

I MACCABEES 1-2
THE PERSECUTION

¹Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, came from the land of Kittim, where he had already become king of Greece. He defeated King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, and succeeded him as king.

²He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth.

³He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth lay quiet under his rule, his pride knew no limits. ⁴He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they paid tribute to him.

⁵After this he fell sick and realising that he was dying, ⁶he summoned his most honoured officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. ⁷After Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died.

⁸Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place.

⁹They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years;

and they caused many evils on the earth.

The very general information contained in this passage would have been common knowledge at the beginning of the first century BC when our author is composing his history.

Philip II of Macedon conquered Greece in 338BC. Two years later he was assassinated. His son, Alexander ('the Great') began his conquest of the Persian Empire in 334.

The 'Kittim'(verse 1), originally referred to a people from Cyprus. It came to be used in the Older Testament for conquerors from the west. The 'Medes'(verse 1) inhabited Media, the mountain region south of the Caspian Sea (see map page 43).

By 331 Alexander controlled Anatolia (modern Turkey), Syria and Egypt. By 325 he had reached the Indus River.

Alexander died in Babylon in 323.

His generals fought among themselves for many years. As noted in the Introduction, in 312 one of his generals, Seleucus, took control in Babylon, and then Syria. Another General, Ptolemy, siezed control of Egypt. Judea was under the Ptolemies throughout the third century BC, but in the second century was controlled by the Seleucids.

The negative judgment expressed at the end of verse 9 reflects the author's objection to the Hellenization of Judea, and the threat it caused to Judaism.

The author moves immediately to the reign of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV. After Rome's victory over his father, Antiochus III, at Magnesia in 190, he was taken as hostage to Rome (verse 10). He succeeded his brother, Seleucus IV, in 175BC, 'in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks' (verse 10), measured from the beginning of the reign of Seleucus I in 312.

The background to verses 11-15 is the determination of Jason (high priest 175-172), followed by Menelaus (high priest from 172-163) to 'shift over to the Greek way of life' (2Maccabees 4:10). The author calls members of this movement 'renegade Jews' (verse 11). Among other things they 'removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant' (verse 15). Understandably the king, Antiochus IV, was pleased to see Jerusalem embracing the customs of the Empire and 'authorized them to introduce laws and customs of the Gentiles' (verse 13). He saw Jerusalem as an ally and a bulwark against any attempt by Egypt to regain control of the land corridor linking Egypt with Anatolia and Syria.

The gymnasium (verse 14) was the centre for the education of citizens in a Greek city-state. This gave Jerusalem a special status in the Greek world and opened opportunities for trade and advancement. Jews could practise the Torah, but their life was governed by a secular Greek constitution.

The information in verses 16-19 would have been drawn, directly or indirectly, from the archives of the Syrian court. In 172 the young Ptolemy VI Philometor became king in Egypt. Palestine had been promised to his father Ptolemy V Epiphanes when he married the sister of Antiochus IV, but Antiochus had reneged on the promise. Egypt declared war on Syria, but was soundly defeated in 169, with the help of Indian elephants (used by the Persian army against Alexander in 331). Antiochus failed to capture Alexandria but left a Syrian garrison at Pelusium on the coast between Palestine and Egypt (see 2Maccabees 5:1).

¹⁰From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

¹¹At that time there arose in Israel a group of renegade Jews who misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." ¹²This proposal pleased them, ¹³and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to introduce laws and customs of the Gentiles.

¹⁴They built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, ¹⁵removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and abandoned themselves to evil ways.

¹⁶When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. ¹⁷So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. ¹⁸He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. ¹⁹They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and plundered the land.

The temple is plundered

²⁰After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against (Israel and) Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. ²²He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. ²³He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found.

²⁴Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance.

²⁵Great was the lamentation throughout Israel, ²⁶rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint, the beauty of the women was disfigured. ²⁷Every bridegroom took up the lament; every bride sat grieving in her chamber. ²⁸Even the land trembled for its inhabitants.

The house of Jacob was clothed with shame.

We are in the year 169 (143 years since the beginning of Seleucid reign in Syria). This is the first of four campaigns instigated by Antiochus against Jerusalem ('Israel and' is a marginal note wrongly introduced into the text). According to Jason of Cyrene (see 2Maccabees 5:11-23) this was in response to the unrest caused when Jason, the brother of Onias III, attempted unsuccessfully to retake the high priestly office from Menelaus. Antiochus did not want trouble so close to Egypt.

As explained in the Introduction (see page 9), the Syrian king had to pay a huge tribute to Rome. He took the opportunity to rob the temple of its treasures, and he appointed officials to control the Jews and their northern neighbours, the Samaritans.

The author accuses Antiochus of 'great arrogance' (verses 21 and 24). The same accusation is made by the author of Daniel (see Daniel 7:8, 25).

The temple furnishings are described in 1Kings 6:2-36. The 'crowns' (verse 22) were probably offerings from countries with which Judea had diplomatic relations. The shedding of blood is described in 2Maccabees 5:11-14.

Verses 25-28 are composed by the author in the style of the lamentations that followed on the destruction of the city and temple in 587 (see the Book of Lamentations).

Antiochus fought a second campaign in Egypt in 168, but was forced to withdraw on orders from Rome (see Daniel 11:30). On his return to Antioch he heard the complaints of the high priest, Menelaus, and the Jews who saw themselves as 'Antiochenes'.

In 167 he followed up on the military intervention of 169 (see 1:20-24) by sending Apollonius to Jerusalem to organise the collection of tribute (see 2Maccabees 5:24-26). His presence met with opposition, which he violently suppressed (verses 30-32). He also fortified the citadel which dominated the north-west corner of the temple mount, and established a garrison there of Syrian soldiers and Jews who favoured the Hellenizing of the city. Their task was to control those whom the king judged fanatics because of their determination to resist all things Greek in the name of their religious laws. The citadel dominated the temple mount throughout the period of the Maccabees. It was taken finally by Simon in 140BC (see 14:36).

Verses 37-40 is a lament for the disaster and shame that had befallen Jerusalem. Compare:

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

– Psalm 79:1-3

²⁹Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force.

³⁰Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel. ³¹He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. ³²They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. ³³Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. ³⁴They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; ³⁵they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace, ³⁶for the citadel became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel at all times.

³⁷On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood; they even defiled the sanctuary.

³⁸Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled; she became a dwelling of strangers; she became strange to her offspring, and her children forsook her.

³⁹Her sanctuary lay desolate like a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into a reproach, her honour into contempt.

⁴⁰The shame of her fall matched the greatness of her renown; her exaltation was turned into mourning.

⁴¹Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, ⁴²and that all should give up their particular customs. ⁴³All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.

⁴⁴The king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, ⁴⁵to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, ⁴⁶to defile the sanctuary and the holy things, ⁴⁷to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, ⁴⁸and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, ⁴⁹so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. ⁵⁰He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."

⁵¹In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. ⁵²Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; ⁵³they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they could find.

Verses 41-43 would have been drawn, directly or indirectly, from the Syrian archives. The author would have drawn the information regarding the renegade Jews from local sources.

Verses 44-53 report the most drastic intervention of the Syrian king in the affairs of Judea. In early spring of 167, the Jewish month of Nisan (April), Antiochus prohibited obedience to the Torah. Up to this time he had encouraged Hellenization and supported those Jews who favoured Greek ways. Now he outlaws the Torah. His opposition would not have been on religious grounds. In the Seleucid Empire subject peoples were permitted to follow their own customs. It must have been because he saw the Torah as fomenting rebellion against those in Jerusalem who favoured accommodation with Syria. Rebellion so close to Egypt had to be put down by obliterating those he considered Jewish fanatics.

Antiochus wanted the temple to be inclusive, like the typical Gentile temple: a place where all citizens could come to worship their chosen deity.

For Antiochus, the sacrifices were a test of loyalty. He had no liking for the exclusive nature of Judaism as a religion. Those who wanted to get on in the world complied (verse 52). Those who were determined to be faithful to their Jewish traditions went into hiding (verse 53). We find a reference to this in Daniel:

He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time.

– Daniel 7:25

The three-and-a-half years appears to be measured from this decree of April 167 to the rededication of the temple in December 164.

Verses 54-63 record Antiochus's forcible implementation of the decree of April 167 (verses 44-53; see 2Maccabees 6-7; Daniel 11:30-35). The one hundred forty-fifth year ('of the kingdom of the Greeks', see verse 10) is the year 167BC. The fifteenth day of Kislev is the day of the full moon in the ninth month of the Jewish calendar (the equivalent of our 6th December).

Antiochus did not intend to introduce a new god in the temple. He would have seen YHWH, called the 'Lord of Heaven' (see Ezra 7:12), as a local name for the Syrian God (Baal Shamim), who was, in turn, the Syrian equivalent of the Greek Zeus Olympios. He wanted Jerusalem to be like other city-states in the Greek world. For Antiochus and the Hellenizers, the 'books of the law' (verse 56), the 'book of the covenant' (verse 57), were seen as fomenting the rebellion of those who resisted this.

The Syrians offered sacrifice on the altar on the twenty-fifth of Kislev (December 16th 167). For the Jews, determined to be faithful to the Torah, the altar erected in the temple (see verse 59) was a 'desolating sacrilege' (verse 54; see also Daniel 12:11 and in the Newer Testament, Mark 13:14).

Verses 59-61 describe the viciousness of the determination to put down what the Syrian rulers saw as rebellion.

Verses 62-63 describe the heroic fidelity of the faithful Jewish martyrs. Jason of Cyrene highlights the persecution and the heroic resistance of the martyrs (see 2Maccabees 6-7)

The author sees the persecution as an expression of God's anger against the Hellenizers.

⁵⁴On the fifteenth day of Kislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, ⁵⁵and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. ⁵⁷Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. ⁵⁸They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns.

⁵⁹On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. ⁶⁰According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, ⁶¹and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

⁶²But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. ⁶³They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.

⁶⁴Very great wrath came upon Israel.

¹In those days Mattathias son of John son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. ²He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, ³Simon called Thassi, ⁴Judas called Maccabeus, ⁵Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

⁶He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, ⁷and said,

**“Alas! Why was I born to see this,
the ruin of my people,
the ruin of the holy city,
and to live there when it was
given over to the enemy,
the sanctuary given over to aliens?**

**⁸Her temple has become like a
person without honour;**

**⁹her glorious vessels have been
carried into exile.**

**Her infants have been killed
in her streets,
her youths by the sword of the foe.**

**¹⁰What nation has not inherited
her palaces
and has not seized her spoils?**

**¹¹All her adornment has been taken away;
no longer free, she has become a slave.**

**¹²And see, our holy place, our beauty,
and our glory have been laid waste;
the Gentiles have profaned them.**

¹³Why should we live any longer?”

**¹⁴Then Mattathias and his sons tore their
clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned
greatly.**

The priestly family of Joarib (Jehoiarib) is mentioned in 1Chronicles 9:10; 24:7). Mattathias was a country priest from Modein (see map page 37), some 27ks north-west of Jerusalem. Of his sons, Jonathan was to become high priest (from 152-143), as was Simon (143-134). Judas, called ‘Maccabeus’ (‘the hammer’) was to lead the faithful Jews to many victories in their struggle for independence.

This is the third lament in 1Maccabees (see 1:25-28 and 1:37-40).

The plundering of the vessels (verse 9) was described in 1:20-23.

On the slaying of infants (verse 9) see 1:61 (compare 2Maccabees 5:13).

For the comparison of Jerusalem to a beautiful woman deprived of her children (verse 11) see the opening words of the Book of Lamentation (see also Lamentations 2:21).

Mattathias and his sons engage in traditional acts associated with mourning (verse 14).

Verses 15-18 set the scene in Modein.

The Jews believed that they should obey the foreign kings under whom God had placed them. However, things change dramatically when the persecution is directed to wiping out observance of the Torah.

Mattathias stands by the covenant his people have with YHWH, what he calls 'the religion of their ancestors' (verse 19), 'the covenant of our ancestors' (verse 21), and 'the law and the ordinances' (verse 21). Central to this is the first of the commandments: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Deuteronomy 5:7).

Mattathias's action in killing the Jew who sacrificed, and in destroying the pagan altar is in strict accordance with Deuteronomy 13:9 and 12:2-3. Throughout 1Maccabees violence is seen as a legitimate tool in the fight for independence.

For the episode involving the priest Phinehas (verse 26), the grandson of Aaron, see Numbers 25. For a eulogizing of Phinehas see Ecclesiasticus (ben Sira) 45:23-24.

Mattathias fled to the hills with his sons (verse 28).

¹⁵The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modein to see that they offered sacrifice. ¹⁶Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. ¹⁷Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honoured and great in this town, and supported by sons and brothers. ¹⁸Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the people of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the Friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honoured with silver and gold and many gifts."

¹⁹But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, everyone of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, ²⁰I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. ²¹Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. ²²We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left."

²³When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. ²⁴When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. ²⁵At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. ²⁶Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu. ²⁷Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" ²⁸Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all their belongings behind in the town.

²⁹At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there. ³⁰With them were their sons, their wives, and their livestock, because troubles pressed heavily upon them. ³¹And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that those who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness.

³²Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. ³³They said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live." ³⁴But they said, "We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day." ³⁵Then the enemy quickly attacked them.

³⁶But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, ³⁷for they said, "Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly." ³⁸So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons.

³⁹When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. ⁴⁰And all said to their neighbours: "If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." ⁴¹So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places."

Many of those who resisted Hellenization, described here as those who were 'seeking righteousness and justice' (verses 29) followed the example of Mattathias (see verse 28) and fled to the wilderness with their families, to escape from those who were determined to pressure them into following the ways of the Greek world. They were pursued and were annihilated because they refused to defend themselves, or move out of the cave on the sabbath (verse 38; see Exodus 16:29). The author of Daniel would have approved. They must wait on God to act.

It was particularly at the time of the Babylonian Exile that the Sabbath became an important element in Jewish self-identity. Unable to go to the temple, the exiles came together (this is the meaning of the word 'synagogue') on the Sabbath to remember and to pray. It was a day consecrated to God, and its observance was symbolic of the commitment of the people to keep their part of the covenant.

You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you.

– Exodus 31:13

If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord.

– Isaiah 58:13-14

Mattathias decided that the preservation of a faithful covenant people must take precedence. God must have wanted them to *defend* themselves on the Sabbath (verse 41).

The party of the Hasidaeans (Hebrew ḥasîdîm) saw themselves as showing loyalty (Hebrew ḥesed) to the covenant.

Love YHWH, all you his loyal ones
(ḥasîdîm). YHWH preserves the faithful.

– Psalm 31:23

In his commentary on *The First and Second Books of the Maccabees* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, 1973, page 40), John Bartlett writes:

They seem to have belonged to the scribal class, the interpreters of the law. Under Antiochus III, when the Jews were allowed to live according to their ancestral law, such a body was important for the daily administration of justice. When Antiochus IV suspended the Jewish law, the Hasidaeans naturally took sides with the opposition. Daniel 11:33 says of them: “Wise leaders of the nation will give guidance to the common people; yet for a while they will fall victims to fire and sword, to captivity and pillage.” 2Maccabees 14:6 reports a complaint that the Hasidaeans, led by Judas Maccabaeus “are keeping the war alive and fomenting sedition, refusing to leave the kingdom in peace.”

Mattathias, and those who joined him, including the Hasidaeans, went on the attack to enforce the law, and thereby to enforce traditional Judaism.

Those who saw them as violent extremists escaped into Gentile territory to bring up their families in peace (verse 44).

⁴²Then there united with them a company of Hasidaeans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law.

⁴³And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. ⁴⁴They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety.

⁴⁵Mattathias and his friends went around and tore down the altars;

⁴⁶they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. ⁴⁷They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands.

⁴⁸They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

⁴⁹The time drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger.

⁵⁰Now, my sons, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors.

⁵¹Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honour and an everlasting name.

⁵²Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? ⁵³Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. ⁵⁴Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. ⁵⁵Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. ⁵⁶Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land.

⁵⁷David, because he was loyal, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. ⁵⁸Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven.

⁵⁹Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. ⁶⁰Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

This final testament of Mattathias, like the final testaments of Jacob in Genesis 49, Moses in Deuteronomy 33, and Samuel in 1Samuel 12, is composed by the author (see Introduction page 7).

The reader is invited to look back over the faithful heroes of Israel's past, in a similar, though much briefer, way than we find in Ecclesiasticus 44-49 (see also in the Newer Testament, Hebrews 11).

Mattathias is commending 'zeal for the law' (verse 50). On the fidelity of Abraham (verse 52) see Ecclesiasticus 44:19-20 (and compare Romans 4 and Galatians 3:1-9). The Joseph Cycle is found in Genesis 37-50. On Phinehas (verse 54) see already 2:26. On Joshua (verse 55) and Caleb (verse 56) see Numbers 14:5-10. On David's loyalty compare Ecclesiasticus 47:1-11. He was promised an everlasting kingdom in 2Samuel 7.

Elijah's zeal is demonstrated in 1Kings 21:17-29, and his assumption into heaven is described in 2Kings 2:11.

The story of the three young men (verse 59) was told to encourage the Jews during this time of persecution, as is evidenced by its inclusion in the Septuagint Version of the Book of Daniel 3:52-73.

The authors of the Book of Daniel published their work against the background of the persecutions under Antiochus IV. They agreed with Mattathias that the people must not submit to the demands of Antiochus, but must remain faithful to the covenant. However, they did not approve of the violent methods employed by Mattathias. They believed that victory would be the work, not of man, but of YHWH, the Lord of history. They would have approved of the actions of the Jews described in 2:34-38. Martyrdom was to be preferred to the use of violence. The ancient stories of Daniel were reproduced by the authors of the Book of Daniel to demonstrate that it is possible to live under foreign domination, even to find advancement as Daniel had done during the time of the Persians.

The reference in verse 62 is to Antiochus IV. An account of Antiochus's death is given later in 6:8-16 (see also 2Maccabees 9:11-29).

Simeon (verse 65) was named earlier as Mattathias's second son (see 2:3). He was named after Mattathias's grandfather (see 2:1). He will become high priest in 143 (see 1Maccabees 13-16).

Judas (verse 66), Mattathias's third son (see 2:4), will lead the anti-Syrian forces (see 1Maccabees 3-9).

Mattathias died in 166BC, in the 'one hundred forty-sixth year' since 312. Syrian dating at this time was in reference to the accession to the throne of Seleucus I.

⁶¹“Observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength.

⁶²Do not fear a wicked man's words, for his splendour will turn into dung and worms. ⁶³Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. ⁶⁴My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honour.

⁶⁵“Here is your brother Simeon who, I know, is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. ⁶⁶Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. ⁶⁷You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. ⁶⁸Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law.”

⁶⁹Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. ⁷⁰He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.

