

The Great Jewish Books Course

The Book of the Maccabees – Sefer Hachosmonaim

- A. What is it?
- a. Scholars seem to agree it was written towards end of 2nd Century BCE, fairly close to the Chanukah story
 - b. Written by a Jewish author in Hebrew, clearly from the perspective of the victorious Chashmonaim – referred to in Rabbinic Literature as Sefer HaChashmonaim
 - c. Details the rise of Greek King Antiochus and Hasmonaean rebellion led by Mattityahu and his 5 sons over about 40-45 years, until the death of Shimon his son.
 - i. Antiochus suspects the Jews are not loyal, levies heavy taxes, followed by a ban on Jewish ritual and Torah study, eventually plundering the Temple of its riches and defiling its sanctity with idols and pagan worship. Mattityahu was forced to sacrifice a pagan offering, instead killed the Greek officer and Hellenist Jew who made the offering, fled to the mountains and waged guerrilla warfare, eventually freeing the country and Jerusalem from Greek rule.
- B. The original Hebrew version has been lost; all that survived was the Greek translation from the Septuagint
- a. Greek King Ptolemy ordered 72 Jewish Scholars in 2-3rd century BCE to translate Torah into Greek
 - b. From that translated into the English versions today
- C. Isn't it a Christian Book?
- a. Yes, and no. It seems to have been written in the style of Megillat Esther with the hope of similar acceptance, and a shortened version based on it is called Megillat Antiochus exists, but was also never adopted.
 - b. Jewish Sages of the time never accepted it as part of Tanach. Era of Prophecy had ended 100-200 years prior, relegating this book to one of Historical interest, but not a Divinely inspired Book of Tanach
 - i. In addition to many issues Sages at the time had with the Hasmonean Dynasty (forced conversion of Idumeans, Priests serving as Kings) which utterly disappeared without a single descendant within a few generations.
 - c. It was adopted into the Catholic Canon which is how it is known today (though Protestant rejected it as too Jewish)
 - i. There are actually several different Books of the Maccabees

(1) Book of the Maccabees, Chapter 3

- 16 And they (Seron, captain of the army, with his troops) approached even as far as Bethoron: and Judah went forth to meet him, with a small company.
- 17 **But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judah: How shall we, being few, be able to fight against so great a multitude and so strong, and we are ready to faint with fasting today?**
- 18 **And Judah said: It is an easy matter for many to be hemmed up in the hands of a few: and there is no difference in the sight of the G-d of Heaven to deliver with many or by few:**
- 19 **For the success of war is not in the multitude of the army, but strength cometh from Heaven.**
- 20 They come against us with an insolent multitude, and with pride, to destroy us, and our wives, and our children, and to take our spoils.
- 21 But we will fight for our lives and our laws:
- 22 And the L-rd himself will overthrow them before our face: but as for you, fear them not.
- 23 And as soon as he had made an end of speaking, he rushed suddenly upon them: and Seron and his host were overthrown before him:

(2) We've seen this theme before (Part 1)

Samuel I, Chapter 14

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן אֶל־הַנָּעַר | נִשָּׂא כָלִיו לְכֹה וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶל־מִצֵּב הָעֵרְלִים הָאֵלֶּה אוּלַי יַעֲשֶׂה ה' לָנוּ כִּי אֵין לָהּ
מַעְצוֹר לְהוֹשִׁיעַ בָּרַב אוּ בְמִעוֹט:

Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his arms, "Come, let us cross over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the L-RD will act in our behalf, for nothing prevents the L-RD from winning a victory by many or by few."

וַיִּכּוּ בַיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּפִלִשְׁתִּים מִמִּכְמָשׁ אֶיְלֹנָה וְיַעַר הָעָם מְאֹד:

They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmas to Aijalon, and the troops were famished.

(3) We've seen this theme before - Part II

Book of Maccabees Chapter 1

- 30 And after two full years the king sent the chief collector of his tributes to the cities of Juda, and he came to Jerusalem with a great multitude.
- 31 And he spoke to them peaceable words in deceit: and they believed him.
- 32 And he fell upon the city suddenly, and struck it with a great slaughter, and destroyed much people in Israel.
- 33 And he took the spoils of the city, and burnt it with fire, and threw down the houses thereof, and the walls thereof round about:
- 34 And they took the women captive, and the children, and the cattle they possessed.

35 And they built the city of David with a great and strong wall, and with strong towers, and made it a fortress for them:

36 And they placed there a sinful nation, wicked men, and they fortified themselves therein: and they stored up armour, and victuals, and gathered together the spoils of Jerusalem;

Shmot 1: 10-11

וַיִּשְׂמוּ עֲלֵיוֹ שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה אֶת־פִּתּוֹם וְאֶת־
רַעַמְסֵס:

(10) Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.” (11) So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses.

(4) Book of Maccabees Chapter 1

“Now the women that circumcised their children, were slain according to the commandment of king Antiochus. And they hanged the children about their necks in all their houses: and those that had circumcised them, they put to death.”

(5) The Inauguration of King Saul

Samuel I, 10:9

וַיֵּרֶדְתָּ לְפָנַי הַגִּלְגָּל וְהִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי יָרֵד אֵלֶיךָ לְהַעֲלוֹת עֲלוֹת לְזִבְחַי שְׁלָמִים שְׁבַע יָמִים תּוֹחֵל עַד־בּוֹאֲי אֵלֶיךָ וְהוֹדַעְתִּי לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה:

After that, you are to go down to Gilgal ahead of me, and I will come down to you to present burnt offerings and offer sacrifices of well-being. Wait seven days until I come to you and instruct you what you are to do next

(6) Samuel I, 13, 5-14

ה וּפְלִשְׁתִּים נֶאֱסָפוּ | לְהַלְחֵם עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹשׁ יָמִים אָרְחָה רַבָּה וְשֵׁשׁ אַלְפִּים פְּרָשִׁים וְעַם כַּחֲוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שַׁפְתֵי־הַיָּם לְרֹב וַיַּעֲלוּ וַיִּחַנּוּ בְּמַכְמֵשׁ קְדֵמֶת בְּיַת אֹנָן: וַיֹּאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂרָאֵל רְאוּ כִּי צָרָלוֹ כִּי נִגְשׁ הָעַם וַיִּתְחַבְּאוּ הָעַם בְּמַעְרֹת וּבְתַחֲוִים וּבְסַלְעִים וּבְצֻרֹת וְעִבְרֵי־יָם עָבְרוּ אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶרְצָן גָּד וּגְלָעָד וְשָׂאוּל עֹדֵנוּ בְּגִלְגָּל וְכִּלְהָעֶצֶם חָדָר וְאֶתְרִיו: ח וַיִּיחַל [וַיִּוְחַל] | שְׁבַע יָמִים לְמוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר שָׂמוּאֵל וְלֹא־בָּא שְׂמוּאֵל הַגִּלְגָּל וַיִּפְּץ הָעַם מְעַלְיוֹ: ט וַיִּיאַמֶּר שָׂאוּל הַגִּישׁוּ אֵלַי הַעֲלֵה וְהַשְׁלֵמִים וַיַּעַל הַעֲלָה: י וַיְהִי כְּכַלְתּוֹ לְהַעֲלוֹת הַעֲלָה וְהַגִּישׁוּ שְׂמוּאֵל בָּגָא וַיִּיצֵא שָׂאוּל לְקִרְאתּוֹ לְבָרְכוֹ: יא וַיִּיאַמֶּר שְׂמוּאֵל מַה עָשִׂיתָ וַיִּיאַמֶּר שָׂאוּל כִּי־רָאִיתִי כִּי־נִפְּץ הָעַם מְעַלְיוֹ וְאִתָּה לֹא־בָּא לְמוֹעֵד הַיָּמִים וּפְלִשְׁתִּים נֶאֱסָפוּ מִכָּמֶשׁ: יב וְאִמָּר עֲתִידָה יָרֵד וְפְלִשְׁתִּים אֵלַי הַגִּלְגָּל וּפְנִי־ה' לְאֵל חַלְּלֵתִי וְאִתָּאֶפֶק:

וְאֶעֱלֶה הָעֵלָה: ס יג וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל לְאַלְשָׁאוּל נִסְכַּף לָתֶּלֶת לְאֹהֲלֵי־יָדָיִם
 אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי בְּיַד עֲתָנָה הַכֵּיִן ה' אֶת־מַמְלַכְתְּךָ וְאַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֲדֵוָלָם: יד וַעֲתָנָה מִמְּלַכְתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְוּם
 בְּקִשׁוֹ לֹא־יֵשׁ כָּל־כֶּבֶד וַיִּצְנֶה ה' לְגִידֵי עֲלֵעֲמֹו כִּי לֹא שָׁמְרִיתְ אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־צִוִּיתִי ה':

(5) The Philistines, in turn, gathered to attack Israel: 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and troops as numerous as the sands of the seashore. They marched up and encamped at Michmas, east of Beth-aven. (6) When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble—for the troops were hard pressed—the people hid in caves, among thorns, among rocks, in tunnels, and in cisterns. (7) Some Hebrews crossed the Jordan, [to] the territory of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and the rest of the people rallied to him in alarm. (8) He waited seven days, the time that Samuel [had set]. But when Samuel failed to come to Gilgal, and the people began to scatter, (9) Saul said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the sacrifice of well-being”; and he presented the burnt offering. (10) He had just finished presenting the burnt offering when Samuel arrived; and Saul went out to meet him and welcome him. (11) But Samuel said, “What have you done?” Saul replied, “I saw the people leaving me and scattering; you had not come at the appointed time, and the Philistines had gathered at Michmas. (12) I thought the Philistines would march down against me at Gilgal before I had entreated the L-RD, so I forced myself to present the burnt offering.” (13) Samuel answered Saul, “You acted foolishly in not keeping the commandments that the L-RD your G-d laid upon you! Otherwise the L-RD would have established your dynasty over Israel forever. (14) But now your dynasty will not endure. The L-RD will seek out a man after His own heart, and the L-RD will appoint him ruler over His people, because you did not abide by what the L-RD had commanded you.” (15) Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul numbered the troops who remained with him—about 600 strong.

(7) Samuel 14

One day, Jonathan son of Saul said to the attendant who carried his arms, “Come, let us cross over to the Philistine garrison on the other side”; but he did not tell his father. (2) Now Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah, under the pomegranate tree at Migron, and the troops with him numbered about 600. (3) Ahijah son of Ahitub brother of Ichabod son of Phinehas son of Eli, the priest of the L-RD at Shiloh, was there bearing an ephod.—The troops did not know that Jonathan had gone. (4) At the crossing by which Jonathan sought to reach the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on one side, and another rocky crag on the other, the one called Bozez and the other Seneh. (5) One crag was located on the north, near Michmas, and the other on the south, near Geba. (6) Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his arms, “Come, let us cross over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the L-RD will act in our behalf, for nothing prevents the L-RD from winning a victory by many or by few.” (7) His arms-bearer answered him, “Do whatever you like. You go first, I am with you, whatever you decide.” (8) Jonathan said, “We’ll cross over to those men and let them see us. (9) If they say to us, ‘Wait until we get to you,’ then we’ll stay where we are, and not go up to them. (10) But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the L-RD is delivering them into our hands. That shall be our sign.”

(8) Samuel I, 14, 23-24

וַיֹּשֶׁעַ ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַהֲמַלְחָמָה עֲבָרָה אֶת־בֵּית אָוֶן:

Thus the L-RD brought victory to Israel that day. The fighting passed beyond Beth-aven.

וַאֲשֶׁר־יִשְׂרָאֵל נִגְשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיֵּאֵל־שְׂאוּל אֶת־הַעָם לְאֹמֵר אַרְוֹר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יֵאֱכַל לֶחֶם עַד־הָעֶרֶב
 וַנִּמְמָתִי מֵאֵיבֵי וְלֹא טָעַם כָּל־הַעָם לֶחֶם: (ס)

The men of Israel were distressed that day. For Saul had laid an oath upon the troops: "Cursed be the man who eats any food before night falls and I take revenge on my enemies." So none of the troops ate anything.