

THE MACCABEES

Mattathias the Hasmonean, sparked the revolt against the Seleucid (Grecian) Empire (specifically Antiochus IV Epiphanes) 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 as priest. He and his five sons then fled to the wilderness of Judah.

After Mattathias' death about one year later in 166 B.C., his son Judah Maccabee led an army of Jewish dissidents to victory over the Seleucid (Grecian) dynasty in guerrilla warfare, which at first was directed against Hellenizing Jews, of whom there were many.

The Maccabees destroyed pagan altars erected by Hellenistic Jews in the villages and once again began to circumcise their children that had been prohibited for them to do by the Grecian ruler. This forced the orthodox Jews into becoming outlaws in their own country.

The revolt itself involved many battles in which the Maccabean forces gained notoriety among the Syrian army for their use of guerrilla tactics. After their victory the Maccabees entered Jerusalem in triumph and ritually cleansed the Temple on December 25 164 B.C., they reestablished traditional Jewish worship in Israel and placed Jonathan Maccabee as high priest.

The cleansing of the temple and the renewing of sacrifices on the altar is known as The Feast of Hanukkah or the Feast of Dedication celebrated each 25th day of December by the Jews.

A large Syrian army was sent to quash this revolt but returned to Syria upon the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The Syrian army commander Lysias, preoccupied with internal Syrian affairs following the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, agreed to a political compromise that restored religious freedom for Israel.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was in Persia, went insane and died suddenly in 165 BC. He was fighting against the Parthians to reestablish his eastern Grecian trade routes to Persia that had been overtaken by the Parthians.