not a city in Persia). He dies at a place called Tabae, between Persia and Media. If he intended to return home to Babylon, he didn’t make it.



⁵Then someone came to him in Persia and reported that the armies that had gone into the land of Judah had been routed; ⁶that Lysias had gone first with a strong force, but had turned and fled before the Jews; that the Jews had grown strong from the arms, supplies, and abundant spoils that they had taken from the armies they had cut down; ⁷that 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.

⁸When the king heard this news, he was thrown into such deep dismay that he took to his bed, ill with grief, because things had not turned out for him as he had planned. ⁹He lay there for many days, because deep disappointment continually gripped him, and he realized that he was dying. ¹⁰So he called all his Friends and said to them, "Sleep has departed from my eyes and I am depressed with worry. ¹¹I 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.' ¹²But 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. ¹³I 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."

¹⁴Then he called for Philip, one of his Friends, and made him ruler over all his kingdom. ¹⁵He gave him the crown and his robe and the signet, so that he might take them to his son Antiochus and bring him up to be king. ¹⁶Thus King Antiochus died there in the one hundred forty-ninth year.

¹⁷When Lysias learned that the king was dead, he set up Antiochus the king's son to reign. Lysias had brought him up from boyhood; he named him Eupator.

The author attributes Antiochus's death to the news he received concerning Judea. The author is mistaken on the timing of Antiochus's death. He appears not to have realised that the Seleucid source on which he was drawing was following the Syrian dating system (not the Babylonian, which the Jews followed; see Introduction page 8). In fact, Antiochus died in November or December 164, before he could have heard of Judas's rededication of the temple.

2Maccabees gives a different version of the death of Antiochus (see 2Maccabees 1:11-17 and chapter 9).

The author has Antiochus regretting his policies in Judea.

The Philip referred to here may be the Philip who was the official in Babylon who dedicated an altar to Antiochus Epiphanes in 169-168BC. He replaces Lysias (see 3:32) as the guardian of the young Antiochus V Eupator (verse 15).

Lysias moved quickly, had Antiochus V crowned as king, and so retained his position at court and overall control of Palestine and Phoenicia.

Judas and his army had been extraordinarily successful, but they were still in a minority. They held Beth-zur in the south and the temple mount in Jerusalem. Judas had to capture the citadel there to free up his troops and to ensure control of the temple. He decided to attack the citadel in the autumn of 163 at the beginning of the 150th year of Seleucid control of Syria (verse 20).

The government of Jerusalem and Judea was still in the hands of the Syrian garrison and Jews who favoured adopting Greek ways. They decided to seek help from the new king, Antiochus V.

The mercenaries were probably largely from Anatolia, and the islands of Cyprus, Crete and Rhodes. The Syrian army that besieged Beth-zur was, indeed, a massive one. For another account of this campaign see 2Maccabees 13:1-19.

¹⁸Meanwhile the garrison in the citadel kept hemming Israel in around the sanctuary. They were trying in every way to harm them and strengthen the Gentiles. ¹⁹Judas therefore resolved to destroy them, and assembled all the people to besiege them. ²⁰They gathered together and besieged the citadel in the one hundred fiftieth year; and he built siege towers and other engines of war. ²¹But some of the garrison escaped from the siege and some of the ungodly Israelites joined them. ²²They went to the king and said, "How long will you fail to do justice and to avenge our kindred? ²³We were happy to serve your father, to live by what he said, and to follow his commands. ²⁴For this reason the sons of our people besieged the citadel 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. ²⁵It is not against us alone that they have stretched out their hands; they have also attacked all the lands on their borders. ²⁶And see, today they have encamped against the citadel in Jerusalem to take it; they have fortified both the sanctuary and Beth-zur; ²⁷unless you quickly prevent them, they will do still greater things, and you will not be able to stop them."

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

³²Then Judas marched away from the citadel and encamped at Beth-zechariah, opposite the camp of the king. ³³Early in the morning the king set out and took his army by a forced march along the road to Beth-zechariah, and his troops made ready for battle and sounded their trumpets. ³⁴They offered the elephants the juice of grapes and mulberries, to arouse them for battle. ³⁵They 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. ³⁶These took their position beforehand wherever the animal was; wherever it went, they went with it, and they never left it. ³⁷On the elephants were wooden towers, strong and covered; they were fastened on each animal by special harness, and on each were four armed men who fought from there, and also its Indian driver. ³⁸The 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. ³⁹When the sun shone on the shields of gold and brass, the hills were ablaze with them and gleamed like flaming torches. ⁴⁰Now 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. ⁴¹All 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. ⁴²But Judas and his army advanced to the battle, and six hundred of the king's army fell. ⁴³Now 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. ⁴⁴So he gave his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name. ⁴⁵He 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. ⁴⁶He got under the elephant, stabbed it from beneath, and killed it; but it fell to the ground upon him and he died.

Judas leaves Jerusalem and marches to meet a far superior force.

Lysias is following the tactics that worked so successfully for Alexander the Great.

The author recalls with pride the heroic action of Eleazar Avaran (verses 43-46), one of Judas's younger brothers (see 2:5).

Judas suffers his first military setback. His troops had to flee back to Jerusalem, where they valiantly resisted the siege, but finally, ‘only a few men were left in the sanctuary’ (verse 54). We are told that it was a sabbatical year. Following the stipulations of the Torah (see Leviticus 25:3-4), there had been no sowing or harvest that year. This contributed to the scarcity of food.

⁴⁷When the Jews saw the royal might and the fierce attack of the forces, they turned away in flight. ⁴⁸The soldiers of the king’s army went up to Jerusalem against them, and the king encamped in Judea and at Mount Zion. ⁴⁹He 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. ⁵⁰So the king took Beth-zur and stationed a guard there to hold it. ⁵¹Then 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. ⁵²The Jews also made engines of war to match theirs, and fought for many days. ⁵³But they had no food in storage, because it was the seventh year; those who had found safety in Judea from the Gentiles had consumed the last of the stores. ⁵⁴Only a few men were left in the sanctuary; the rest scattered to their own homes, for the famine proved too much for them.

⁵⁵Then Lysias heard that Philip, whom King Antiochus while still living had appointed to bring up his son Antiochus to be king, ⁵⁶had 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.

⁵⁷So 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. ⁵⁸Now then let us come to terms with these people, and make peace with them and with all their nation. ⁵⁹Let 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."

⁶⁰The speech pleased the king and the commanders, and he sent to the Jews an offer of peace, and they accepted it. ⁶¹So the king and the commanders gave them their oath. On these conditions the Jews evacuated the stronghold. ⁶²But 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. ⁶³Then 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.

The author has already informed us that before his death Antiochus IV had made Philip vice-regent 'over all his kingdom' and entrusted to him the care of his son (see 6:14-15). While the young king and Lysias were occupied in Palestine, Philip came to claim his rights. This forced Lysias to call off the siege of the temple in Jerusalem and head for Antioch. So he came to an agreement with Judas to allow the Jews to follow their laws, hoping that would satisfy the revolutionaries. In other words he persuaded Antiochus V to repeal the decree of his father (see 1:41-50).

He forthwith withdrew, but not before breaking his word and having the temple fortifications destroyed (verse 62). According to 2Maccabees 13:3-8, he also executed the high priest, Menelaus (172-163). For another account see 2Maccabees 11:22-26; 13:23-26.

According to Josephus (*Antiquities* xii 9.7.386), Antiochus V appointed Alcimus high priest in his place, and the rightful high priest, Onias IV took refuge in Egypt. The author of 1Maccabees does not mention Alcimus at this stage, possibly because he did not consider Antiochus V to be a legitimate ruler, who therefore had no right to make such an appointment.

In 161BC (151 years since the beginning of the reign of Seleucus I) Demetrius escaped from Rome to claim the throne of Syria. He was the son of Seleucus IV who had been king from 187-175, and should have become king when his father died. However, he was only 9 years old at the time and Rome preferred to have him as a hostage in Rome. They backed his uncle Antiochus IV (175-164), who was succeeded by his son, Antiochus V (164-161).

The 'town by the sea' (verse 1) is Tripolis, 283 ks from Antioch. The 'royal palace' (verse 2) was in Antioch (see map page 43). Demetrius has his cousin, King Antiochus V, killed, and becomes king of Syria (verse 4). He ruled from 161 to 150.

Alcimus was sympathetic to the Hellenizers, and so was acceptable to Syria. He had already been appointed high priest by Antiochus V, but the author of 1Maccabees did not judge this legitimate. In any case Alcimus would have needed to seek reappointment from Demetrius. Alcimus was not descended from Zadoc, but he was descended from Aaron (verse 14). This gave him some claim to legitimacy, though he was completely unacceptable to Judas (and to the author; compare 2Maccabees 14:1-10).

To put down the rebellion in Judea, King Demetrius sent Bacchides, governor of the satrapy that took in the area west of the Euphrates, with 'a large force' (verse 11; see 2Maccabees 14:3-4).

¹In the one hundred fifty-first year Demetrius son of Seleucus set out from Rome, sailed with a few men to a town by the sea, and there began to reign. ²As he was entering the royal palace of his ancestors, the army seized Antiochus and Lysias to bring them to him. ³But when this act became known to him, he said, "Do not let me see their faces!" ⁴So the army killed them, and Demetrius took his seat on the throne of his kingdom.

⁵Then there came to him all the renegade and godless men of Israel; they were led by Alcimus, who wanted to be high priest. ⁶They brought to the king this accusation against the people: "Judas and his brothers have destroyed all your Friends, and have driven us out of our land. ⁷Now then send a man whom you trust; let him go and see all the ruin that Judas has brought on us and on the land of the king, and let him punish them and all who help them."

⁸So 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. ⁹He 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. ¹⁰So they marched away and came with a large force against the land of Judah; and he sent messengers to Judas and his brothers with peaceable but treacherous words. ¹¹But they paid no attention to their words, for they saw that they had come with a large force.

Alcimus breaks his word

¹²Then a group of scribes appeared in a body before Alcimus and Bacchides to ask for just terms. ¹³The Hasideans were first among the Israelites to seek peace from them, ¹⁴for they said, "A priest of the line of Aaron has come with the army, and he will not harm us." ¹⁵Alcimus spoke peaceable words to them and swore this oath to them, "We will not seek to injure you or your friends." ¹⁶So 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." ¹⁸Then 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."

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

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

The Hasideans (verse 13; see 2:42) are hoping the high priest will act in accordance with the peace offer made by Antiochus V (see 6:59).

Treacherously, Alcimus broke his word and had a large group of the Hasideans killed (verse 16). The author sees this as fulfilling the sentiments of Psalm 79:2-3 (verse 17).

They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

Though the Syrian government claimed control of Judea, people of the countryside were largely sympathetic with Judas. Bacchides made his camp at Beth-zait ('house of the olive') halfway between Jerusalem and Beth-zur, and massacred a number of the locals. He made Alcimus head of state in Judea (as Onias, Jason and Menelaus had been before him), and returned to Antioch.

Alcimus is unable to assert his authority, and is forced to leave Judea and appeal to the Syrian king (verse 25; see 2Maccabees 14:3-14).

According to 2Maccabees 14:12, Nicanor had helped Demetrius escape from Rome. On the likely assumption that we are dealing with the same Nicanor, his hatred of Israel would have been stirred up by the defeat he suffered in Judea in 165 (see 3:38 - 4:27; 2Maccabees 8:9-36).

Nicanor's duplicity is discovered, and when he decides on open conflict his forces are routed by Judas (compare 2Maccabees 14:15-24). 'Caphar-salama' ('village of Salem') was some 11ks north-west of Jerusalem.

The priests and elders under Alcimus would have been generally sympathetic with Nicanor, whose cause was not helped by his arrogant reaction to their friendly overtures.

The prayer placed on the lips of the priests by the author echoes Solomon's prayer when he dedicated the altar (see 1Kings 8:29, 33-34).

²⁶Then the king sent Nicanor, one of his honoured princes, who hated and detested Israel, and he commanded him to destroy the people. ²⁷So 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." ²⁹So he came to Judas, and they greeted one another peaceably; but the enemy were preparing to kidnap Judas. ³⁰It became known to Judas that Nicanor had come to him with treacherous intent. He took alarm and would not meet him again. ³¹When Nicanor learned that his plan had been disclosed, he went out to meet Judas in battle near Caphar-salama. ³²About five hundred of the army of Nicanor fell, and the rest fled into the city of David.

³³After 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. ³⁴But he mocked them and derided them and defiled them and spoke arrogantly, ³⁵and 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. ³⁶At 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. ³⁸Take vengeance on this man and on his army, and let them fall by the sword; remember their blasphemies, and let them live no longer."

³⁹Now Nicanor went out from Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-horon, and the Syrian army joined him.

⁴⁰Judas 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. ⁴²So crush this army before us today; let the rest learn that Nicanor has spoken wickedly against the sanctuary, and judge him according to this wickedness.”

⁴³The 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. ⁴⁴When his army saw that Nicanor had fallen, they threw down their arms and fled. ⁴⁵The Jews 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. ⁴⁶People came out of all the surrounding villages of Judea, and they outflanked the enemy and drove them back to their pursuers, so that they all fell by the sword; not even one of them was left.

⁴⁷Then the Jews 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. ⁴⁸The people rejoiced greatly and celebrated that day as a day of great gladness.

⁴⁹They decreed that this day should be celebrated each year on the thirteenth day of Adar. ⁵⁰So the land of Judah had rest for a few days.

Nicanor’s army is at Beth-horon (see maps page 37 and page 53). Judas is between Beth-horon and Jerusalem, at Adasa. Judas has a smaller army than in 164 (see 5:20).

Judas’s prayer recalls the catastrophe suffered by the Assyrian army in 701 (see 2Kings 19; Isaiah 37:36).

Adar is the last month of the Babylonian calendar. The date given here is 17th March 160BC. Nicanor is killed in the battle (verse 43).

The Syrian army flees and is annihilated (verses 44-46).

On the defeat and death of Nicanor see 2Maccabees 14:31-36; 15:6-36).

This festival of *Megillath Ta’anith* was held the day before the festival of Purim. It was dropped from the calendar after 70AD.

The peace, as we will see, lasted only two months (see chapter 9).

Nicanor's final campaign



¹Now Judas had heard of the Romans: that they were renowned for their military power and were well-disposed toward all who made an alliance with them. Any who joined them could be sure of their firm friendship. ²He 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, ³and what they had done in the land of Spain to get control of the silver and gold mines there, ⁴and 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.

⁵They had crushed in battle and conquered Philip, and King Perseus of the Macedonians, and the others who rose up against them. ⁶They 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; ⁷they 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, ⁸the countries of India, Media, and Lydia. These they took from him and gave to King Eumenes.

At the beginning of the first century BC the Jewish view of Rome was positive.

The Roman army conquered the Gauls of the Po valley south of the Alps in 222 and 190.

Spain was conquered in the years 206-195 and 154-133.

Philip V of Macedon was defeated in 197 and Perseus in 168.

Antiochus III was defeated at Magnesia (see map page 9) by Scipio Africanus in 188, as a result of which Syria had to pay an indemnity of 12,000 talents in annual instalments. We have already seen the effect this had on the Syrian king having to raise the indemnity from subject nations, including Judea.

Alexander the Great reached only to the border of India. Lydia was ceded to Eumenes king of Pergamum for the help he gave Rome against Antiochus.

In 147-146 the Achaean League of the Peloponnese resisted Rome. It was defeated by Lucius Mummius who destroyed Corinth. This happened well after the time of Judas Maccabaeus who died in 160.

Verse 11 includes the capture of Carthage in 146. Sicily was made a province of Rome in 227.

Examples of verse 13 are Rome's support for Eumenes of Pergamum (see verse 8), of Ptolemy VI of Egypt against Antiochus IV of Syria (see Daniel 11:29-30), and of Antiochus V against Demetrius I (see 1Maccabees 7:1-2).

Wearing a crown was a Hellenistic symbol of royalty, something unacceptable to the Jews (see verse 14).

The author has an idealized picture of Roman government. This is no doubt because of the support Rome gave the Jews against the Seleucids.

⁹The Greeks planned to come and destroy them, ¹⁰but this became known to them, and they sent a general against the Greeks and attacked them. Many of them were wounded and fell, and the Romans took captive their wives and children; they plundered them, conquered the land, tore down their strongholds, and enslaved them to this day.

¹¹The remaining kingdoms and islands, as many as ever opposed them, they destroyed and enslaved; ¹²but 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. ¹³Those 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. ¹⁴Yet for all this not one of them has put on a crown or worn purple as a mark of pride, ¹⁵but they have built for themselves a senate chamber, and every day three hundred twenty senators constantly deliberate concerning the people, to govern them well. ¹⁶They 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.

¹⁷So Judas chose Eupolemus son of John son of Accos, and Jason son of Eleazar, and sent them to Rome to establish friendship and alliance, ¹⁸and to free themselves from the yoke; for they saw that the kingdom of the Greeks was enslaving Israel completely. ¹⁹They 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.” ²¹The proposal pleased them, ²²and 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. ²⁴If war comes first to Rome or to any of their allies in all their dominion, ²⁵the nation of the Jews shall act as their allies wholeheartedly, as the occasion may indicate to them. ²⁶To 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. ²⁷In 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. ²⁸And 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. ²⁹Thus on these terms the Romans make a treaty with the Jewish people. ³⁰If 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? ³²If now they appeal again for help against you, we will defend their rights and fight you on sea and on land.’”

The fact that Judas’s envoys have Greek names is an indication of the influence of Hellenization in Judea. This may be the Eupolemus who wrote a history of the Jewish kings in Greek. Jason was a common Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua.

Notice that the envoys do not speak in the name of the Judean government (verse 20), which is still in the hands of the Hellenizers.

Judas chose a good time to reach out to Rome, in view of Rome’s opposition to Demetrius, who had taken control in Syria against Rome’s wish.

In verses 23-32, the author is quoting from the archives.

It was too early for this treaty to have any practical effect. Rome would not intervene in Palestine for another century, and then it was to Rome’s benefit, not Judea’s.

For Bacchides's first campaign see 7:8-20.

Arbela is in Galilee (see map page 63). The reading 'Galilee' follows Josephus. The Greek manuscripts of 1Maccabees have 'Gilgal' or 'Gilead'.

Demetrius encamps outside Jerusalem in the month of Nisan (April-May) 160BC.

Berea is 16ks north of Jerusalem (see map page 63).

Once again the odds are against Judas. This time morale is low.

Typically Judas hopes to win by striking first.

¹When 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. ²They marched by way of Galilee and encamped against Mesaloth in Arbela, and they took it and killed many people. ³In the first month of the one hundred fifty-second year they encamped against Jerusalem; ⁴then they marched off and went to Berea with twenty thousand foot soldiers and two thousand cavalry.

⁵Judas was encamped in Elasa, and with him were three thousand picked men. ⁶When 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. ⁷When 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. ⁸He 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." ⁹But they tried to dissuade him, saying, "We do not have the strength. Let us rather save our own lives now, and let us come back with our kindred and fight them; we are too few." ¹⁰But 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 honour."

¹¹Then the army of Bacchides 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. ¹²Bacchides 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. ¹³The earth was shaken by the noise of the armies, and the battle raged from morning until evening.

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

¹⁹Then Jonathan and Simon took their brother Judas and buried him in the tomb of their ancestors at Moadin, ²⁰and wept for him. All Israel made great lamentation for him; they mourned many days and said, ²¹“How is the mighty fallen, the saviour of Israel!”

²²Now 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.

Here we have an account of Judas’s final battle. It is not included in the historical summary made by the author of 2Maccabees.

There being no mountain near Azotus (Ashdod), we are probably meant to visualise a pursuit to the foothills of the mountains in the direction of Ashdod (verse 15).

The lament echoes David’s lament at the death of Saul and Jonathan (2Samuel 1:19).

The loss of Judas, and the famine, meant that the country people saw siding with the government as their only hope.

The abridged version of the history of the time by Jason of Cyrene, which we know as Second Maccabees, goes only as far as 160BC, and shows no interest in his brothers Jonathan and Simon.

There had been no prophets since the fifth century, some 250 years before the time of the Maccabees.

No explanation is given why Simon was passed over in favour of his younger brother, Jonathan.

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

²⁸Then 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 enemies and Bacchides, and to deal with those of our nation who hate us. ³⁰Now therefore we have chosen you today to take his place as our ruler and leader, to fight our battle." ³¹So Jonathan accepted the leadership at that time in place of his brother Judas.

³²When Bacchides learned of this, he tried to kill him. ³³But 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. (³⁴Bacchides found this out on the sabbath day, and he with all his army crossed the Jordan.)

³⁵So Jonathan 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. ³⁶But the family of Jambri from Medeba came out and seized John and all that he had, and left with it.

³⁷Some time afterwards 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." ³⁸Remembering how their brother John had been killed, they went up and hid under cover of the mountain. ³⁹They 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. ⁴⁰Then 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 took all their goods. ⁴¹So the wedding was turned into mourning and the voice of their musicians into a funeral dirge. ⁴²After they had fully avenged the blood of their brother, they returned to the marshes of the Jordan.

The author has placed this episode between April 160 (the death of Judas, see 9:3) and May 159 (see 9:54). The Maccabees are forced to hide out in the wilderness south-east of Jerusalem. Tekoa (the home of the prophet Amos) is some 24 ks south of Jerusalem, high on the eastern slopes of the hill country, looking down to the Dead Sea.

Verse 34 appears to be a marginal note incorrectly included (see verse 43).

Jonathan had reason to think that the Nabateans would help (verse 35; see 5:25).

Medaba was in ancient Moab on the King's Highway (see Numbers 20:17; map page 63). 'John'(verse 36) is the oldest of the sons of Mattathias (see 2:2).

Verses 37-42 describe the massacre that avenged what was done to John.

Verse 43 picks up verse 34. Bacchides is attempting to catch Jonathan and his followers at 'the marshes of the Jordan' (verse 42).

It looks as though Jonathan crossed with his men from the east bank of the Jordan to the west bank, which meant that he was caught between the waiting forces of Bacchides and the river marshes. However, Bacchides himself was fortunate not to be killed, and Jonathan and his troops, having inflicted huge losses on the Syrian army, swam back to the safety of the east bank.

⁴³When Bacchides heard of this, he came with a large force on the sabbath day to the banks of the Jordan. ⁴⁴And 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. ⁴⁵For look! the battle is in front of us and behind us is the water of the Jordan, and on both sides swamp and thicket! There is no place to draw back! ⁴⁶Cry out now to Heaven that you may be delivered from the hands of our enemies."

⁴⁷So the battle began, and Jonathan stretched out his hand to strike Bacchides, but Bacchides drew back to escape him. ⁴⁸Then Jonathan and the men with him leaped into the Jordan and swam across to the other side. The enemy did not cross the Jordan to attack them. ⁴⁹Indeed, about one thousand of Bacchides' men fell that day.

⁵⁰Then Bacchides returned to Jerusalem and built strong cities in Judea: the fortress in Jericho, and Emmaus, and Beth-horon, and Bethel, and Timnath, and Pharathon, and Tephon, with high walls and gates and bars. ⁵¹And he placed garrisons in them to harass Israel. ⁵²He also fortified the town of Beth-zur, and Gazara, and the citadel, and in them he put troops and stores of food.

⁵³And he took the sons of the leading men of the land as hostages and put them under guard in the citadel at Jerusalem. ⁵⁴In the one hundred and fifty-third year, 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! ⁵⁵But 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. ⁵⁶And Alcimus died at that time in great agony.

⁵⁷When Bacchides saw that Alcimus was dead, he returned to the king, and the land of Judah had rest for two years.

Bacchides sets about consolidating his control of Judea by building garrisons in strategic towns: Jericho to control the Jordan fords; Emmaus and Beth-horon to control the home territory of the Maccabees; Bethel to control the northern approach to Jerusalem. Others of the garrisons were in Samaria (see map opposite).

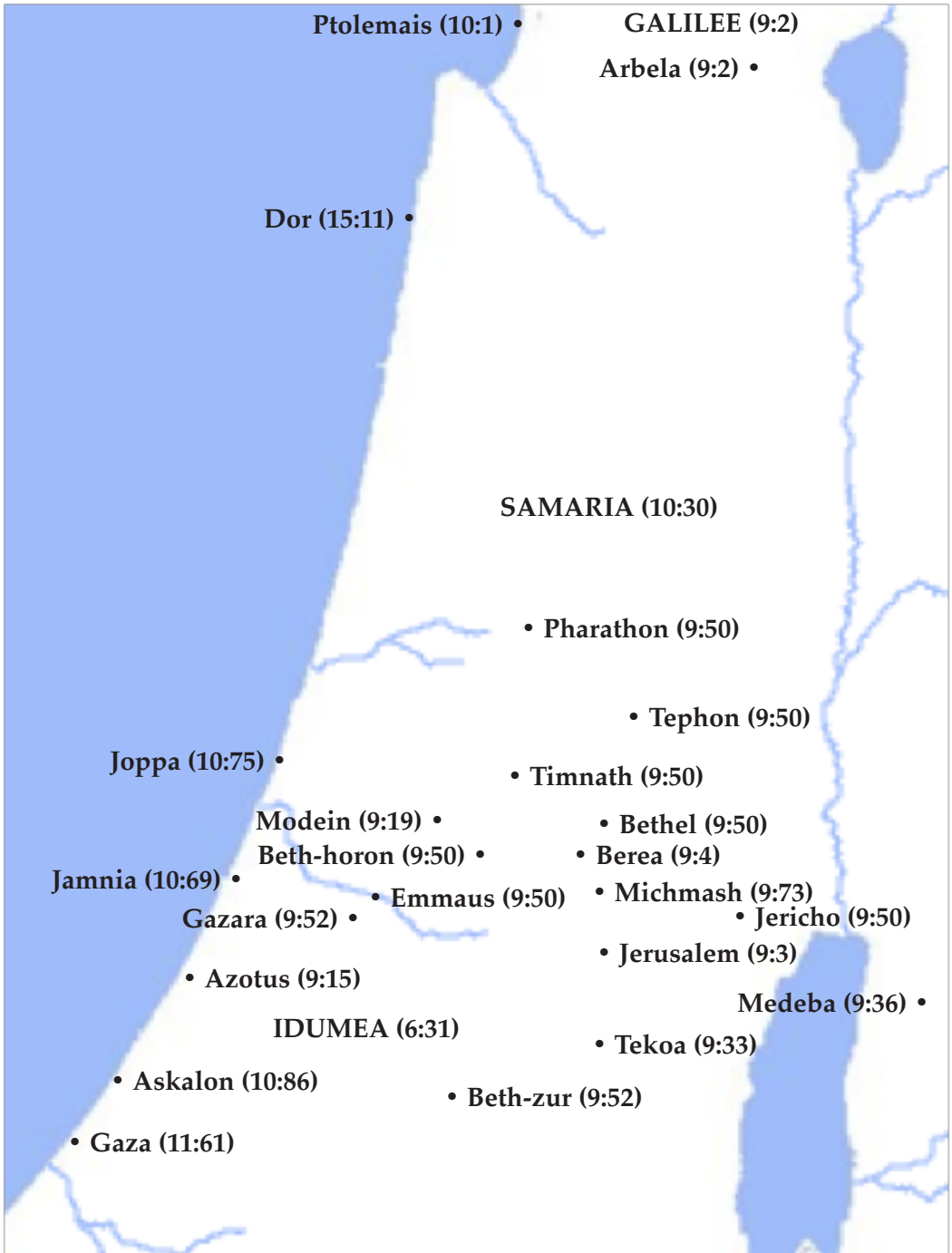
Bacchides rebuilt the fortification in Beth-zur, controlling the approach to Jerusalem from the south.

We are in May 159BC (verse 54). The author appears to be accusing the high priest, Alcimus (verse 55; see 7:5) of breaking down the wall separating the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Israelites, so that, like other Hellenized temples, the temple would be open to all the citizens, and not kept exclusively for Jews. ‘The prophets’ (verse 54) refers to Haggai and Zechariah who inspired the building of the temple after the return from exile (520).

The author portrays the death of the high priest (verse 57) as divine punishment for this sacrilege. His death left the office of the high priest vacant. This lasted for seven years, till it was filled by Jonathan in 152BC. From that time through to the publishing of 1Maccabees, the high priestly office remained with the Hasmonaean dynasty.

Bacchides left, presumably for further orders.

The stalemate lasted for two years (verse 57).



⁵⁸Then the renegades 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." ⁵⁹And they went and consulted with him. ⁶⁰He 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. ⁶¹And Jonathan's men seized about fifty of the men of the country who were leaders in this treachery, and killed them.

⁶²Then 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. ⁶³When Bacchides learned of this, he assembled all his forces, and sent orders to the men of Judea. ⁶⁴Then he came and encamped against Bethbasi; he fought against it for many days and made machines of war.

⁶⁵But Jonathan left his brother Simon in the town, while he went out into the country; and he went with only a few men. ⁶⁶He struck down Odomera and his kindred and the people of Phasiron in their tents. ⁶⁷Then he 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. ⁶⁸They fought with Bacchides, and he was crushed by them. They pressed him very hard, for his plan and his expedition had been in vain. ⁶⁹So 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.

⁷⁰When Jonathan learned of this, he sent ambassadors to him to make peace with him and obtain release of the captives. ⁷¹He agreed, and did as he said; and he swore to Jonathan that he would not try to harm him as long as he lived. ⁷²He 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. ⁷³Thus the sword ceased from Israel. Jonathan settled in Michmash and began to judge the people; and he destroyed the godless out of Israel.

This is the year 157BC
(see verse 57).

Bethbasi (verse 62) may have been near Bethlehem.

Bacchides was not happy with the anti-Maccabee group who had drawn him into this campaign, which was not as popular as he had been led to believe.

Jonathan is accepted in Judea like the Judges of old. He set up his power base in Michmash, a garrisoned town 14ks north of Jerusalem (see 1 Samuel 14). Obviously Jerusalem is still in the hands of the Hellenizing party.