

Daniel chapter 8 verses 13-14 tells of the “Transgression of Desolation” that will come upon the Jews and the temple and the “2300 days” before the temple will be cleansed once again. This period of time is explained again in chapter 11 verses 31-35.

The Maccabees are the people that will fight against the Seleucus Empire and will restore the temple. The “History of the Maccabees” explains what happens during the “2300 Days” and the following 102 years before the Roman Empire conquers Israel in 63 BC.

History of the Maccabees

The **Maccabees** were a Jewish rebel army who took control of Judea, which had been a client state of the Seleucid Empire. They founded the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled from 164 BC to 63 BC, reasserting the Jewish religion, expanding the boundaries of the Land of Israel and reducing the influence of Hellenism.

Background

In the 2nd century BC, Judea lay between the Ptolemaic Kingdom based in Egypt and the Seleucid empire based in Syria, kingdoms formed after the death of Alexander the Great (336–323 BC) Previously under the Ptolemies, Judea had fallen to the Seleucids in 200 BC. Since the rule of Alexander in the near east, there had been a process of Hellenization, which affected Judea. Some Jews, mainly those of the urban upper class, notably the Tobiad family, wished to dispense with Jewish law and to adopt a Greek lifestyle. According to the historian Victor Tcherikover, the main motive for the Tobiads' Hellenism was economic and political. Hellenizing Jews had built a gymnasium, competed internationally in Greek games, "removed their marks of circumcision and repudiated the holy covenant".

When **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** (215–164 BC), became ruler of the **Seleucid Empire** in **175 BC**, the **High Priest** in Jerusalem was **Onias III**. **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** was insensitive to the views of religious Jews and treated the High Priest as a political appointee and one from whom money could be made. To **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, the High Priest was merely a local governor within his realm, who could be appointed or dismissed at will, while to orthodox Jews he was divinely appointed. **Jason**, the brother of **Onias**, bribed **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** to make him High Priest instead. **Jason** abolished the traditional theocracy and established Jerusalem as a Greek city state. **Menelaus** (who was not even a member of the Levite priestly family) then bribed **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** and was appointed High Priest in place of Jason. **Menelaus** had **Onias** assassinated. His brother Lysimachus took holy vessels from the Temple, causing riots and the thief's death at the hands of the rioters. **Menelaus** was arrested and arraigned before **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, but he bribed his way out of trouble. **Jason** subsequently drove out **Menelaus** and became High Priest again. **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** pillaged the Temple, attacked Jerusalem and "led captive the women and children". From this point onwards, **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** pursued a Hellenizing policy with zeal. This effectively meant banning traditional Jewish religious practice. In **167 BC** Jewish sacrifice was forbidden, Sabbath's and feasts were banned and circumcision was outlawed. Altars to Greek gods were set up and animals prohibited to Jews were sacrificed on them. The Olympian Zeus was placed on the altar of the Temple. Possession of Jewish scriptures was made a capital offence. The motives of **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** were to create Israel as a Grecian Hellenistic state.

The revolt

In the narrative of *1 Maccabees*, after **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** issued his decrees forbidding Jewish religious practice, a rural Jewish priest from Modiin, **Mattathias the Hasmonean**, sparked the revolt against the **Seleucid Empire** by refusing to worship the Greek gods. **Mattathias** killed a Hellenistic Jew who stepped forward to offer a sacrifice to an idol in **Mattathias'** place. He and his

five sons fled to the wilderness of Judah. After **Mattathias'** death about one year later in **166 BC**, his son **Judah Maccabee** led an army of Jewish dissidents to victory over the **Seleucid dynasty**, (*King of the North, Daniel chapter 11*) in guerrilla warfare, which at first was directed against Hellenizing Jews, of whom there were many. The **Maccabees** destroyed pagan altars in the villages, circumcised children and forced Jews into outlawry. The term **Maccabees** as used to describe the Jewish army is taken from the Hebrew word for "**hammer**".

The revolt itself involved many battles, in which the **Maccabean forces** gained notoriety among the **Seleucid** army for their use of guerrilla tactics. After the victory, the **Maccabees entered Jerusalem in triumph and ritually cleansed the Temple, reestablishing traditional Jewish worship there and installing Jonathan Maccabee as high priest**. A large Seleucid army was sent to quash the revolt, but returned to Syria on the death of **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**. Its commander Lysias, preoccupied with internal Syrian affairs, agreed to a political compromise that restored religious freedom.

The Jewish festival of **Hanukkah** celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple following Judah Maccabee's victory over the Seleucids. According to Rabbinic tradition, the victorious **Maccabees** could only find a small jug of oil that had remained uncontaminated by virtue of a seal, and although it only contained enough oil to sustain the **Menorah** for one day, it miraculously lasted for eight days, by which time further oil could be procured.

Maccabean rule

Following the re-dedication of the temple, the supporters of the **Maccabees** were divided over the question of whether to continue fighting or not. When the revolt began under the leadership of **Mattathias**, it was seen, in the view of the author of the **First Book of Maccabees**, as a war for religious freedom to end the oppression of the **Seleucids**. However, as the Maccabees realized how successful they had been, many wanted to continue the revolt and conquer other

lands with Jewish populations or to convert their peoples. This policy exacerbated the divide between the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees** under later Hasmonean monarchs such as Alexander Jannaeus. Those who sought the continuation of the war were led by **Judah Maccabee**.

On his death in battle in **160 BC**, Judah was succeeded as army commander by his younger brother, Jonathan, who was already High Priest. Jonathan made treaties with various foreign states, causing further dissent between those who merely desired religious freedom and those who sought greater power.

In **142 BC** Jonathan was assassinated by Diodotus Tryphon, a candidate to the **Seleucid throne**, and was succeeded by **Simon Maccabee**, the last remaining son of Mattathias. **Simon Maccabee** gave support to Demetrius II Nicator, the **Seleucid king**, and in return Demetrius exempted the **Maccabees** from tribute (taxation). **Simon** conquered the port of Joppa and the fortress of Gezer and expelled the **Seleucid** garrison from the **Acra in Jerusalem**.

NOTE: The **Acra** was a fortified compound in Jerusalem built by **Antiochus Epiphanes**, ruler of the **Seleucid Empire**, following his sack of the city in 168 BC. The fortress played a significant role in the events surrounding the Maccabean Revolt and the formation of the Hasmonean Kingdom. It was destroyed by Simon Maccabeus during this struggle.

In **140 BC**, **Simon Maccabee** was recognized by an assembly of the priests, leaders and elders as high priest, military commander and ruler of Israel. Their decree became the basis of the Hasmonean kingdom. Shortly after, the **Roman senate** renewed its alliance with the Hasmonean kingdom and commanded its allies in the eastern Mediterranean to do so also. Although the **Maccabees** won autonomy, the region remained a province of the **Seleucid Empire** and Simon was required to provide troops to **Antiochus VII Sidetes**, the brother of **Demetrius II**. When Simon refused to give up the territory he had conquered, **Antiochus VII Sidetes** took them by force.

Simon Maccabee was murdered in **134 BC** by his son-in-law **Ptolemy**, and was succeeded as high priest and king by his son **John Hyrcanus I.** **Antiochus VII Sidetes** conquered the entire district of Judea, but refrained from attacking the Temple or interfering with Jewish observances. Judea was freed from **Seleucid** rule on the death of **Antiochus VII Sidetes** in **129 BC**.

Hasmonean rule lasted until **63 BC**, when the Roman general **Pompey** captured Jerusalem and subjected Israel to Roman rule, while the Hasmonean dynasty itself ended in **37 BC** when **Herod the Great** **became king of Israel** and king of the Jews.