CHAPTER 27

Daniel, 1–2 Maccabees

This chapter concerns Jewish writings composed in the Hellenistic era: the book of Daniel (and Greek additions to the book), and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Daniel is probably the latest composition in the Hebrew Bible. Like Ezra, it is written partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic. The Greek edition of the book includes passages and whole stories that are not attested in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, it contains the only example in the Hebrew Bible of a genre, apocalypse, that was of great importance for ancient Judaism and also for early Christianity. In Christian tradition, Daniel is regarded as the fourth of the major prophets, and the book follows those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. In the Hebrew Bible, however, Daniel is placed among the Writings. It may be that the canon of prophetic writings was already closed when Daniel was written. It may also be that the rabbis saw the book as having more in common with the Writings than with the Prophets.

As found in the Hebrew Bible, the book falls into two sections. The first six chapters are stories about Daniel and his friends, who were allegedly among the exiles deported from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The second half of the book, chapters 7–12, consists of a series of revelations to Daniel, which are explained to him by an angel. Strictly speaking, only the second half of the book is an apocalypse, but the stories in chapters 1–6 form an introduction that sets the scene. One of the oddities of the book is that the division by language does not fully coincide with the division by genre. Chapters 2:4b—7:28 are in Aramaic. Chapter 1 and chapters 8–12 are in Hebrew. It seems clear that the book was written in stages. The Aramaic stories in chapters 2–6 originally circulated independently. Chapter 1 was written as an introduction to these stories, presumably in Aramaic. The first of the visions, in chapter 7, was composed in Aramaic for continuity with the tales. The remaining chapters were added in Hebrew, presumably because of patriotic fervor at the time of the Maccabean revolt. The opening chapter was then translated into Hebrew, so that the beginning and end of the book would be in Hebrew, forming an *inclusio.* This explanation is, of course, hypothetical, but it gives a plausible account of the way the book took shape.

The Greek Additions to the book are of two kinds. Two poetic compositions, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, are inserted into chapter 3. The stories of Bel and the Dragon and of Susanna are freestanding stories analogous to the stories in chapters 1–6.

THE COURT TALES

The stories in Daniel 1–6 have much in common with the short stories in the Hebrew Bible, especially those of Joseph and Esther. Like these stories, they are "court tales": stories about Jews at the court of a foreign king. Like Esther, the stories in Daniel are set in the eastern Diaspora, and most probably originated there. Unlike Esther, however, Daniel is overtly pious, and the stories are punctuated with prayer and praise. Nonetheless, they share with Esther the concern about maintaining Jewish identity in a foreign land, in the service of a foreign king.

The tales tell the story of a group of young Judeans who were deported after the conquest of Jerusalem. Any attempt to derive historical information from these stories encounters insuperable problems. The opening verse dates the siege of Jerusalem to the third year of King Jehoiakim (606 B.C.E.). We know from other sources, both biblical and Babylonian, that Nebuchadnezzar did not besiege Jerusalem until 598/597, and Jehoiakim died before the siege began. Chapter 2 is set in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, which would require that he had conquered Jerusalem in his first year. Later chapters present problems that are even more glaring. Daniel 4 claims that Nebuchadnezzar was transformed into a beast for seven years. Chapter 5 presents a king of Babylon named Belshazzar. Belshazzar was a son of the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, and governed Babylon in the absence of his father. He was never king, however. Daniel goes on to say that after the death of Belshazzar, "Darius the Mede" received the kingdom. No such figure is known to history. Attempts to read these tales as history are misdirected. They are legends, full of miraculous elements (the fiery furnace, the lions' den). They are meant to inspire awe and wonder, and are not to be taken as factual accounts. It is unlikely that Daniel ever existed. A Daniel is mentioned in Ezek 14:14, 20, in conjunction with Noah and Job, as a legendary righteous person. He is also mentioned in Ezek 28:3 as a paradigmatic wise man ("are you wiser than Daniel?"). The Daniel of the book of Daniel, however, would have been a younger contemporary of Ezekiel. It is likely that the biblical author borrowed the name of the legendary hero and assigned it to a fictional Judean in the Babylonian exile.

The story of Daniel, then, is not historical. It is meant to be exemplary. Daniel is an exceptional Jew, who does things that the ordinary person cannot hope to imitate, but he models a lifestyle for Jews in the Diaspora. He strikes a fine balance between loyalty to his pagan rulers and fidelity to his God and to his religious tradition.

Daniel 2

By way of illustration of the court tales, I will consider chapter 2. The king has a dream and summons the Chaldeans (Babylonian diviners). He does not tell them the dream, but

demands that they tell both dream and interpretation. The demand is, in human terms, impossible, and can only be satisfied by divine intervention.

The king flies into a rage and orders that all the wise men be killed. This kind of hyperbolic reaction is typical of these stories. The king is a stock figure, like a character in a fairy tale. The execution order applies even to Daniel and his companions, who have not been consulted at all up to this point. Daniel, however, manages to get a stay of execution so that he can attempt to resolve the problem.

The Chaldean wise men are helpless in the face of the king's demand. Daniel, however, has a resource on which he can draw. He and his companions pray to the God of heaven, and the mystery is revealed to him in a dream or "vision of the night."

Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerns a giant statue composed of different metals: gold, silver, bronze, and iron mixed with clay. These are interpreted as representing a series of kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian kingdom is the head of gold—the golden age. Each of the succeeding kingdoms is inferior to the one that precedes it. The fourth kingdom is strong as iron and crushes everything, but it is mixed with clay, and so has a fatal weakness. In the end the entire statue is destroyed by a stone that becomes a mountain. Daniel interprets this to mean that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and will never be left to another people."

Babylonian clay brick from sixth century B.C.E. with the cuneiform inscription: "Nebuchadnezzar supports Esagila temple and temple", Birs Nimrud, Iraq. Now in the Hecht Museum, Haifa, Israel.

There are ancient parallels for the representation of history by a sequence of metals of declining value—in the Greek poet Hesiod, who wrote about 700 B.C.E., and in a Persian text, the Bahman Yasht, chapter 1. The schema by which ages or kingdoms were represented by metals was known in the ancient Near East.

Daniel's interpretation of the statue draws on another widely known pattern: the idea that a sequence of four kingdoms would be followed by a lasting fifth one. Several Greek and Roman sources describe the sequence as follows: first Assyria, second Media, third Persia, fourth Greece, and finally Rome. Daniel does not identify the four kingdoms, but their identity becomes clear as the book progresses. When the Babylonian kingdom falls at the end of chapter 5, the new ruler is called Darius the Mede. He is followed by Cyrus of Persia (6:28). The sequence starts over in chapter 7, which is dated to the first year of Belshazzar of Babylon. He is followed by Darius the Mede (9:1) and Cyrus of Persia (10:1), and Daniel is told that after the prince of Persia, the prince of Greece will come (10:20). The four kingdoms, then, are Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. Babylon replaces Assyria, because it was the Babylonians who conquered Jerusalem. The presence of Media, however, can be explained only by reference to the schema of the four kingdoms. Media never ruled over the Jews, and no such person as Darius the Mede ever existed. (There were three Persian kings called Darius, all after Cyrus.) Darius the Mede is invented to fit the traditional pattern of the sequence of kingdoms.

It is somewhat surprising in a Jewish text to find the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the king who had destroyed Jerusalem, depicted as a golden age. Nebuchadnezzar is Daniel's king, and some flattery is in order. He does not tell Nebuchadnezzar that the final kingdom will be Jewish; the king is free to think that it will be a Babylonian restoration. But Jewish readers know better. The mountain that develops out of the stone is Mount Zion, and the God of heaven is sure to favor his own people. Moreover, the whole statue, representing all Gentile sovereignty, will be brought crashing down. Nonetheless, Daniel is not suggesting rebellion. The promised kingdom will only come about long after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Eschatology is deferred. For the present, the Jews in Babylon are quite content in the service of the Gentile king.

Nebuchadnezzar expresses admiration for Daniel's god, and he appoints Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon. He does not seem to perceive the threatening character of the prophecy. The exaltation of the hero is part of the genre, a stock ending to a tale such as this. The ending of the story of Belshazzar in chapter 5 is even more incongruous. Belshazzar honors Daniel, even though he has predicted his imminent death.

The Purpose of the Tales

The tales in Daniel 1–6 have been aptly said to present "a lifestyle for the Diaspora." Their message to the Jews in exile is twofold: participate in the life of the Gentile world and be loyal to the king, but realize that your ultimate success depends on your fidelity to your God and his laws.

In the context of the book, the tales in chapters 1–6 establish the identity of Daniel, who presents his own visions in chapters 7–12. The way Daniel is described may provide a clue to the kind of people who produced this literature. He is a wise man who does some

of the same things as the Chaldeans but relies on the power of his God to reveal mysteries. He is not a prophet, and he only rarely strikes a prophetic note in addressing the Gentile kings. Neither is he the kind of wise man portrayed in Proverbs or Qoheleth. His wisdom consists in his ability to interpret dreams and other mysteries such as the writing on the wall (compare the story of Joseph). He has no quarrel with Gentile rule as such, for the present, although the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 expresses the hope that the Gentile kingdoms will eventually be overthrown.

THE VISIONS (DANIEL 7–12)

The visions in the second half of the book of Daniel differ from the tales in chapters 1–6 both in genre and in setting. Chapters 7 and 8 are symbolic visions in the prophetic tradition (cf. especially the visions of Zechariah). In each case the visions are interpreted to Daniel by an angel. In chapter 9 the revelation takes the form of the interpretation of an older prophecy from Jeremiah, but again the interpretation is given by an angel. In chapters 10–12 Daniel has a vision of an angel, who then narrates the revelation to him. In each case the revelation is eschatological, in the sense that it concerns the end of history. The final revelation ends with a prediction of resurrection and judgment. This is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that speaks unambiguously of individual resurrection. This hope is also expressed in 2 Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon, which are part of the Old Testament in the Roman Catholic tradition but are not included in the Hebrew Bible, since they were written in Greek.

The Genre Apocalypse

While angelic interpreters are also found in the prophetic visions of Zechariah, the combination of angelic revelation and transcendent eschatology (involving the judgment of individuals after death) constitutes a new genre in biblical literature. This genre, apocalypse, takes its name from the book of Revelation in the New Testament. There is an extensive apocalyptic literature from Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The book of *1 Enoch* contains no fewer than five apocalypses, all attributed to Enoch, who supposedly lived before the flood. Some of the Enoch apocalypses are older than Daniel, some roughly contemporary, and one, known as the *Similitudes of Enoch,* is later, most probably from the first century C.E. Another cluster of apocalypses, *4 Ezra* and *2* and *3 Baruch,* were composed at the end of the first century C.E., at about the same time as the book of Revelation. Several of these apocalypses, especially the *Similitudes of Enoch, 4 Ezra,* and Revelation, were directly influenced by Daniel. All the Jewish apocalypses are pseudepigraphic: their real authors are not named, but the works are attributed to famous people who had lived centuries earlier (or in the case of Enoch, thousands of years earlier). This device presumably added to the authority of the compositions. It also allowed the seer to "predict" many things that had actually happened by the time that the book was written and thereby to strengthen confidence in the real predictions.

The Setting of the Visions

The setting of Daniel 7–12 also differs from that of chapters 1–6. The tales are set in the Diaspora, and generally reflect an acceptance of Gentile rule. The visions, in contrast, are focused on events in Jerusalem, and reflect a time of persecution. While no names are mentioned, they point quite clearly to the persecution by the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168–164 B.C.E., which provoked the Maccabean revolt and which is described in 1 and 2 Maccabees. At that time Syrian forces occupied the Jerusalem temple and installed a pagan altar there. The pagan altar becomes known as "the desolating abomination" or "abomination of desolation" both in Dan 11:31 and in 1 Macc 1:54. Some Jews were put to death for observing the law of Moses (e.g., by having their sons circumcised) or for refusing to participate in pagan sacrifices. According to Deuteronomy, those who kept the law should prosper and live long lives. Now Jews were confronted with a situation where those who broke the law prospered and those who observed it risked losing their lives. It is against this backdrop that the visions of Daniel must be read.

Daniel 7

In chapter 7 Daniel has a terrifying dream, which is really a nightmare. He sees four great beasts rising from the sea. The fourth is especially terrifying. It grows horns, including one final upstart horn that is especially offensive. Then the scene changes to a heavenly throne room, where a judgment is held and the beasts are condemned. Then Daniel sees "one like a son of man," that is, one like a human being, coming on the clouds of heaven. This figure is given dominion and a kingdom that will never pass away.

This vision resembles Daniel 2 in some respects. Both visions involve four kingdoms and a final kingdom that will not pass away. But the imagery is very different. The first kingdom in chapter 2 was represented by a head of gold, and so could be thought to be a golden age. In chapter 7 all the kingdoms are beasts that arise from the sea.

This imagery draws on old mythic traditions that can be traced back to the Canaanite texts from Ugarit but that are also often reflected in the Hebrew Bible. In the Ugaritic myths, the Sea, Yamm, is a monster who challenges the authority of the god Baal and is crushed by him. In ancient Israel, YHWH, not Baal, is the God of life, and there are numerous allusions to a battle between him and the Sea and a monster that is called Rahab or Leviathan (Job 26:12-13; Isa 51:9-11). In Isa 27:1 the battle is projected into the future: "On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea." In this myth, which is quite different from the account of creation in Genesis but very similar to creation myths of the ancient Near East, the work of creation involves subduing the sea and killing its monsters. In Daniel 7 the beasts rise up again. The four kingdoms are portrayed as manifestations of primeval anarchy let loose upon the world.

In Dan 7:9 thrones are set up and a white-haired "Ancient of Days" appears, surrounded by thousands of servants. This figure is evidently God. It is surprising, then, when another figure appears "with the clouds of heaven." In the Hebrew Bible, the figure who rides on the clouds is always YHWH, the God of Israel (cf. Pss 68:5; 104:3). Yet in Daniel 7 this figure is clearly subordinate to the Ancient of Days. The juxtaposition of two divine figures

can be understood against the background of the Canaanite myth. There the high god was El, a venerable figure with a white beard. The young fertility god was Baal, who is called the "rider of the clouds" in the Ugaritic texts. In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH usually combines the roles of El and Baal. In Daniel 7, however, they are separated. The influence of the Canaanite mythic tradition is clearly evident in the relationships between the Ancient of Days, the rider of the clouds, and the beasts from the sea. We do not know in what form the author of Daniel 7 knew this tradition. Some of it is reflected in biblical poetry, but the author probably had sources that are no longer available to us. Of course he adapted the tradition. The rider of the clouds does not attack the Sea as Baal had attacked Yamm. The conflict is resolved by a divine judgment. And of course the Jewish author would not have identified the Ancient One and the rider of the clouds as El and Baal.

The identity of the "one like a son of man" (7:13, RSV) in its Jewish context is the most controversial issue in the book of Daniel. Traditional Christian exegesis assumed that this figure was Jesus Christ, because of the way the phrase "Son of Man" is used in the Gospels. This understanding of the figure could not have been available to Jews before the Christian era, although Daniel's son of man was identified as the messiah in both Jewish and Christian exegesis for many centuries. But there is no other reference in Daniel to a messiah (a king who would restore the kingdom of David). Over the last century or so, there have been two main interpretations of the "one like a son of man." Many scholars assume that this figure is simply a symbol for the Jewish people. The alternative, and more satisfactory, interpretation is that he is an angel, most probably the archangel Michael, who represents the Jewish people on the heavenly level.

The argument that the "one like a son of man" is the Jewish people takes the angel's interpretation as the point of departure. According to the interpretation, the four beasts are four kings or kingdoms. Then, "the holy ones of the Most High" will receive the kingdom. Some scholars assume that the "one like a son of man" is a symbol for the holy ones, who are then identified with the Jewish people. In the literature of this period, however, holy ones are nearly always angels. (Compare the "watcher and holy one" who announced Nebuchadnezzar's fate in Daniel 4.) Whenever else Daniel sees a "man" in his vision, the figure turns out to be an angel (see Dan 8:15; 9:21; 12:6-7). In Daniel 10, each people has a heavenly "prince" or protector. The "prince" of Israel was the archangel Michael.

Coin of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Most probably, it is Michael who is depicted as "one like a son of man" coming with the clouds of heaven.

Daniel 7 addresses the situation of the Jewish people under Antiochus Epiphanes. The offensive "little horn" is Epiphanes. The Jews are given into his power for "a time, two times, and half a time," or three and a half years. But eventually Israel's heavenly allies, the holy ones, prevail. The Jewish people are "the people of the holy ones of the Most High" who receive the lasting kingdom in 7:27.

Daniel's vision dramatizes the conflict in which the Jews found themselves in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. This crisis is worse than might be thought: it is nothing less than an eruption of primordial chaos. But it is also reassuring, for the end of the story is known. The holy ones will eventually prevail, and the Most High will pronounce judgment. The appropriate response on the part of the Jewish people is not to take up arms in its own defense but to wait for the deliverance from heaven. All of this will be spelled out more clearly in the last revelation of the book.

Daniel 10–12

The final revelation of the book spans chapters 10–12. Daniel 10:2-9 describes how Daniel has his vision, by fasting for three weeks. Whether the author of the book actually had visions in this way is something we cannot be sure of, but it seems plausible. Other apocalypses describe other techniques for inducing visions. For example, in *4 Ezra*, Ezra eats "the flower that is in the field" (2 Esd 9:24).

Daniel's vision in this case resembles that of Ezekiel in Ezek 8:2: a wonderful gleaming man, who turns out to be an angel. He is dressed in linen like a priest. He explains to Daniel the real nature of conflicts on earth. He is engaged in combat with the "prince of Persia," and after that the "prince of Greece" will come. Nobody helps him except "Michael your prince." Michael, prince of Israel, is the archangel. The princes of Persia and Greece are presumably the patron angels of those peoples. In earlier times they would be called simply "gods." Conflicts on earth are decided not just by human actions but by the actions of the gods or patron angels.

The angel proceeds to tell Daniel what is written in "the book of truth," a heavenly writing that is analogous to the tablets of destiny in Babylonian mythology. The course of history is predetermined. The history in question begins with the last kings of Persia and extends down to the second century B.C.E. No names are mentioned, in accordance with prophetic style, so the impression is given that the future is perceived dimly. Kings of Syria (the Seleucids, in the Hellenistic period) are called "the king of the north." Kings of Egypt (the Ptolemies) are called "the king of the south." In 11:21 "a contemptible person" will arise. This is Antiochus Epiphanes. Verses 25-28 describe Epiphanes' first invasion of Egypt, which took place in 170 B.C.E. and was relatively successful. Verse 29 describes his second invasion of Egypt, in 168, which was a disaster. He was confronted by the Romans (the Kittim) and ordered to withdraw. He obeyed. Daniel implies that he took out his frustration on Jerusalem. While the king was in Egypt, civil war had broken out in Jerusalem between the former high priest, Jason, and the current one, Menelaus (see 2 Macc 5:5-14). The king took it that Judea was in revolt, and sent in the troops.

After this, for reasons that remain controversial, Antiochus attempted to suppress the Jewish cult. Some Jews collaborated. Daniel says, "He shall seduce with intrigue those who violate the covenant" (11:32). The people who know their God, however, stand firm. The real heroes, from the viewpoint of Daniel, are the "wise" (Hebrew *maskilim*) who instruct the common people, even though some of them do so at the cost of their lives.

It is reasonable to suppose that the authors of Daniel belonged to the circle of "the wise." The instruction they gave to the masses presumably corresponded to the revelations of Daniel: that the human conflicts were only a reflection of conflicts on the supernatural level, and that the outcome was assured. Some scholars have argued that "the wise" should be identified with a party known as the Hasidim, who are mentioned three times in the books of Maccabees (1 Macc 2:42; 7:12-13; 2 Macc 14:6). We know very little about these people, except that they were militant supporters of the Maccabees. Daniel 11:34 says that the wise shall receive little help. This has often been interpreted as a slighting reference to the Maccabees. It is not clear, however, that Daniel would have regarded the Maccabees as any help at all. In his view, the battle would be won by the archangel Michael. The role of the Jews was to keep themselves pure and not do anything to obstruct their heavenly deliverer.

Daniel 11:40-45 describes the downfall of the king. Verse 45 claims that he would meet his death between the sea and the holy mountain, that is, in the land of Israel. This prophecy was not fulfilled. Antiochus Epiphanes died in Persia, from wounds received in an attempt to rob a temple, late in 164 B.C.E. The unfulfilled prophecy reveals the date of the composition of Daniel. All the "predictions" are correct down to the persecution. This part of the prophecy was presumably written after the fact and served to inspire confidence in the real prediction of the end of the story, which was yet to come. The prophecy must have been written before the news of Antiochus's death reached Jerusalem.

The death of the king is not the climax of the prophecy. According to Dan 12:1-3, "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise." Then all those written in the book of life would be delivered. Some would rise to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt. The wise would shine like the stars forever. We know from a passage in *1 Enoch* 104 that "to shine like the stars" means "to become companions of the angels." The idea of astral immortality, that some souls ascend to the stars after death, was well known in the Greek world. Daniel does not say that everyone will be raised, only the righteous and the wicked. Neither does he say that the resurrection will involve a body of flesh and blood. Daniel 12:2, which is usually taken to refer to "the dust of the earth," can better be translated as "the land of dust," or Sheol. The idea then is that the wise, at least, are lifted up from Sheol to heaven.

> *At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But as that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the*

dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

(Daniel 12:1-3)

The hope for resurrection explains why the wise could let themselves be killed in the time of persecution. The traditional hope in ancient Israel was for a long life and to see one's children's children. This hope was changed radically by the idea of resurrection to a glorious afterlife. The goal of life would henceforth be to become like the angels, so that one could live with them forever. This new hope is central to the apocalyptic literature. It figures prominently in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it was essential to the rise of Christianity. Of course, the transition in the nature of Jewish hope was not instantaneous and complete. Some Jews (e.g., the Sadducees) did not accept the idea of resurrection. Those who did believe in resurrection did not necessarily give up their old ideas about fulfillment on earth. But the idea of individual resurrection, which occurs in the Hebrew Bible for the first time in Daniel, introduced a kind of hope for the future that was radically new in the context of Jewish tradition, and that would have far-reaching consequences for the development of religion in the Western world.

Two final points from Daniel 10–12 require comment. In 12:4 Daniel is told to "keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end." We should not infer that the book of Daniel was to be kept secret. The time of the end was the time when the book was actually written. The command to keep it secret explained why these visions had not been known before the Maccabean period.

The second point concerns the calculation of the time of the end in 12:11-12. The first of these verses says: happy are those who persevere and attain the 1,290 days. The second says: happy are those who persevere and attain the 1,335 days. Two different numbers are placed side by side. A third number, 1,150, was given in chapter 8, and in that case it was clear that the number was counted from the time that the temple was profaned. The simplest explanation of the different numbers is that when the shorter number passed, a new calculation was made. This phenomenon is well known from the case of the Millerites in nineteenth-century America, who recalculated the end several times. In the case of Daniel, however, there is a further complication. All the figures given amount to more than three years, and may be taken as approximations of the time, times and half a time, or three and a half years mentioned elsewhere in the book. But according to 1 Maccabees, the temple was restored by Judas Maccabee exactly three years after it was profaned. It would seem that the author of Daniel's visions did not regard the Maccabean restoration as the "end." Most probably, he still awaited the resurrection of the dead.

1 AND 2 MACCABEES

The events in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.E.), which form the backdrop of the visions of Daniel, are described in 1 and 2 Maccabees. First Maccabees was most

CHART OF DATES IN HELLENISTIC PERIOD (ALL DATES B.C.E.)	
336–323	Campaigns of Alexander the Great
320–198	Judea ruled by Ptolemies of Egypt.
198-164	Judea conquered by Seleucids of Syria
175–164	Antiochus IV Epiphanes
175-168	Hellenistic reform in Jerusalem
168–167	Profanation of temple; Maccabean revolt
164	Rededication of temple by Judas Maccabee
164–63	Judea independent under Hasmoneans (descendants of Maccabees)
63	Conquest of Jerusalem by Roman general Pompey

probably written in Hebrew but is extant only in Greek and other translations. Second Maccabees was composed in Greek and was an abridgement of a longer history by Jason of Cyrene. It is somewhat ironic that these stories of Jewish liberation are not represented in the Hebrew Bible and owe their preservation to the Christian churches. Both books are canonical in the Roman Catholic tradition and are included in the Protestant Apocrypha.

FIRST MACCABEES

First Maccabees tells the story of the Maccabee family and their immediate descendants, the Hasmonean dynasty, who ruled Judea for approximately a century, down to the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C.E. The history in I Maccabees extends as far as the accession of John Hyrcanus in 135 B.C.E.

The events leading up to the Maccabean revolt are described rapidly in the opening chapter. Only brief notice is given to the "Hellenistic reform" by which "certain renegades" got permission from the king to follow the Gentile way of life. They then built a gymnasium in Jerusalem and "removed the marks of circumcision," presumably because they exercised nude, in the Greek fashion (1:11-15). First Maccabees, however, pays little further attention to these people. In this account the trouble results from unprovoked aggression by the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. First he pillaged Jerusalem. Two years later he sent a tax collector, who again plundered the city and established a citadel, in which he installed "a sinful people, men who were renegades" (1:34). Finally, "the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people and that all should give up their particular customs" (1:41-42). Consequently, a violent attempt was made to suppress the Jewish religion. Copies of the law were destroyed, people were put to death for having their sons circumcised, and the temple was profaned by the installation of the "profaning sacrilege," an altar on which pagan sacrifices were offered. The claim of I Maccabees,

that the king tried to impose uniformity on his whole kingdom, cannot be sustained. Antiochus Epiphanes was known to celebrate the multiplicity of deities worshiped in his kingdom. His repressive measures were directed only against the Jews.

According to 1 Maccabees, the revolt that broke out was inspired by fidelity to the covenant. It was initiated by Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees, who refused to offer pagan sacrifice and killed a Jew who came forward to do so. Thus we are told, "He burned with zeal for the law as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu" (2:26). (Cf. Numbers 25, where Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, kills an Israelite in the act of intercourse with a Midianite woman.)

The Maccabees, however, were prepared to qualify their adherence to the law. First Maccabees 2:29-38 tells of a group of pious Jews who withdrew to the wilderness to avoid the persecution. They were attacked on the Sabbath day. They refused to violate the Sabbath by defending themselves, and so they were slaughtered, calling on heaven and earth to witness that they were being killed unjustly. The invocation of heaven and earth is an allusion to Deuteronomy 32, which goes on to say, "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord" (Deut 32:35). Those who died on the Sabbath may have hoped that God would avenge them. Their mentality may have been similar to that of the "wise" in Daniel 11, who lay down their lives but are assured of vindication in the hereafter. When Mattathias and his friends heard of the slaughter on the Sabbath, they mourned for the victims, but they resolved that they would defend themselves on the Sabbath, lest the whole Jewish people be wiped from the earth. In doing so, they resolved to break the law for the greater good of the people. Not all pious Jews agreed with this decision. The dilemma, however, is one that has continued to confront Judaism down to modern times.

The remainder of 1 Maccabees recounts the heroic exploits of the Maccabean family.

SECOND MACCABEES

The book of 2 Maccabees offers a different perspective on the same events. The book begins with two letters to the Jews in Egypt, urging them to join in the celebration of the purification of the temple (Hanukkah). These letters are prefixed to the book proper, which begins at 2:19. Second Maccabees differs from 1 Maccabees in several respects:

1. It gives a much fuller account of the events leading up to the persecution, especially of the so-called Hellenistic reform.
2. It makes no mention of Mattathias and focuses on Judas Maccabee, rather than on the whole family.
3. Much of the credit for the success of the rebellion is given to the deaths of the martyrs, which may be regarded as the centerpiece of the book.
4. The story ends before the death of Judas, after one of his greatest victories, over the general Nicanor. (This victory is reported in 1 Macc 7:43-50.)

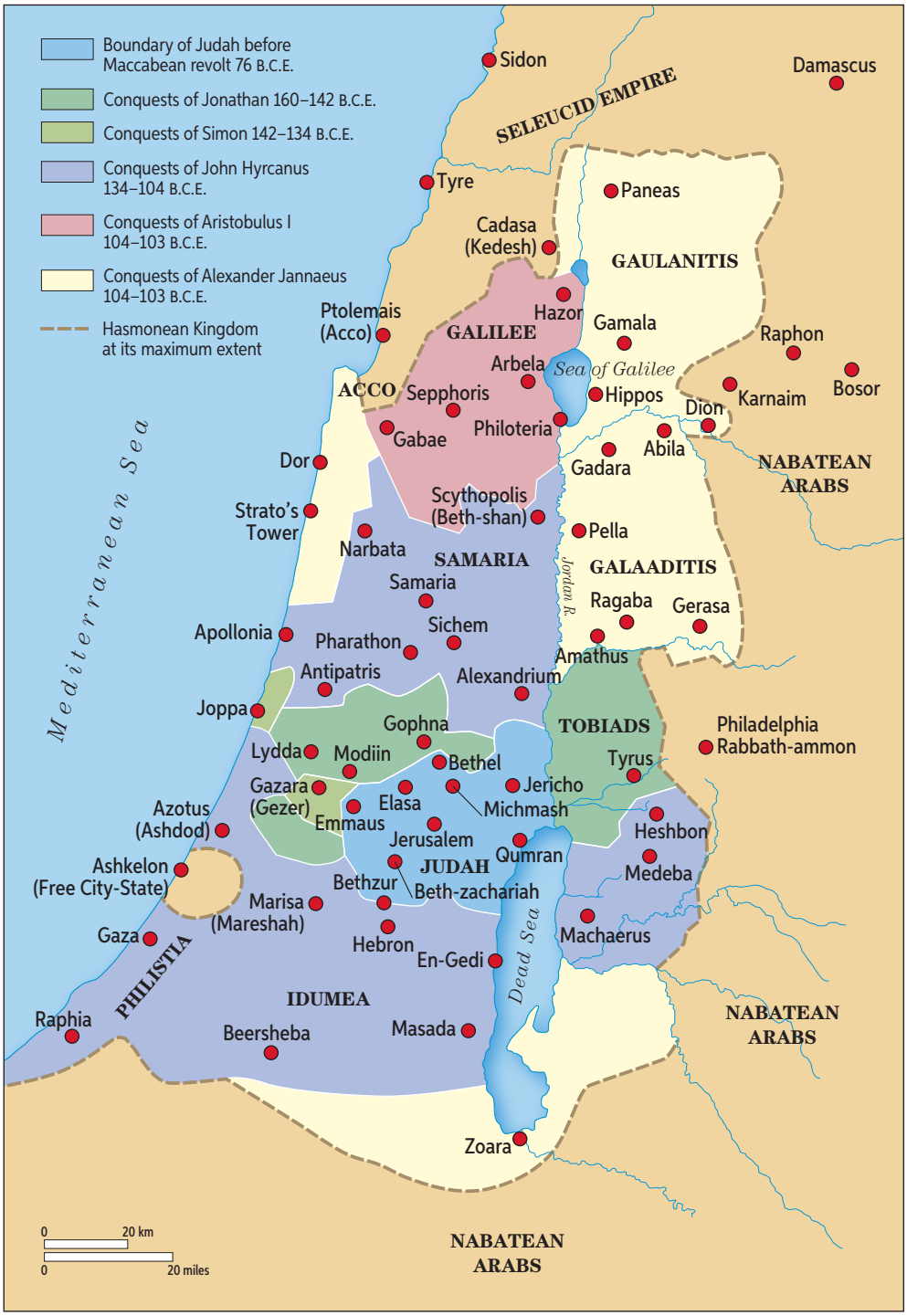
Chapter 4 provides an extensive account of the Hellenistic reform, which was described

Coin of John Hyrcanus, r. 134–104 B.C.E.

in a few verses in I Maccabees. A man named Jason, brother of the high priest Onias, obtained the high priesthood by bribing the king, and proceeded to build a gymnasium and introduce the Greek way of life in Jerusalem. (The word "Hellenism" is used here for the first time to refer to the Greek way of life.) Then a man named Menelaus, who was not of the high priestly family, outbid Jason and became high priest. Menelaus also contrived to have the legitimate high priest, Onias, murdered. When Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Egypt for the second time (in 168 B.C.E.), Jason attempted unsuccessfully to stage a coup. When the king heard of fighting in Jerusalem, he thought that the city was in revolt and sent in the troops. Shortly after this he took measures to suppress the Jewish religion. According to 2 Maccabees, the temple became a place where prostitutes had intercourse with Gentiles, and Jews were compelled to celebrate a festival in honor of the Greek god Dionysus.

The account of these events in 2 Maccabees is generally more satisfactory than that of I Maccabees. It becomes clear that the king's actions were not entirely unprovoked but were a response to what he perceived as rebellion on the part of the Jews. Nonetheless, the attempt to suppress the Jewish religion is extraordinary in antiquity. Some scholars suspect that the persecution may have been the idea of the renegade Menelaus, as a way of crushing the opposition of traditional Jews. All the ancient accounts, however, place the responsibility on the king. It may be, as some ancient authors suggest, that the king regarded the Jewish religion as barbaric. It was certainly highly distinctive in the ancient world, in its insistence on monotheism and rejection of idolatry. On this account, the king would have been trying to make it like a Greek cult, in effect, to "normalize" it. But there was no precedent in the Greek world for an attempt to suppress a cult in this manner. Better precedents, in fact, can be found in the biblical tradition, notably in the reform of King Josiah (2 Kings 22–23), which suppressed the cults of the Israelite high places.

In placing so much emphasis on the Hellenistic reform, 2 Maccabees represents the basic conflict as one between Hellenism and Judaism. Yet the "reforms" of Jason and the building of the gymnasium encountered no significant opposition. It was only when the



Maccabean-Hasmonean Palestine 166–76 B.C.E.

king attempted to suppress the traditional forms of Jewish worship that a revolt broke out. The essential conflict, then, was not over broad cultural issues but over the freedom of the Jewish people to practice their traditional religion as they saw fit.

Second Maccabees dwells at length on the deaths of the martyrs, and tells in gruesome detail the story of a mother and seven sons (chapter 7). The second brother says that "the king of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws" (2 Macc 7:9). The faith of the brothers, then, is essentially the same as that of the "wise" in Daniel: they give up their lives in this world in the hope of exaltation after death. In 2 Maccabees, however, the resurrection has a distinctly physical character. One brother offers his hands to be cut off, because he is confident that he will get them back again (7:11). The emphasis on bodily resurrection seems to be inspired by the circumstances of the story, where the bodies of the young men are subjected to torture.

Bronze coin issued under Antigonus II, last of the Hasmonean kings, showing the seven-branched menorah from the Temple. Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

In general, 2 Maccabees places much more emphasis on divine assistance than was the case in 1 Maccabees. This is why the deaths of the martyrs are effective. Angelic horsemen appear to assist the Jews in battle (11:8). There is much less emphasis here on the human achievements of the Maccabees.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of 2 Maccabees, however, lies in the stories of the martyrs. These stories served as blueprints for numerous similar tales in later Judaism and especially in Christianity. An early example is found in the book of 4 Maccabees, which is sometimes included in the Apocrypha, although it is not part of the Roman Catholic Bible. It is typical of these stories that the tyrant confronts the martyrs in person, and that the latter have an opportunity to affirm the beliefs for which they die. Second Maccabees 7 is also typical insofar as the conviction of the martyrs is grounded in the hope of resurrection.

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