

The First Book of Maccabees

This book tells of the Jewish struggle for religious and political independence against the Seleucid kings.

The Seleucid Empire (312 – 63 BC) was a Hellenistic empire, i.e. a successor state of Alexander the Great's empire.

The Seleucid Empire was centered in the near East and at the height of its power included central Anatolia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, Persia, today's Turkmenistan, Pamir and parts of Pakistan.

It was a major centre of Hellenistic culture which maintained the preeminence of Greek customs and where a Greek-speaking Macedonian élite dominated, mostly in the urban areas. ([Wikipedia](#))

Chapter 1

Some Jews abandoned their religion and made a pact with King Antiochus Epiphanes, a Seleucid king of the Greeks. Antiochus conquered many lands, including Israel. He plundered the Temple and forced the Jews to renounce their religion.

But many Jews courageously stood firm and were punished with death.

This was a sad and terrible time for Israel.

Dear God, please help us stay faithful to you

Chapter 2

Mattathias was a Jew loyal to his religion at a time when most people were not loyal.

When the king's representative came to the town of Mattathias and started forcing people to take part in pagan ceremonies, Mattathias killed the representative.

Mattathias then called on everyone loyal to God to join him in the desert.

Mattathias soon had a small army which gradually won control of many parts of the country and restored observance of God's law.

When Mattathias was coming to the end of his life he appointed his son Judas as his army successor.

Dear God, help us to be loyal to you like Mattathias

Chapter 3

Judas led the people in many successful battles. He often said that it is easy for a great number of soldiers to be defeated by a few.

"Victory in war does not depend on the size of an army.
It is from heaven that strength comes."

As Judas' fame spread,
King Antiochus ordered a huge army to attack Judas.

Dear God, please help us put our trust in you
rather than in anyone or anything else

Chapter 4

The army of Antiochus was led by Gorgias and had 40,000 men. Judas and his men numbered only 3,000.

Judas implored God for help and then fought bravely.
The army of Gorgias was routed.

The next year another force, numbering 60,000 men,
was sent against Judas who had 10,000 men.

Once again by prayer and courage, Judas was victorious.
Judas gave thanks to God, and then went to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem Judas re-dedicated the Temple
and re-built the city walls.

Dear God, please give me the courage of Judas

Chapters 5, 6

As the years went on, several nearby countries made war
on Israel. But Judas and his followers used prayer
and courage to defeat all enemies.

When King Antiochus heard of Judas' continued victories,
he became severely depressed and realized he was dying.

The king's son succeeded him
and he too sent a huge army against Israel.

This army also failed to defeat Judas. The king then made
peace with the Jews and for a time there was peace.

Dear God, please help all nations to live in peace

Chapter 7

Some Jews who were disloyal to Judas joined with supporters of the new king, Demetrius, to plot the overthrow of Judas.

Nicanor, one of the king's generals, was sent to defeat Judas and exterminate the Jews.

But when the battle took place, Nicanor himself died and his army was routed.

Once again the land experienced peace for a while.

Dear God, please protect us from people
who are disloyal

Chapter 8

Judas had heard about the Romans: how they had conquered many lands and yet acted in a friendly way to other nations.

Judas therefore sent representatives to Rome and an alliance was agreed to with the Romans.

Judas' aim was to obtain protection and peace for Israel.

Dear God, may peace and justice be the aim of all leaders

Chapter 9

King Demetrius sent another army against Israel. The size of this army was so large that many of Judas' soldiers deserted him.

Judas had only a small force to fight the king's army. Judas could have saved his life by running away from the battle, but he courageously chose to stay and fight.

Judas died in the battle and his troops fled.

Judas' brother Jonathan succeeded him as leader of the Jews. Jonathan gradually reclaimed control of most of the country and again there was peace for a time.

Dear God, please give me some of the courage of Judas

Chapter 10

When King Demetrius was challenged for the throne by Alexander, Demetrius tried to get Jonathan's support for a possible war with Alexander.

Alexander then also sought Jonathan's support, and appointed him as high priest of Israel.

Demetrius again tried to win Jonathan's support, but Jonathan and the Jews did not trust Demetrius.

Alexander and Demetrius went to war. Demetrius died in the battle.

Alexander then became king.

He married Cleopatra, daughter of Egypt's Ptolemy, thus securing a treaty with Egypt.

Jonathan met Alexander and Ptolemy and was given great honor in their presence.

About 147 B.C. Demetrius son of Demetrius challenged Alexander for the throne.

This younger Demetrius also challenged Jonathan to fight.

Jonathan defeated the army of Demetrius.

Alexander then gave Jonathan new honors.

Dear God, please help all countries live at peace
with each other

Chapter 11

King Ptolemy of Egypt pretended to be friends with Alexander. But then he went to war with Alexander.

Ptolemy's army won the battle, but not long after both Ptolemy and Alexander died.

Demetrius then became king. He had an unstable relationship with Jonathan even though Jonathan on one occasion rescued him from former supporters of Alexander.

Demetrius was replaced as king by a young Antiochus. Antiochus confirmed Jonathan's position as leader of Israel.

Dear God, please stop countries from fighting each other

Chapter 12

Jonathan sent a delegation to Rome to renew his treaty with the Romans. He also renewed treaties with other groups, all the time using politics to secure peace for Israel.

But Demetrius once again made war on Jonathan, this time with a larger army than before.

Jonathan bravely faced and defeated Demetrius' army before they could enter the land of Israel.

Not long after this Jonathan was tricked and captured by Trypho who wanted to become king of Asia, replacing Antiochus.

Dear God, please give wisdom and courage to all leaders

Chapters 13, 14

After Jonathan's capture, Jonathan's brother Simon became leader of the Jews. He rallied the people to defend their land against an attack by Trypho.

Trypho was forced to abandon his attack by a heavy snowfall.

As he returned to his own land, he killed Jonathan.

Trypho killed Antiochus and became king of Asia.

Simon made peace with Demetrius.

He also renewed the treaties with Sparta and the Romans.

Israel had peace during the time of Simon.

Dear God, please give the world leaders
who work for peace

Chapter 15

In 138 B.C., Antiochus son of Demetrius made war with Trypho. This same Antiochus became hostile to Simon after the Romans renewed their treaty with Israel.

When Antiochus sent an army to attack Israel, Simon defeated that army.

A disloyal and ambitious Jew named Ptolemy got Simon and two of his sons drunk at a banquet and killed them.

Simon was succeeded by his son John as leader of the Jews.

Dear God, please protect good leaders from disloyalty