



**Can  
I  
Trust  
The  
Bible?**

## Part 5

By

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# Chapters

1 Maccabees	3
Jesus and the Old Testament	9
2-4 Maccabees	14

# 1 Maccabees

Many scholars believe that 1 Maccabees is the most important historical writing in the Apocrypha. It details the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid Empire, which was established by one of the leading army officers who served under Alexander the Great (Seleucus I Nicator) during the 4th century BC. At its height, the Seleucid Empire included much of Mesopotamia, Persia, Central Asia, Asia Minor, and the Middle East. However, by the early to middle part of the 2nd century BC, the Seleucid “empire” had lost much of the eastern part of the empire to the Parthians. The Seleucids did continue to control parts of its western areas, including Syria and Judea, but the empire was unstable. That instability gave a small army of Jews the opportunity to take control of Judea.

According to 1 Maccabees, the revolt began with Mattathias and his sons. Mathathias was the son of John, the son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib. His sons’ names were Joannan (called Caddis), Simon (called Thassi), Judas (called Maccabeus), Eleazar (called Avaran), and Jonathan (whose surname was Apphus). They refused to obey the king’s decree and worship Greek gods – the first step in the rebellion.

“Then Mattathias answered and spake with a loud voice, Though all the nations that are under the king’s dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent

to his commandments: Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left. Now when he had left speaking these words, there came one of the Jews in the sight of all to sacrifice on the altar which was at Modin, according to the king's commandment. Which thing when Mattathias saw, he was inflamed with zeal, and his reins trembled, neither could he forbear to shew his anger according to judgment: wherefore he ran, and slew him upon the altar. Also the king's commissioner, who compelled men to sacrifice, he killed at that time, and the altar he pulled down. Thus dealt he zealously for the law of God like as Phinees did unto Zambri the son of Salom. And Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me. So he and his sons fled into the mountains, and left all that ever they had in the city. Then many that sought after justice and judgment went down into the wilderness, to dwell there: Both they, and their children, and their wives; and their cattle; because afflictions increased sore upon them." 1 Maccabees 2:19-30

1 Maccabees contains the history of Mattathias and his sons' many battles with Gentiles and Hellenist Jews. The Maccabees ruled for many years in what became known as the Hasmonean Dynasty. Judas captured Jerusalem in 164 BC and reconsecrated the Temple. Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, commemorates that

rededication of the Temple under Judas, the new high priest. Judas died during the Battle of Elasa in 160 BC against the Seleucid General Bacchides. Jonathan continued to fight against the Seleucids and eventually defeated them. His brother Simon became high priest and leader.

“Also that the Jews and priests were well pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet; Moreover that he should be their captain, and should take charge of the sanctuary, to set them over their works, and over the country, and over the armour, and over the fortresses, that, I say, he should take charge of the sanctuary; Beside this, that he should be obeyed of every man, and that all the writings in the country should be made in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple, and wear gold: Also that it should be lawful for none of the people or priests to break any of these things, or to gainsay his words, or to gather an assembly in the country without him, or to be clothed in purple, or wear a buckle of gold; And whosoever should do otherwise, or break any of these things, he should be punished. Thus it liked all the people to deal with Simon, and to do as hath been said. Then Simon accepted hereof, and was well pleased to be high priest, and captain and governor of the Jews and priests, and to defend them all.” 1 Maccabees 14:41-47

Simon Thassi ruled for several years, but was killed by son-in-law Ptolemy in 135 BC. Simon's son John became high priest the next year, but had to negotiate a truce with Antiochus VII after the Seleucidian leader laid seige to Jerusalem.

Three religious groups formed during this time in Israel's history: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The Sadducees came from the wealthy and priestly families and supported the Hasmoneans. The Hasidim were opposed to the Sadducees. The Pharisees and Essenes came from the Hasidim. The Pharisees believed in strict adherence to the Mosaic Law, but continued to live within Jewish society. The Essenes were so opposed to the Hasmoneans that they lived apart from society in desert communities. The Sadducees and Pharisees were the primary religious groups that Jesus Christ dealt with during the early part of the 1st century AD.

1 Maccabees has been part of many Bibles through the centuries, including the original version of the King James Version (1611 AD). It is part of the canon of Scripture in the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Coptic, and Russian Orthodox churches.

We do not know the name of the author of the book, but it was probably written toward the end of the 2nd century BC. Even though Hebrew texts for 1 Maccabees have not been found, scholars believe it was originally written in Hebrew based on the pro-Jewish and strong nationalistic approach to the historical information.

It is interesting in light of the nature of the history of Israel that 1 Maccabees was not included in the Hebrew Canon of the Bible. It was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that included 1 Maccabees and other apocryphal books. The historical events of 1 Maccabees are also not referred to by Jesus or His Apostles in the New Testament. Though that is not the final answer as to whether a writing is Scripture or not, it is an observation worth noting. It is clear that the religious/political groups born out of the time of the Maccabees were in opposition to the Message of Israel's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

I find 1 Maccabees a fascinating historical document and believe every Christian should read it to understand the historical and political structure of Israel in the years leading up to our Lord's Ministry on earth. It is helpful to understand the climate of faith and fear that Jesus addressed with His preaching and teaching.

As far as 1 Maccabees being part of the canon of Scripture, I'm not convinced. Where is the prophet of God? Several times in the book we read that the people were going about their lives waiting for a prophet of God to come along and show them what to do. The prophet never came. These are the only verses in 1 Maccabees that mention a prophet.

“They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down, And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a

convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them.” 1 Maccabees 4:45-46

“So was there a great affliction in Israel, the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them.” 1 Maccabees 9:27

“Also that the Jews and priests were well pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet.” 1 Maccabees 14:41

Also, the name of God is used only a few times in 1 Maccabees and never in relation to His speaking to anyone. This is important. God spoke hundreds of times in the Old Testament and usually through prophets. Where are the prophets in 1 Maccabees? Where is God guiding His people by Voice? While an interesting historical read, I can't find the kind of proof necessary to add a book to the Canon of Scripture.

## Jesus and the Old Testament

Before we look at the next apocryphal book, let's answer an important question. Some scholars believe that the Old Testament Jesus read, memorized and quoted from was the Greek version, the Septuagint, and that gives credibility to the apocryphal books. True or false?

The translation of the Septuagint began during the 3rd century BC in Alexandria, Egypt. The Letter of Aristeas details how King Ptolemy commissioned a Greek translation of the Hebrew Torah (Law) for his growing library. Aristeas wrote that Ptolemy wrote to the chief priest of Israel and arranged for six translators from each of the 12 tribes of Israel to travel to Alexandria to translate Hebrew to Koine Greek ("common" Greek). Philo of Alexandria (1st century AD) confirmed that only the Torah was commissioned by Ptolemy, but other Hebrew Scriptures were translated and added at a later time (2nd and 1st centuries BC). The Septuagint had been in use for more than two centuries when Jesus was born, but the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was also in use at that time in Israel (as evidenced by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls). Israel had both Hebrew and Hellenist Jews at the time of Christ (Acts 6:1). So, which text did Jesus use?

The Gospel accounts give us several clues. In Matthew 5:18, Jesus is quoted as saying: "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till

all is fulfilled.” The word “jot” refers to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet (*yodh*). The word “tittle” refers to a small decorative point or spur on the upper edge of the yodh that distinguished between two similarly written letters. The “jot” and “tittle” refer to the Hebrew text – not the Greek.

Another clue: Jesus referred to the Scriptures as the Law (Torah) and/or Prophets (Nevi'im), or as the Law, Prophets and Psalms (Ketuvim). That was how the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) was divided. The Septuagint had no similar division.

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ” Matthew 5:17

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ” Matthew 11:13

“On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:40

“The law and the prophets *were* until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. ” Luke 16:16

“Then He said to them, ‘These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.’” Luke 24:44

“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’” John 1:45

It’s important to remember that Jesus Christ is God and has All Knowledge. The Spirit of Christ (God) inspired the writings of the Old Testament in the Hebrew language. Jesus certainly knew that. Jesus confused the original language of earth into many languages when He scattered the human race (Genesis 11:5-9). He knows every language and translation of the Hebrew Bible and could have certainly quoted the Old Testament in perfect Koine Greek if He wanted to do that. However, even if He had quoted in Greek, that does not prove Jesus used the Septuagint instead of the Tanakh.

The three primary languages used in Israel during the 1st century AD were Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek. Even though the Greek culture was an influence in Israel, Hebrew was still the primary language of native residents and used during worship in the Temple and synagogues. Aramaic was also used both in speech and writing of the time of Jesus. Aramaic was often used as a “bridge” language

between Jews and some non-Jews. From what I've been able to glean from the many studies done about the language of Israel at the time of Christ, Hebrew appears to be the language of instruction in the home as well as in schools, synagogue and Temple. Hebrew would have been the Lord's native language, though He was also conversant in Aramaic and could have spoken in Greek if He had wanted.

One last note on this point is that when the Apostle Paul spoke to Jews in Jerusalem he used Hebrew, even though he spoke to the Roman commander in Greek. It's another clue about which language was the native tongue of Jews in Israel.

“Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, ‘May I speak to you?’ He replied, ‘Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?’ But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.’ So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying ...” Acts 21:37-40

Keep in mind that Jesus always knew exactly what He was doing and how what He was doing would impact the entire history of the Christian Church and the world. Jesus left many clues for us to follow

to find the Truth that would set us free. Some clues are in plain sight for everyone to see. Others are hidden and need His help in uncovering (e.g. Matthew 11:10-11; Ephesians 3:1-7). So, where are the clues that He read, memorized and quoted the Septuagint more often than the Tanakh? Where are the clues that He sanctioned and supported the Apocrypha of the Septuagint?

Jesus quoted scores of times from the Word of God. Did He ever quote from any of the apocryphal writings and refer to them as the Word of God? Did He ever quote directly from any of the apocryphal writings? The answer to both questions is NO. Knowing that the question about the “inspiration” of the Apocrypha would be a sticking point to many believers through the ages, why did Jesus not refer to any apocryphal writing? even once?

What about the Lord’s Apostles – those who were closest to Him and “filled” with the Holy Spirit? Did Peter quote from or even mention an apocryphal writing? Did John? Did James? Did Paul? They did not – not even once. Jude quoted from 1 Enoch as to the prophesy of the seventh from Adam about the Lord coming with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment on the ungodly. However, Jude did not call it Scripture. As we will see later in our study about the Apocrypha, Jude’s quote give credence to the legitimacy of the existence of 1 Enoch, but does not support the claim of Holy Inspiration.

# 2-4 Maccabees

**2 Maccabees** is a member of the Old Testament Apocrypha and covers some of the same historical events recorded in 1 Maccabees. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches include 2 Maccabees in their Canon of Scripture. Jews and Protestants do not. What should we believe?

2 Maccabees deals with a short period of time in the history of Jewish revolt against the Seleucids, specifically 180 – 161 BC. The name of the author of 2 Maccabees is not known, though the writer states it is based on the five volumes written by Jason of Cyrene (2 Maccabees 2:23). Jason's larger document has not been discovered, so there is no way to compare 2 Maccabees to what Jason of Cyrene may have written. There is also no way to confirm that Jason of Cyrene was a prophet through whom God spoke His Word. Jesus and His Apostles did not mention Jason nor quote from his writings. They also did not mention nor quote from 2 Maccabees in the New Testament.

Historians do not view 2 Maccabees as accurate as 1 Maccabees. 2 Maccabees deals more with theological concerns, which makes it important to know if it is part of the Canon of Scripture. They include: resurrection of the dead, prayer for the dead and sacrificial offerings to free the dead from the power of sin, and the intercession of the saints. Let's look at each one.

**Resurrection of the dead** – this was a big issue for Jews in 2nd and 1st centuries BC and the 1st century AD. As we know from previous studies, the Pharisees believed in the physical resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees did not. Jesus not only believed in the physical resurrection of the dead, He preached it, then did it. He rose from the dead.

The Old Testament (Tanakh) refers to dead people being brought back to life (e.g. 1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 13:21) and also promises resurrection at a future time (e.g. Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:1-4).

2 Maccabees Chapters 6 & 7 have the stories of the brutal deaths of a scribe named Eleazar and a woman and her seven sons and their belief in a future resurrection and life after death.

**Prayers for the dead and sacrificial offerings to free the dead from the power of sin** - The Tanakh does not refer to a prayer for the dead or making sacrificial offerings to free the dead from the power of sin, but 2 Maccabees does.

“So Judas gathered his host, and came into the city of Odollam, And when the seventh day came, they purified themselves, as the custom was, and kept the sabbath in the same place. And upon the day following, as the use had been, Judas and his company came to take up the bodies of them that were slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen in their fathers’ graves. Now under the coats of every one that was slain they found things consecrated to the idols

of the Jamnites, which is forbidden the Jews by the law. Then every man saw that this was the cause wherefore they were slain. All men therefore praising the Lord, the righteous Judge, who had opened the things that were hid, Betook themselves unto prayer, and besought him that the sin committed might wholly be put out of remembrance. Besides, that noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forsomuch as they saw before their eyes the things that came to pass for the sins of those that were slain. And when he had made a gathering throughout the company to the sum of two thousand drachms of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering, doing therein very well and honestly, in that he was mindful of the resurrection: For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And also in that he perceived that there was great favour laid up for those that died godly, it was an holy and good thought. Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin.” 2 Maccabees 12:38-45

Jesus and His Apostles did not request nor require that believers pray for the dead or make sacrificial offerings for the dead. Some have pointed to 2 Timothy 1:16-18 as Paul praying for the dead Onesiphorus, but there is no proof that Onesiphorus was dead at the time of Paul’s letter, though he may have been – plus, even if Onesiphorus was dead, Paul asked the Lord to grant mercy to the “household of Onesiphorus.” That’s because Onesiphorus had often refreshed Paul when he was in prison. It was a common practice to

wish good things on the household of people who had served someone well whether the people were alive or dead.

**The intercession of the saints** – This is the doctrine of Christians praying to dead saints to intercede with God on their behalf. Some point to 2 Maccabees 15:11-17 and Luke 16:19-31, but neither reference supports the idea of praying to a dead believer to intercede with the Living God. In fact, the New Testament is quite clear that the only Person Who can intercede with God on our behalf is Jesus Christ (e.g. Romans 8:34; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). Christians can intercede for living people (2 Timothy 2:1-4), but are not directed by New Testament writers to pray to dead saints. That includes prayers to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Anyone who is Catholic or was Catholic is familiar with the Salve Regina – Hail Holy Queen. It was written in Latin during the Middle Ages. Here is an English translation.

“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, who by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit didst prepare the body and soul of the

glorious Virgin-Mother Mary to become a dwelling-place meet for thy Son: grant that as we rejoice in her commemoration; so by her fervent intercession we may be delivered from present evils and from everlasting death. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Jesus never asked anyone to pray to His mother. The Apostles never asked anyone to pray to Mary. God chose Mary to be the human vessel who would give birth to our Savior and she was greatly blessed for submitting to God’s Will (Luke 1:26-38). However, Mary knew she was a sinner who needed salvation (Luke 1:46-55). Jesus expressed His great love for Mary at the Cross when He asked the Apostle John to provide for her as a son would provide for his mother (John 19:25-27). John wrote a Gospel, three Letters, and the Revelation, but never mentioned Mary after his Gospel. Peter also did not write about Mary in his Letters, even though they were close friends. Even Mary’s son James (half brother of Christ) did not mention her when he wrote his Letter. Paul mentioned one person named Mary in his Letter to the Romans (Romans 16:6), but there’s no indication he was referring to the mother of Jesus. Even if the Mary Paul mentioned was the mother of Jesus, his words about her were simply, “Greet Mary, who labored much for us.” Nowhere in the New Testament do we find anything about praying to Mary.

2 Maccabees falls short of Canonicity. It was not included in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus did not refer to it. The Apostles did not refer to it. Some of the historical data is more legend than fact. It presents doctrines which are not supported by Christ and His Apostles.

**3 Maccabees** also falls short of Canonicity. The book has nothing to do with the Maccabees and deals with King Ptolemy Philopator and his purported visit to Jerusalem. The book is believed to be mostly fictional.

**4 Maccabees** draws on some of the characters from 2 Maccabees, but is primarily a discourse about the supremacy of the philosophy of reason over passion. Some people thought through the centuries that Josephus wrote 4 Maccabees, though there is no proof for that. The book also falls short of Canonicity for the same reasons as 3 Maccabees.

I find no compelling reason to believe that any of the Maccabees books should be included in the Canon of Scripture for the reasons stated above. 1 and 2 Maccabees have some historical interest about the long time between prophets (Malachi and John the Baptist), but nothing more.

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