

Kingdom of God

God's Covenant with Abraham

On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates - the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." (Gen 15:18-21)

God's Covenant with David

"Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten Him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from Him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." ' "

According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. (2Sa 7:8-17)

King Nebuchadnezzar's dream

"This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all - you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom of silver, inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold - the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure." (Dan 2:36-45)

From history we know that the kingdom of gold was Nebuchadnezzar's, the Babylonian Empire; the kingdom of silver was Cyrus', king of the Persian Empire; the kingdom of bronze was Alexander the Great's, the Greek Empire; and the kingdom of iron was the Roman Empire. All these empires ruled over the region, from the river of Egypt to the River Euphrates. At the time of Jesus, the Romans allowed the Jews to rule in places, subject to the governing authority of Rome. This is the kingdom of mixed iron and clay.

Christ is the Rock

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." (Mat 21:43-44)

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. (1Co 10:1-4)

His kingdom will have no end

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luk 1:30-33)

Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.' " Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. (Mat 3:1-4)

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mat 4:17)

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mar 1:14-15)

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist. (Mat 16:24 - 17:13)

And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. (Mar 9:1-4)

Present = Introduce; Put a thing into the presence of a person.

"But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God." Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luk 9:27-31)

Destroy the Temple

So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (Joh 2:18-21)

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (Joh 18:36-37)

Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. (Joh 19:19)

The Old Covenant ends, and the Temple of stone becomes obsolete, when the veil of the Temple is torn, and the way into the Holy of Holies is opened for all Christians to enter.

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mat 27:50-54)

And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (Mar 15:37-39)

Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last. So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" (Luk 23:44-47)

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. (Mat 28:1-8)

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:19-25)

Christians are now the temple of God

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (1Co 3:16-17)

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2Co 6:14 -7:1)

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (Rom 9:30-33)

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19-22)

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1Pe 2:4-10)

The Temple of stone in Jerusalem became obsolete when Jesus was crucified, so the prophecy of Daniel regarding the desecration of the Temple, and its cleansing again 2300 days later, had to be fulfilled before the crucifixion of Jesus in 31AD.

The Vision of a Ram and a Goat

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me - to me, Daniel - after the one that appeared to me the first time. I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last.

I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great. And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking,

"How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?"

And he said to me,

"For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

(Daniel 8:1-14)

Gabriel interprets the Vision

Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said,

"Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."

So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me,

"Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end."

Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright. And he said,

"Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be."

"The ram which you saw, having the two horns - they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.

And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human means. And the vision of the evenings and mornings which was told is true; therefore seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future."

And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.

(Daniel 8:15-27)

Maccabees

Alexander the Great

This history begins when Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedonia, marched from Macedonia and attacked Darius, king of Persia and Media. Alexander enlarged the Greek Empire by defeating Darius and seizing his throne. He fought many battles, captured fortified cities, and put the kings of the region to death. As he advanced to the ends of the earth, he plundered many nations; and when he had conquered the world, he became proud and arrogant. By building up a strong army, he dominated whole nations and their rulers, and forced everyone to pay him taxes. When Alexander had been emperor for twelve years, he fell ill and realized that he was about to die. He called together his generals, noblemen who had been brought up with him since his early childhood, and divided his empire, giving a part to each of them. After his death, the generals took control, and each had himself crowned king of his own territory. The descendants of these kings ruled for many generations and brought a great deal of misery on the world.

(1Mc 1:1-9)

Antiochus Epiphanes and the Renegade Jews

The wicked ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus the third of Syria, was a descendant of one of Alexander's generals. Antiochus Epiphanes had been a hostage in Rome before he became king of Syria in the year 137. At that time there appeared in the land of Israel a group of traitorous Jews who had no regard for the Law and who had a bad influence on many of our people. They said,

"Let's come to terms with the Gentiles, for our refusal to associate with them has brought us nothing but trouble."

This proposal appealed to many people, and some of them became so enthusiastic about it that they went to the king and received from him permission to follow Gentile customs. They built in Jerusalem a stadium like those in the Greek cities. They had an operation performed to hide their circumcision, abandoned the holy covenant, started associating with Gentiles, and did all sorts of other evil things. *(1Mc 1:10-15)*

Jason introduces Greek customs

Later, when King Seleucus died and Antiochus (known as Epiphanes) became king, Jason the brother of Onias became High Priest by corrupt means. He went to see the king and offered him 12,000kg of silver with 2,700kg more to be paid later. Jason also offered him an additional 5,000kg of silver for the authority to establish a stadium where young men could train and to enrol the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch.

The king gave his approval, and just as soon as Jason took over the office of High Priest, he made the people of Jerusalem change to the Greek way of life. He began by abolishing the favours that John had secured for the Jews from previous Syrian kings. (John was the father of the Eupolemus who later went to Rome to make an alliance and to establish ties of friendship.) Jason also did away with our Jewish customs and introduced new customs that were contrary to our Law. With great enthusiasm he built a stadium near the Temple hill and led our finest young men to adopt the Greek custom of participating in athletic events. Because of the unrivalled wickedness of Jason, that ungodly and illegitimate High Priest, the craze for the Greek way of life and for foreign customs reached such a point that even the priests lost all interest in their sacred duties. They lost interest in the Temple services and neglected the sacrifices. Just as soon as the signal was given, they would rush off to take part in the games that were forbidden by our Law. They did not care about anything their ancestors had valued; they prized only Greek honours. And this turned out to be the source of all their troubles, for the very people whose ways they admired and whose customs they tried to imitate became their enemies and oppressed them. It is a serious thing to disregard God's Law, as you will see from the following events. (2Mc 4:7-17)

Jerusalem under Syrian influence

Once when the king was present for the athletic games that were held every five years in the city of Tyre, that worthless Jason sent some men there from Jerusalem, who were also enrolled as citizens of Antioch, to take 10,000kg of silver to pay for a sacrifice to the god Hercules. But even these men did not think it was fitting to use such a large sum of money for a sacrifice, and so the money originally intended as a sacrifice to Hercules was used for the construction of warships. When Apollonius son of Menestheus was sent to Egypt to attend the crowning of Philometor as king, Antiochus learnt that Philometor was opposed to his policies. Antiochus became concerned about the security of his own kingdom, so he went to Joppa and then on to Jerusalem. There he was welcomed with great splendour by Jason and the people of the city who went out to greet him, shouting and carrying torches. From Jerusalem Antiochus led his army to Phoenicia. (2Mc 4:18-22)

Antiochus attacks Jerusalem

When the news of what had happened in Jerusalem reached Antiochus, he thought the whole country of Judaea was in revolt, and he became as furious as a wild animal. So he left Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm, giving his men orders to cut down without mercy everyone they met and to slaughter anyone they found hiding in the houses. They murdered everyone - men and women, boys and girls; even babies were butchered. Three days later Jerusalem had lost 80,000 people: 40,000 killed in the attack and at least that many taken away to be sold as slaves. But Antiochus was still not satisfied. He even dared to enter the holiest Temple in all the world, guided by Menelaus, who had become a traitor both to his religion and to his people. With filthy and unholy hands, Antiochus swept away the sacred utensils and the gifts which other kings had given to increase the glory and honour of the Temple. He was so thrilled with his conquest that he did not realize that the Lord had let His holy Temple be defiled because the sin of the people of Jerusalem had made Him angry for a while. If the people of Jerusalem had not been involved in so many sins, Antiochus would have been punished immediately and prevented from taking such a foolish action.

He would have suffered the same fate as Heliodorus, who was sent by King Seleucus to inspect the treasury. But the Lord did not choose His people for the sake of His Temple; He established His Temple for the sake of His people. So the Temple shared in the people's suffering but also later shared in their prosperity. The Lord abandoned it when He became angry, but restored it when His anger had cooled down. (2Mc 5:11-20)

Another attack against Jerusalem

Antiochus took 62,000kg of silver from the Temple and hurried off to Antioch. Such was his arrogance that he felt he could make ships sail across dry land or troops march across the sea. He appointed governors to cause trouble for the people. In Jerusalem he placed Philip, a man from Phrygia who was more evil than Antiochus himself. At Mount Gerizim he placed Andronicus. In addition to these, there was Menelaus, who ill-treated his fellow-Jews far worse than the governors did. Antiochus hated the Jews so much that he sent an army of 22,000 mercenary troops from Mysia to Jerusalem under the command of a man named Apollonius, with orders to kill every man in the city and to sell the women and boys as slaves.

Apollonius arrived in Jerusalem, pretending to be on a peace mission. Then on a Sabbath, when all the Jews were observing the day of rest, he led his troops, who were fully armed, in a parade outside the city. Suddenly he commanded his men to kill everyone who had come out to see them. They rushed into the city and murdered a great many people. But Judas Maccabaeus and about nine others escaped into the barren mountains, where they lived like wild animals. In order not to defile themselves, they ate only the plants which they found growing there. (2Mc 5:21-27)

The Jews are persecuted because of their faith

Not long after that, the king sent an elderly Athenian to force the Jews to abandon their religion and the customs of their ancestors. He was also to defile their Temple by dedicating it to the Olympian god Zeus. The temple on Mount Gerizim was to be officially named "Temple of Zeus the God of Hospitality", as the people who lived there had requested. The oppression was harsh and almost intolerable. Gentiles filled the Temple with drinking parties and all sorts of immorality. They even had intercourse with prostitutes there. Forbidden objects were brought into the Temple, and the altar was covered with detestable sacrifices prohibited by our Law.

It was impossible to observe the Sabbath, to celebrate any of the traditional festivals, or even so much as to admit to being a Jew. Each month when the king's birthday was celebrated, the Jews were compelled by brute force to eat the intestines of sacrificial animals. Then, during the festival in honour of the wine god Dionysus, they were required to wear ivy wreaths on their heads and march in procession. On the advice of Ptolemy, the neighbouring Greek cities were also instructed to require Jews to eat the sacrifices; they were told to put to death every Jew who refused to adopt the Greek way of life. It was easy to see that hard times were ahead. For example, two women were arrested for having their babies circumcised. They were paraded round the city with their babies hung from their breasts; then they were thrown down from the city wall. On another occasion, Philip was told that some Jews had gathered in a nearby cave to observe the Sabbath in secret. Philip attacked and burnt them alive. They had such respect for the Sabbath that they would not fight to defend themselves. (2Mc 6:1-11)

Antiochus now issued a decree that all nations in his empire should abandon their own customs and become one people. All Gentiles and even many of the Israelites submitted to this decree. They adopted the official pagan religion, offered sacrifices to idols, and no longer observed the Sabbath. The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judaea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt-offerings, grain-offerings, or wine-offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king's decree was death. The king not only issued the same decree throughout his whole empire, but he also appointed officials to supervise the people and commanded each town in Judaea to offer pagan sacrifices. Many of the Jews were ready to forsake the Law and to obey these officials. They defiled the land with their evil, and their conduct forced all true Israelites to hide wherever they could.

On the 15th day of the month of Kislev in the year 145, King Antiochus set up "The Awful Horror" on the altar of the Temple, and pagan altars were built in the towns throughout Judaea. Pagan sacrifices were offered in front of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burnt, and anyone who was caught with a copy of the sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king. Month after month these wicked officials used their power against the Israelites caught in the towns.

On the 25th of the month, they offered sacrifices on the pagan altar erected on top of the altar in the Temple. Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put to death in accordance with the king's decree. Their babies were hung round their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death. But many people in Israel firmly resisted the king's decree and refused to eat food that was ritually unclean. They preferred to die rather than break the holy covenant and eat unclean food - and many did die. In His anger God made Israel suffer terribly.
(1Mc 1:41-63)

The faithfulness of Mattathias

During that time, a priest of the Jehoiarib family named Mattathias, who was the son of John and the grandson of Simeon, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. Mattathias had five sons: John (also called Gaddi), Simon (also called Thassi), Judas (also called Maccabaeus), Eleazar (also called Avaran), and Jonathan (also called Apphus). When Mattathias saw all the sins that were being committed in Judaea and Jerusalem, he said:

"Why was I born to see these terrible things, the ruin of my people and of the holy city? Must I sit here helpless while the city is surrendered to enemies and the Temple falls into the hands of foreigners? The Temple is like a man without honour. Its splendid furnishings have been carried away as loot. Our children have been killed in the streets, and our young men by the sword of the enemy.

Every nation in the world has occupied the city and robbed her of her possessions. All her ornaments have been stripped away; she is now a slave, no longer free. Look at our Temple, profaned by the Gentiles, emptied of all its splendour. Why should we go on living?"

In his grief, Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and continued in deep mourning. Then the king's officials, who were forcing the people to turn from God, came to the town of Modein to force the people there to offer pagan sacrifices. Many of the Israelites came to meet them, including Mattathias and his sons. The king's officials said to Mattathias,

"You are a respected leader in this town, and you have the support of your sons and relatives. Why not be the first one here to do what the king has commanded? All the Gentiles, the people of Judaea, and all the people left in Jerusalem have already done so. If you do, you and your sons will be honoured with the title of 'Friends of the King', and you will be rewarded with silver and gold and many gifts."

Mattathias answered in a loud voice,

"I don't care if every Gentile in this empire has obeyed the king and yielded to the command to abandon the religion of his ancestors. My sons, my relatives and I will continue to keep the covenant that God made with our ancestors. With God's help we will never abandon His Law or disobey His Commands. We will not obey the king's decree, and we will not change our way of worship in the least."

Just as he finished speaking, one of the men from Modein decided to obey the king's decree and stepped out in front of everyone to offer a pagan sacrifice on the altar that stood there. When Mattathias saw him, he became angry enough to do what had to be done. Shaking with rage, he ran forward and killed the man right there on the altar. He also killed the royal official who was forcing the people to sacrifice, and then he tore down the altar. In this way Mattathias showed his deep devotion for the Law, just as Phinehas had done when he killed Zimri son of Salu (*see Num 25:1-15*).

Then Mattathias went through the town shouting,

"Everyone who is faithful to God's covenant and obeys his Law follow me!"

With this, he and his sons fled to the mountains, leaving behind all they owned.

At that time also many of the Israelites who were seeking to be right with God through obedience to the Law went out to live in the wilderness, taking their children, their wives, and their livestock with them, because of the terrible oppression they were suffering. (*1Mc 2:1-30*)

The Guerilla Warfare of Mattathias

Then Mattathias and his friends were joined by a group of devout and patriotic Jews, the strongest and bravest men in Israel, who had all volunteered to defend the Law. In addition, everyone who was fleeing from the persecution joined them and strengthened their forces. Now that they had an army, they gave vent to their anger by attacking the renegade Jews. Those who escaped were forced to flee to the Gentiles for safety. Mattathias and his friends went everywhere tearing down pagan altars and circumcising by force every uncircumcised boy they found within the borders of Israel. They were also successful in hunting down the arrogant Gentile officials. They rescued the Law of Moses from the Gentiles and their kings and broke the power of the wicked King Antiochus. (*1Mc 2:39-48*)

The Purification of the Temple

Judas and his brothers said,

"Now that our enemies have been defeated, let's go to Jerusalem to purify the Temple and rededicate it."

So the whole army was assembled and went up to Mount Zion. There they found the Temple abandoned, the altar profaned, the gates burnt down, the courtyards overgrown with a forest of weeds, and the priests' rooms torn down. In their sorrow, they tore their clothes, cried loudly, threw ashes on their heads, and fell face downwards on the ground. When the signal was given on the trumpets, everyone cried out to the Lord. Then Judas ordered some of his soldiers to attack the men in the fort, while he purified the Temple. He chose some priests who were qualified and who were devoted to the Law. They purified the Temple and took the stones that had been defiled and put them in an unclean place. They discussed what should be done with the altar of burnt-offerings, which had been desecrated by the Gentiles, and decided to tear it down, so that it would not stand there as a monument to their shame.

So they tore down the altar and put the stones in a suitable place on the Temple hill, where they were to be kept until a prophet should appear and decide what to do with them. Then they took uncut stones, as the Law of Moses required, and built a new altar like the old one. They repaired the Temple, inside and out, and dedicated its courtyards. They made new utensils for worship and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table for the bread into the Temple. They burnt incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and there was light in the Temple! They placed the loaves of bread on the table, hung the curtains, and completed all the work.

The 25th day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev, in the year 148 was the anniversary of the day the Gentiles had desecrated the altar. (Exactly 3 years to the day!)

On that day a sacrifice was offered on the new altar in accordance with the Law of Moses. The new altar was dedicated and hymns were sung to the accompaniment of harps, lutes, and cymbals. All the people bowed down with their faces to the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord for giving them victory. For eight days they celebrated the rededication of the altar. With great joy they brought burnt-offerings and offered fellowship-offerings and thank-offerings. They decorated the front of the Temple with gold crowns and shields, rebuilt the gates and the priests' rooms and put doors on them. Now that the Jews had removed the shame which the Gentiles had brought, they held a great celebration. Then Judas, his brothers, and the entire community of Israel decreed that the rededication of the altar should be celebrated with a festival of joy and gladness at the same time each year, beginning on the 25th of the month of Kislev and lasting eight days. Then they built high walls and strong towers round Mount Zion, so that the Gentiles could not come in and trample and defile it again. Judas placed a detachment of soldiers there to guard the Temple. He also fortified the town of Bethzur, so that the people of Israel would have a fortress facing Idumea.

(1Mc 4:36-61)

Judas Maccabaeus and his followers, under the leadership of the Lord, recaptured the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. They tore down the altars which foreigners had set up in the marketplace and destroyed the other places of worship that had been built. They purified the Temple and built a new altar. Then, with new fire started by striking flint, they offered sacrifice for the first time in two years, burnt incense, lit the lamps, and set out the sacred loaves. After they had done all this, they lay face downwards on the ground and prayed that the Lord would never again let such disasters strike them. They begged Him to be merciful when he punished them for future sins and not hand them over any more to barbaric, pagan Gentiles.

They rededicated the Temple on the 25th day of the month of Kislev, the same day of the same month on which the Temple had been desecrated by the Gentiles. The happy celebration lasted eight days, like the Festival of Shelters, and the people remembered how only a short time before, they had spent the Festival of Shelters wandering like wild animals in the mountains and living in caves. *(see Heb 11:38)*

But now, carrying green palm branches and sticks decorated with ivy, they paraded round, singing grateful praises to Him who had brought about the purification of His own Temple. Everyone agreed that the entire Jewish nation should celebrate this festival each year. *(2Mc 10:1-8)*

Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking,

"How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?"

And he said to me,

"For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

(Daniel 8:13-14)

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