

Session 17: The Maccabean Revolt

- After the remnant of Jews had returned to Judah, they lived in peace for nearly 100 years until Alexander the Great conquered the known world in the 330s BC, as **Greece (Hellas)** supplanted Persia as the new world power. The Greeks, by a process of **Hellenization**, tried to unify the world under Greek culture, language, philosophy, and religion. **Because the Greek religion was pagan and polytheistic, the faithful Jews, who are monotheistic, could not comply to Hellenization.** Because of the Jews' noncompliance, Alexander the Great sought to punish them but relented when he personally witnessed, and was impressed by, their devotion to Judaism, and thus he permitted religious freedom to them.
- However, when Alexander the Great died unexpectedly at the age of 33, the Greek empire was divided among five of his generals. First, the general Ptolemy and his dynastic line, called the Ptolemies, reigned over Judah, and the Ptolemies permitted religious freedom to the Jews. **Later, however, the general Seleucid and his dynastic line, called the Seleucids, reigned over Judah, and again tried to enforce Hellenization upon the Jews.**
- In fact, in an effort to intensify Hellenization upon the Jews, the Seleucid king **Antiochus IV** began a terrible religious persecution of the Jews, **putting to death those who would not comply to Hellenization, and these are called martyrs (witnesses).** He even attacked the three symbols of the Jews return to Judah. First, he desecrated the Temple that had been rebuilt under Zerubbabel, trespassing into its sanctuary, plundering its gold and silver, and erecting in its precincts an altar to the god/demon Zeus. Second, he destroyed copies of the Torah, which had been the focus of Ezra's ministry, sentencing to death any Jew who was found possessing a copy, or even observing its teachings. Third, he destroyed the city walls that had been rebuilt by Nehemiah, establishing a citadel in Jerusalem, and filling it with troops to ensure that the Jews kept his orders.
- Antiochus IV, in his arrogance, assumed the title of Theos Epiphanes, which means "God Manifest". However, the Jews derisively called him Antiochus Epimanes, with *epimanes* literally meaning "something pressing upon the brain", thus meaning "madman".
- **The Jewish reponse to this persecution was divided.** Many capitulated, willingly or under compulsion, to the demands of Antiochus IV, thus betraying the faith of their fathers and the One True God. Some died as martyrs. **Others resisted militarily under Mattathias, and later his son Judas Maccabeus ("the Hammer"), leading the Maccabean Revolt.**
- The Maccabean Revolt was quite successful within only three years, as Judas Maccabeus recaptured Jerusalem, cleansing and rededicating the Temple, instituting the Feast of Hanukkah ("to dedicate"), also called the Feast of Lights. The Feast of Lights derives its name from the **tradition of the miraculous oil of Hanukkah.** Specifically, when Judas Maccabeus began the eight-day feast of the rededication of the Temple, only enough oil was found to fuel the Temple lampstand (menorah) for one day, **but this oil nonetheless burned for eight days, the length of time it took to prepare and consecrate fresh oil.**
- Under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, the Jews ally themselves with the rising power of Rome, in an effort to strengthen their ongoing resistance movement against the Seleucids.
- After the sudden death in battle of Judas Maccabeus, his brother Jonathan took power. **Jonathan disgraced himself and the Maccabean movement by accepting the high priesthood from the reigning Seleucid king, even though he himself was not even a son of Aaron, as required by God (Ex 29:29).**

- After Jonathan's death, his brother, and the last of Mattathias' sons, named Simon, took power. Simon used nefarious political means to obtain Jewish independence from the Seleucids, and he thus established the **Hasmonean dynasty** of priest-kings, named after a Maccabean ancestor named Hasmon, **though this dynasty of priest-kings were neither legitimate high priests nor legitimate kings, as they were not Davidides.**
- Further, and ironically, under Simon's successor and son John, **the Hasmonean dynasty became gradually Hellenistic.** Therefore, Jews inclined to be Hellenistic, called **Sadducees**, were favored by the Hasmoneans, while Jews zealous for Torah observance, called **Pharisees**, fell out of favor with the Hasmoneans. Eventually, within four generations of John, who had taken a Hellenistic throne name of John Hykanos, tension between the Sadducees and Pharisees erupted into a civil war, causing Roman intervention and a subsequent smackdown by the Roman general Pompey, who captured Jerusalem in 63 BC.
- Pompey then established the Sadducee named Hykanos II as high priest, though the kingship was denied him, **as political authority now belonged to the Romans.** The high priests from this point forward, to the time of Christ such as **Annas and Caiphas**, and also to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, would all be illegitimate Sadducees.
- Later, in 47 BC, the Hasmonean dynasty was replaced by Julius Caesar, who established a different fraudulent dynasty, called the **Herodian dynasty**, by appointing the Edomite named **Antipater** to be the Roman puppet-king of Judea. His successor and son would be **Herod the Great**, who reigned at the time of the birth of Christ. **Herod the Great claimed to be the new Solomon, renovator of the glorious Second Temple, and also claimed on his coins to be both *christos* and high priest.**
- Similarly, after the death of Julius Caesar, his adopted son, named **Augustus Caesar**, ruled the Roman Empire. First, his assumed name of **Augustus, which means "one worthy of adoration", claimed him to be a god.** Second, he proposed legislation to the Roman Senate declaring his father Julius to have been a god, **and then, after said legislation had passed, he proclaimed himself to be "son of god", as temples throughout the Roman Empire quickly arose for the worship of both.** Lastly, consider a shocking inscription, discovered in the ancient city of Priene, dating from 9 BC, as it reveals how Augustus wanted to be seen and understood:

(The day of the birth of Augustus) gave the whole world a new aspect.

It would have fallen into ruin had not a widespread well-being shone forth through him, the one now born...

Providence, which has ordered all things, filled this man with virtue that he might benefit mankind, sending him as a Savior both for us and our descendants...

The birthday of the god was the beginning of the good tidings that he brought to the world.

From his birth, a new reckoning of time must begin.

- **The concurrent reigns of the blasphemous imposters Herod and Augustus provide the context for the birth of the Christ Child, Who will be *all* that both claim to have been, but were not.**