

# The Significance of the Seleucid Empire and the Maccabean Revolt

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Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to the throne of the Seleucid Empire in 175 BC and was initially on good terms with the Jews. He appointed high priest Menelaus, who bribed him, and was invited inside the Second Temple. This was a violation of Jewish law and he raided the temple treasury for 1800 talents. Former high priest Jason, attempted a coup against Menelaus when he received a false report that Antiochus IV had died in battle. Upon hearing of this coup, Antiochus returned to Jerusalem and after numerous battles, retook the city. It was after this that tolerance for Jewish religion and customs was completely obliterated.

**“Now Antiochus was not satisfied either with his unexpected taking the city ([Jerusalem](#)), or with its pillage, or with the great slaughter he had made there; but being overcome with his violent passions, and remembering what he had suffered during the siege, he compelled the Jews to dissolve the laws of their country, and to keep their infants uncircumcised, and to sacrifice swine's flesh upon the altar; against which they all opposed themselves, and the most approved among them were put to death.”** —[Flavius Josephus](#), *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 1.1 §2

In 167 BC, Antiochus committed an “abomination of desolation” by setting up an altar to Zeus in the Jewish temple and sacrificing a pig upon it. This and other efforts to convert the Jews to paganism sparked the Maccabean revolt, led by the sons of Mattathias Maccabeus, a priest from the village of Modein. This eventually led to Israel gaining its freedom from the Seleucids during a time known as the Maccabean or Hasmonean Period.

Israel was recognized as an independent state by the Roman Senate. The Hasmonean Dynasty lasted until 37 BCE when Herod the Great defeat the last Hasmonean ruler to become a Roman client king.

1 and 2 Maccabees from the Apocrypha provide a good historical source about the Maccabean revolt as does Josephus’ “The Wars of the Jews”.

Looking at the timeline of events, when Israel survived the increasing Greek hostility to Judaism and became an independent state, groundwork was laid for Herod the Great to become king. It is unlikely in the first place that Israel would have even survived if the Maccabean revolt had never happened. The Maccabees did their best to root out the mixing of pagan and Jewish cultures and beliefs and if that didn’t happen, Israel would have been completely diluted with Greek paganism. Because of these events that occurred while Greece was in power, Bethlehem, the Second Temple, and Jerusalem were all able to survive by the time Christ was born, allowing many prophecies to be fulfilled, such as this one from Micah:

**Micah 5:2: But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.**

Not only this, but a pagan king, Herod, was set in power over Israel to fulfil yet another prophecy from Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah 31:15: Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.**

And because of this fulfilled prophecy, another prophecy was fulfilled when Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt with the young Christ:

**Hosea 11:1: When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.**

In summary, what I have found is that Greece eventually committed an abomination that was so severe, the consequences were that they were wiped out (much like Belshazzar's desecration of holy items). Not only that, but the Seleucid Empire tried to destroy Jewish culture, further incurring God's wrath. Of course, that's only my interpretation of what happened, but this progression of events laid the foundation for Israel to become an independent state and then to be ruled by Herod the Great, who enabled many of the events prophesied to happen in the Gospels.